

How I Do It: AAC in the IEP

We're happy to welcome back, Lauren Enders, an AAC specialist from Pennsylvania. You can read [her earlier post here](#). This month, Lauren shares some of ways

she addresses AAC learning in the IEP.

Frequently, SLPs and teachers contact me in a complete panic because they need to generate an IEP and write IEP goals for a student who is using (or beginning to use) Augmentative and Alternative Communication (AAC). These folks have lots of questions and most often, have no idea where to begin. There are a number of questions that come up repeatedly in these panicked requests. When approached by PrAACtical AAC to write a post about IEPs and AAC, I thought it might be helpful to share some of the most common questions I hear along with the answers I provide. I will structure the post in a Question & Answer format in the hopes that the post is an easy read and useful as a quick reference that you can pull out during the IEP writing process. In this post, Part One, I will focus on how and where to enter AAC into the IEP. In an upcoming post, Part Two, I will concentrate on suggestions for writing functional and measurable goals for your students who need AAC.

QUESTION 1: "Should we check the box that asks 'Does the student need assistive technology devices and/or services?'"**ANSWER:** YES!! As part of the Individuals with Disability Education Improvement Act (IDEA 2004), Augmentative and Alternative Communication (AAC) devices, supports, and services fall under the category of Assistive Technology Devices and Services.

Assistive Technology Device – IDEA 2004 Definition: any item, piece of equipment, or product system, whether acquired commercially off the shelf, modified, or customized, that is used to increase, maintain, or improve functional capabilities of a child with a disability <http://tinyurl.com/atphg5y>

Assistive Technology Service – Definition: any service that directly assists a child with a disability in the selection, acquisition, or use of an assistive technology device <http://tinyurl.com/at4w36j>

U.S. Department of Education (March 13, 2013). Building the Legacy: IDEA 2004 [website]. Retrieved from <http://tinyurl.com/atphg5y>

So, all AAC systems from paper-based (manual) communication boards, to single message devices like BigMacks, all the way through to the highest tech systems (including iPads with AAC apps and dedicated high-tech communication devices) are considered forms of Assistive Technology.

CRUCIAL: For assistive technology tools or solutions (including AAC) to be successfully implemented, most teams require one or more assistive technology services. (Click on the link above to learn what services are considered assistive technology services.)

When I talk about the team, I mean *everyone* who is interacting with the child...the teachers, therapists, support staff, parents (of course) and sometimes even support staff from home. I am finding that most teams need repeated consultative visits with not only "training" but *modeling* of HOW to teach the student to communicate via AAC. I'd say that most teams need a minimum of four visits to train, provide resources, and model, model, model.

Talking about consultation services leads us to the next question.

QUESTION 2: "How should we list Augmentative & Alternative Communication (and other Assistive Technology consultation services) in the IEP?"

ANSWER: If AT & AAC consultation services are needed for the team, they are generally placed under Supports for School Personnel (this is where my services land on IEPs in my county). They should be written as Assistive Technology Consultation or Augmentative Communication Consultation. If the student will receive direct contact from the consultant, the time is most often listed under Related Services and should generally be written as Assistive Technology or Augmentative Communication Services. Different school systems will dictate where AT/AAC services must be listed in the IEP, so be sure to check with your LEA!

Note: When determining frequency of consultation visits and the amount of time spent during each visit, please be sure to check with your AT/AAC Consultant before finalizing the IEP!! I can't tell you how many times I've found out *after the fact* that my services have been written into an IEP

(sometimes for provision of services once a month)! Yikes!**QUESTION 3: How should assistive technology equipment/software (including augmentative communication systems) be written on the Supplementary Aids and Services Section of the IEP?****ANSWER:** “Assistive technology equipment should be described in general, non-specific terms under the “Supplementary Aids/Services; Modifications; Accommodations” section when the student has access to the equipment on a long-term basis.”**DO NOT NAME SPECIFIC TOOLS OR DEVICES**The following are some examples of how to describe equipment (rather than naming it):

- single message voice output device (NOT Big Mack)
- portable device with touch screen capability (NOT iPad, iPod)
- dynamic display device with keyguard (NOT Dynavox V)
- communication system including communication book, topic boards, and choice boards (not Boardmaker symbols)

Portland Public Schools – Portland Oregon (March 13, 2013) Assistive Technology Team / Augmentative & Alternative Communication: Frequently Asked Questions [website]. Retrieved from <http://tinyurl.com/as2k4lz>The reason we don't name specific tools or devices is that there are times when the device is not available (due to breakage, battery drainage, being left at home, or simply not being an effective tool in a certain setting). If we name the device and don't use it at certain times, we are out of compliance whenever the device is not in use!**Note:** In this Supplementary Aids and Services Section of the IEP, you must also “Identify what IEP objective it (the AAC system) addresses (e.g. expressive communication/language).**Saint Paul Public Schools (March 13, 2013) Special Education –Assistive Technology in the IEP [website] Retrieved from <http://tinyurl.com/a5s5ruu>****QUESTION 4: If we are still trialing devices or communication boards through the SETT process, should those devices/supports be written into the IEP?****ANSWER:** NO!! If you are still exploring, there is a chance that the trial device or support won't be the right match for the student. If the trial AAC tool is written into the IEP but is not the one that is eventually implemented, the team will have to re-open the IEP to remove the trial device/support and add the final solution.If there is room next to the box where you check off that the students needs assistive technology, I recommend that you write that the IEP team is in the process of exploring communication options for the student via the SETT process. If a comment box is not available, ask your LEA where in the IEP they would like to note that AT/AAC is being explored via the SETT process. Different school districts will have different procedures, so it's essential that you check with your LEA!!Be sure to explore the following excellent resource developed by the Georgia Program for Assistive Technology (GPAT) and shared by the Oregon Technology Assistance Program (OTAP) <http://tinyurl.com/aqgk39j> This resource includes additional information not touched upon in the above sections!

Lauren will be back next month with more information on IEP issues. In the meantime, you can follow [her Pinterest boards](#) and [Facebook page](#), or connect with her on Twitter ([@lasenders](#)).



- 246 Share