



AFC'S GUIDE TO

# Assistive Technology

November 2019



Advocates for Children of New York  
Protecting every child's right to learn

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This guide does not constitute legal advice. This guide attempts to summarize existing policies or laws without stating the opinion of AFC. If you have a legal problem, please contact an attorney or advocate.

# WHAT IS ASSISTIVE TECHNOLOGY (AT)?

Assistive Technology (AT) is any device or support for using that device that helps a student with a disability to learn. AT Devices are defined by the federal Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) as “any item, piece of equipment, or product system . . . that is used to increase, maintain, or improve the functional capabilities of a child with a disability.” (34 CFR § 300.5)

***It is the responsibility of the Department of Education (DOE) to provide these devices and services at no cost to the student or parent if the need for AT is indicated on a child’s Individualized Education Program (IEP).***



# WHAT ARE EXAMPLES OF AT?

## Some common AT devices include:

- Computers and iPads
- Computer adaptations for access, keyboarding devices such as switches, and keyboard overlays to customize computer settings
- Alternative Augmentative Communication (AAC) devices, like communication boards that help students who have trouble communicating
- Writing aids such as pencil grips and smart pens
- Technology for students who are Blind, have Low-Vision or are Hearing Impaired
- Environmental Control Units (ECUs), which include things like switches, joysticks, buttons, and voice commands to control lights, televisions, and telephones.

## AT Devices are generally divided into three categories:

- NO-TECH: Does not require any specialized equipment  
Examples include breaking information into steps, large print materials, and extended time
- LOW-TECH: These devices are only minimally complex  
Examples include taped instructions, adapted scissors, and calculators
- MID- TO HIGH-TECH: A more complex, specialized system or device  
Examples include: reading pens, iPads, and voice recognition software



# WHAT DEPARTMENTS OF THE DOE ARE RESPONSIBLE FOR AT?

There are currently two evaluation sites within the DOE.

**Technology Solutions** is responsible for evaluating students who:

1. Are served by District 75 (citywide) school sites
2. Have visual and/or hearing impairments and receive services through District 75
3. Are in hospital programs
4. Are receiving home instruction
5. Attend charter schools

**The Center for Assistive Technology (CAT)** at the Office of Related and Contractual Services (ORCS) is responsible for evaluating students who:

1. Are in community school district programs (including general and special education classes, except for students with visual or hearing impairments)
2. Are preschool students
3. Attend State approved non-public, special education schools



# HOW DO I OBTAIN AT DEVICES AND SERVICES?

## Requesting AT

The request for an AT evaluation can be made by a parent, school staff or any other concerned party. To begin the referral process, submit a letter requesting the AT evaluation to your child's school IEP team and copy the school's principal.

Next, the IEP team, of which you are a full, legally required member, will meet to consider if your child needs AT. Among the things the team should consider are your child's use of programmatic equipment in the school (this is equipment readily available in class such as a class computer or specialized software), current communication skills, reliance on prompting, and need for the device at home.

## Referral for Evaluation for AT

If the IEP team decides your child could benefit from AT, the therapist or school psychologist on the team will need to access the referral section in SESIS, the DOE's special education student database, to complete and submit the referral. This is the case regardless of where your child receives services, whether in a community school, District 75, a nonpublic school, or through home or hospital instruction. The referral will then be reviewed by District 75 or the CAT.

### ADVOCACY TIP:

We recommend you send all correspondence by registered mail, "Return receipt requested," or hand deliver letters to the school. If you hand deliver a letter, ask the school to time stamp a copy so you have a record of the request for your files. Keep records of all phone calls you have with the school and take notes on any meetings you attend.

### ADVOCACY TIP:

Families may always choose to obtain evaluations through outside providers (see Other Resources on page 13); however, it is up to the DOE to decide how much weight to give that evaluation compared to their own evaluations. If you do get an outside evaluation, be sure to submit it to the DOE with a cover letter asking them to modify your child's IEP to reflect what your child needs based on the evaluation.

## Evaluation

The DOE should respond promptly to any request for an evaluation. Your request will lead to a number of screening forms that need to be completed by the therapist and parent, and any evaluation will include an observation of your child. If the DOE does not respond or says that they will not do an assistive technology evaluation, you have a right to ask for mediation or a due process hearing to obtain one.



***It is the school's responsibility to notify you of the evaluation date and evaluator name. The evaluator should be trained in assistive technology and aware of potential resources.***

The evaluation may be conducted:

- At the school level by an occupational therapist, physical therapist, teacher of speech improvement and/or other knowledgeable school staff
- At the Committee on Special Education (CSE) if there is no qualified staff at the school
- If the case is particularly complex, the school or CSE may request that the evaluation be done by:
  - The Technology Solutions office if your child attends a District 75 specialized program or is hearing or vision impaired, or
  - The CAT for all other students
- If for some reason the DOE is unable to conduct the evaluation, they should work to contract out for an outside evaluation.

