

Designing Quality AT Services  
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*This article is the first in a series of articles about improving assistive technology services in schools.*

The field of assistive technology (AT) is growing by leaps and bounds. Every month there seems to be new assistive technology devices, software programs and resources available to support students with disabilities. How is your school system keeping up with the flow of assistive technology information, materials and resources?

Many school systems across the nation have found the use of assistive technology teams to be an effective method of designing policies and procedures around assistive technology services, providing AT assessments, and training IEP teams in the appropriate selection and use of AT materials and services. In addition, these teams can also be responsible for purchasing and maintaining an inventory of AT equipment, keeping up with routine maintenance, and providing training to families and service providers on the use of these devices.

Perhaps you are asking how might your school program begin to address these assistive technology needs? There are several initial steps:

- Develop a planning team.
- Conduct a system-wide assessment to evaluate how your school division is currently providing AT devices and services related to referral, evaluation and IEP development.
- Develop an action plan based on the information collected with the goal of improving referral, evaluation and consideration of AT in the IEP.

## **Develop a Planning Team**

The first step is to develop an AT planning team whose members have an interest in and some knowledge of assistive technology. Members should represent general education, special education, related services (occupational therapist, physical therapist, speech-language pathologist, vision, hearing, etc.), instructional technology, family members, and others. It is critical to have an administrator on the team to support the commitment of personnel and financial resources.

## **Conduct a System-Wide Assessment**

Across a single school division, often there are pockets of effective AT service delivery. There may be groups of professionals who are highly skilled in the use of AT and others who are not as knowledgeable about how to use AT with students. It's important to determine what is happening across the school system related to AT referral, evaluation, instruction, and training so that planning will be systematic and based on the needs and resources of your division. Whichever model of AT service delivery is selected, it should be individualized to meet the needs of your division.

The School Profile of Assistive Technology Services and the Quality Indicators for Assistive Technology (QIAT) are two assessment and planning tools that might help your school division determine how well you are currently providing AT services.

- The School Profile of Assistive Technology Services (Reed, 2000) contains a rubric for rating the quality of recommended components of effective AT service delivery. These components guide schools through necessary services related to referral, evaluation, extended assessments, plan development, implementation and periodic review. This tool helps to identify differences in AT skills and

knowledge, determine perceptions about how AT services should be delivered, and assess how information is shared across the school division. A plan for improvement is then developed by the AT team to address the identified needs.

- The Quality Indicators for Assistive Technology (QIAT), revised 2005, was developed by a consortium of national AT leaders and provides a set of descriptors and guidelines for the assessment of quality AT services aligned to meet federal, state and local mandates. These descriptors can be used to formulate an improvement plan for AT service and delivery. This guide describes quality indicators for:

- Consideration of AT Needs
- Assessment of AT Needs
- Including AT in the IEP
- AT Implementation
- Evaluation of the Effectiveness of AT
- AT in Transition
- Administrative Support of AT Services
- Professional Development in Training of AT

Guiding questions related to common errors school systems face in AT service delivery are included in each of the above sections.

### **Develop an Action Plan**

Information from The School Profile of Assistive Technology Services and the Quality Indicators for Assistive Technology helps to provide a snapshot of AT service delivery in your school division. This information will direct the AT planning team to

identify areas of strength and need and can be used to formalize an action plan. The action plan should include outcomes related to assistive technology, specific strategies, timelines, persons responsible, other resources needed, and status updates. This plan provides a structure for the planning team to improve AT service delivery across the school division.

This process of self-evaluation helps to validate how well teachers, administrators, related service providers and family members are working together to provide assistive technology devices and services to students with disabilities. It also provides research-based guidance to help the AT planning team work toward the development of high quality AT services using a systematic method of documentation and analysis. The end result is to provide appropriate assistive technology to help students succeed in various educational environments.

#### References

- Quality indicators for assistive technology services, Revised, 2005.* Retrieved October 23, 2006, from <http://sweb.uky.edu/~jszaba0/QIAT%202005%20with%20MATRIX%20VARIATIONS.pdf>
- Reed, P. (2000). *School profile of assistive technology services.* Oshkosh: Wisconsin Assistive Technology Initiative.