During the evaluation, multiple AT options should be considered for your child, and he or she should have the opportunity to try out any device, if that is possible, before it is recommended on the IEP. The evaluation should be conducted in a quiet environment, and your child should also be observed in the classroom.

## Post-Evaluation

After the evaluation, the technology team will complete a report, which will include the device or service recommended and goals for use of the device. One copy will be sent to the IEP team to make the necessary changes on the IEP in SESIS and another to you. If you do not receive a copy of the evaluation, ask for one!

## HOW DO I GET THE RECOMMENDED EQUIPMENT?

If the device is being provided through Technology Solutions, it will be given to your child at the time of the evaluation if available in inventory. If Technology Solutions does not have the device in inventory, it will need to be ordered.

If the device is being provided through CAT, they will give your school's supporting network or CSE the information needed to order the equipment on a purchase order.



### **ADVOCACY TIP:**

It is important you stay in touch with someone on the IEP team to be sure the necessary paperwork is completed in order to avoid delays in receiving the needed technology. Delays are not uncommon, so be sure to get the names and phone numbers of whoever is handling the required paperwork and check in with them on a regular basis.





# WHO WILL PROVIDE TRAINING FOR THE AT?

If District 75 Technology Solutions is responsible for the device, they will conduct training either on the day of the evaluation or once the equipment arrives at the school.

Training is provided to you, your child, and his or her teacher. Video overviews of eleven AT devices are available online or on DVD. Sometimes trainings are offered at one of the Technology Centers or via WebCast to reach larger groups. Contact Technology Solutions for training information at (212) 802-1530.

***School staff is responsible for calling Technology Solutions to request initial training as well as any additional training that may be needed.***

If CAT is responsible for the device or service, the school should call (718) 391-8136 to arrange for training.

Many of the companies the DOE purchases the devices from (the “vendors”) provide training as needed. You can contact the company directly and check with them regarding their training schedules. ***It is important to make sure everyone who works with your child understands how his or her device should be used. Devices must be used properly in order to work.*** Ask that training and support for using a device be included on your child’s IEP as part of your child’s program.



## WHO OWNS THE AT DEVICE AND WHERE CAN IT BE USED?

The device is the property of the DOE and is to be used only by your child as shown on his or her IEP. It can be used in school, in the home and in the community, depending on what is indicated on the IEP.

If you and your child wish to take the device home for an extended period of time, such as over the holidays or summer vacation, and the IEP team agrees it would be appropriate, the school must prepare a letter for you to sign accepting responsibility for the device during that period. The letter should be placed in your child's school file so that there is no question as to the whereabouts of the device.

## WHAT HAPPENS WHEN YOUR CHILD NO LONGER NEEDS THE TECHNOLOGY OR LEAVES THE DOE?

If the device no longer meets your child's needs, a written request should be sent to Technology Solutions or to the CAT to request a re-evaluation. Intervention by the IEP team is not required.

The device should be returned to the AT office when your child leaves school or no longer receives special education services through the DOE.

### **ADVOCACY TIP:**

Assuming that timing can be anticipated, approximately 8 months before your child graduates from or ages out of school, the school should work with the IEP team planning for your child's transition so that the AT device may be ordered through your child's insurance (including Medicaid). Remember, you are a full member of the IEP team!

## HOW ARE AT DEVICES REPAIRED?

***The DOE is responsible for repair of IEP-mandated devices even after the warranty expires for all students receiving AT.***

Check first with Technology Solutions or the CAT to see if they want to repair or replace the device. Assuming they decide it is best to repair, you will still need to stay on top of things to keep the transition during repair or replacement as short as possible.

Usually there is a phone number and serial number on the back of the device. You should call the manufacturer's technical support group and explain the problem. If it is determined that the device must be sent back to the company for repair, they will ask for the serial number. Whether or not it is still under warranty, the manufacturer should provide a Return Authorization (RA) number. You will then mail the device to them as instructed. Contact the CAT or Technology Solutions for shipment reimbursement information before shipping.

If you need a manufacturer's name and number, you can Google search the name of the device and should get the information you need. If not, you can call Technology Solutions for District 75, or the CAT for the information.

If the device is no longer under warranty, still send it for repair, but take the RA number and call Technology Solutions for District 75 or the CAT to alert them of the expired warranty and the RA number.



## CONTACT INFORMATION: DOE Assistive Technology Offices

### Technology Solutions, District 75

400 First Avenue, Room 111  
New York, NY 10010

Technology Evaluation Coordinator:  
Karen Gorman

Phone: (212) 802-1530

Fax: (212) 802-1681

Email: [kgorman@schools.nyc.gov](mailto:kgorman@schools.nyc.gov)

<http://schools.nyc.gov/Academics/>

[SpecialEducation/SupportsServices/D75AT](http://schools.nyc.gov/Academics/SpecialEducation/SupportsServices/D75AT)

### The Center for Assistive Technology

28-11 Queens Plaza North  
Long Island City, NY 11101

CAT Director: Colleen Warn

Phone: (718) 391-8197

AT Coordinators: Maricris Formoso-  
Santos & Doris Hubner

Phone: (718) 391-8114 & (718) 391-8136

Fax: (718) 391-8174

Email: [CATteam@schools.nyc.gov](mailto:CATteam@schools.nyc.gov)

NOTE: Do not fax referrals to these offices. Referrals must be entered into SESIS by the student's school.

### For more information:

- See the DOE's *Family Guide to Assistive Technology*, available in 10 languages at <http://schools.nyc.gov/Academics/SpecialEducation/FamilyResources/GuidesDocuments/default.htm>.
- See the DOE's *Assistive Technology Reference Guide for Students with Disabilities*: [http://schools.nyc.gov/NR/rdonlyres/5EAB31DC-0CB3-4D99-8AC1-4F030643657D/0/ParentATresources\\_finalcopy\\_fall2015.pdf](http://schools.nyc.gov/NR/rdonlyres/5EAB31DC-0CB3-4D99-8AC1-4F030643657D/0/ParentATresources_finalcopy_fall2015.pdf).
- See the DOE's AT webpage: <http://schools.nyc.gov/Academics/SpecialEducation/SupportsServices/AssistiveTechnology.htm>.
- See the ARISE Coalition's AT webpage: <http://www.arisecoalition.org/assistive-technology.html>.

### GET HELP:

If you need further information on AT, or if you run into barriers while trying to obtain AT and need guidance, please call Advocates for Children's Education Helpline at 866-427-6033.

## OTHER RESOURCES

### **Augmentative and Alternative Communication (AAC) Connecting Young Children (YAACK)**

(866) 998-1726

<http://aac.unl.edu/yaack/toc.html>

Provides information on AAC

### **The Center for AAC and Autism**

(866) 998-1726

<http://www.aacandautism.com/>

Provides information and resources for parents and use of AAC at home

### **CogniTechCafe**

(212) 491-3601

[www.cognitechcafe.com](http://www.cognitechcafe.com)

Provides information and evaluations

### **Family Center for Technology and Disability (FCTD)**

(202) 884-8068

<http://www.fctd.info/>

Provides guides in English and Spanish, fact sheets, presentations, and parent discussion forums

### **LD OnLine**

<http://www.ldonline.org/indepth/technology>

Provides resources and information, particularly for students classified as learning disabled or ADHD

### **National Center for Technology Innovation (NCTI)**

(202) 403-5323

<http://www.nationaltechcenter.org/>

Provides resources, information, and a searchable database of AT devices

### **National Center on Accessible Instructional Materials (The AIM Center)**

(781) 245-2212

<http://aim.cast.org/>

Provides information and resources for obtaining accessible instructional materials

### **Pass It On Center**

<http://passitoncenter.org/locations/search.aspx>

Provides searchable database of local organizations offering gently used devices

### **The T.R.E. Center**

(518) 456-9290

[www.trecenter.org](http://www.trecenter.org)

Provides New York State's designated training center for AT

### **United Cerebral Palsy Technology Resource Center**

(212) 979-9700

[www.ucp.org](http://www.ucp.org)

Provides information, evaluations and devices

## ADVOCACY TIPS

- ✓ **Keep your child's school documents** (such as IEPs and evaluations) and all letters and reports from school in a file, arranged by date.
- ✓ **Put it in writing:** Keep a notebook for yourself with dates and times of all meetings and communications with school staff and outside clinicians (such as doctors or therapists); follow up on conversations in writing, by letter, or by email, and keep a copy so you have a record.
- ✓ **Send all important information by certified mail**, return receipt requested or by fax with confirmation so you have proof it was sent.
- ✓ **Talk with the people who work with your child.** Speak to teachers when things are going well or if things are going poorly and you will establish yourself as a concerned and involved parent.
- ✓ **Be persistent.** If someone says there is nothing that can be done for your child, get a second opinion.
- ✓ **Maintain a productive conversation.** Even when you are angry about something that has happened, try to speak calmly when making your point.
- ✓ **Bring along a friend**, family member, or someone who knows your child outside of school to school meetings if you feel your perspective is not being heard by the DOE.

**This guide and additional resources on educational services in New York City are available on our website, [www.advocatesforchildren.org](http://www.advocatesforchildren.org).**





## Our Mission

Advocates for Children of New York (AFC)'s mission is to ensure a high-quality education for New York students who face barriers to academic success, focusing on students from low-income backgrounds. AFC achieves this through four integrated strategies:

- Free advice and legal representation for families of students;
- Free trainings and workshops for parents, communities, and educators and other professionals, to equip them to advocate on behalf of students;
- Policy advocacy to effect change in the education system and improve education outcomes; and
- Impact litigation to protect the right to quality education and to compel needed education reform.

### **Still have more questions? Please call the Jill Chaifetz Education Helpline:**

Monday through Thursday

10 am to 4 pm

866-427-6033 (toll free)

### **Advocates for Children of New York, Inc.**

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