Guiding Document
Administrative Support of
Assistive Technology Services

This area defines the critical areas of administrative support and leadership for developing and delivering assistive technology services. It involves the development of policies, procedures, and other supports necessary to sustain effective assistive technology programs.

1. **The education agency has written procedural guidelines that ensure equitable access to assistive technology devices and services for students with disabilities, if required for a free, appropriate, public education (FAPE).**

   Intent: Clearly written procedural guidelines help ensure that students with disabilities have the assistive technology devices and services they require for educational participation and benefit. Access to assistive technology is ensured regardless of severity of disability, educational placement, geographic location, or economic status.

While assistive technology (AT) decisions are made on a case-by-case basis, guidelines outline the steps to be followed for the provision and support of AT. Written guidelines support consistent delivery of services that are legal, ethical and equitably available to all students.

Guidelines include clarification of processes and procedures for referral, consideration, assessment, documentation, device acquisition, and implementation. In addition to general procedural guidelines, education agencies may find it helpful to develop guidelines for actions such as: 1) determining when AT is needed in the home; 2) addressing damages to AT devices; 3) providing services to private schools; and 4) resolving conflicts related to AT. Such guidelines enable educators and families to understand and follow agency practices. Processes and procedures are reviewed regularly and updated when necessary.

Example:

> *Mr. Mattson had a 3rd grade student with an IEP who was struggling in several areas of the curriculum, particularly with reading and using print materials. He conferred with the student's parents, and it was decided that the student's possible need for accessible instructional materials and AT should be explored. Mr. Mattson looked up the district's procedures for making an AT referral. He used the recommended form, followed the steps and made the referral according to the procedure outlined in the guidelines.*

Key Questions
• What written procedures are in place to support equitable access to AT? • How does the administrator ensure that the procedures are current and adequate? • When are the written procedures reviewed and updated? • How are current and emerging trends incorporated into the written procedures?

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2. **The education agency broadly disseminates clearly defined procedures for accessing and providing assistive technology services and supports the implementation of those procedures.**

   Intent: Procedures are readily available in multiple formats to families and school personnel in special and general education. All are aware of how to locate the procedures and are expected to follow procedures whenever appropriate.

Procedural guidelines are made available in multiple formats and languages used by families in the district. All team members, including families, have access to the procedures and have opportunities to learn more about them. Staff members are held accountable for following the guidelines. Guidelines are disseminated at regular intervals with confirmation that they have been received.

Example:

> *At the beginning of the year staff members in the Springfield School District received written AT guidelines and verified receipt. They were also given the web address for the guidelines. Mr. Simpson, the school principal, gave magnets with the web address to all staff members in his building. Mrs. Jones, the third grade teacher, shared the web address with Mr. Brown as part of his new employee orientation when he joined the faculty in January. Prior to a conference to discuss Johnny's possible AT needs, Mr. Brown provided the web address to Johnny's parents so that they could prepare for the AT discussion.*

Key Questions
• When and how are families and staff informed about the procedures and how to access them? • In what formats (e.g., printed, web based) and languages are the guidelines available? • How do staff members verify receipt of the guidelines? • How will staff understanding and implementation of procedural responsibilities be assessed?

3. **The education agency includes appropriate assistive technology responsibilities in written descriptions of job requirements for each position in which activities impact assistive technology services.**

   Intent: Appropriate responsibilities and the knowledge, skills, and actions required to fulfill them are specified for positions from the classroom through the central office. These descriptions will vary depending upon the position and may be reflected in a position description, assignment of duty statement, or some other written description.

AT is part of the collective responsibility of all educators who provide services to students who use AT devices (e.g., general and special educators, administrators, related service providers, curriculum directors, educational assistants). Job descriptions across the agency include the AT-related responsibilities of each position, such as ensuring that AT required in the IEP is

available and in working order on a daily basis, and the student is supported in using it to carry out classroom tasks. A teacher's job description, for example, could include having knowledge of AT and the ability to include it in instruction for students with disabilities. Speech therapists are generally knowledgeable about language development. Job descriptions that include descriptors of basic augmentative communication and other relevant AT skills can assist administrators to seek and hire staff members who can enhance the district's services, to meet the needs of children who use AT.

Written descriptions provide clarity about expectations for current knowledge and the ability to implement the identified AT responsibilities. Administration and staff are mutually accountable for acknowledging and addressing the AT-related job responsibilities within their primary role.

Example:

> *Ms. Williams, the principal, interviewed Mr. Chiba for a teaching position at Lalk Middle School. They reviewed the AT portion of the job description. Job responsibilities included the ability to manage and support AT use for students in that classroom and collaborate with peers on the selection, acquisition and use of AT. Mr. Chiba explained that he had worked in a classroom previously where students used text-to-speech, augmentative communication and environmental controls. He talked about lesson plans that he developed that incorporated these technologies into classroom activities.*

Key Questions
• Where are the AT responsibilities of each position described? • How are the AT responsibilities reflected in hiring practices? • How are job descriptions reviewed and updated to insure that AT is included? • Who is responsible to review and update job descriptions?

4. The education agency employs <u>personnel with the competencies</u> needed to support quality assistive technology services within their primary areas of responsibility at all levels of the organization.

<u>Intent</u>: Although different knowledge, skills, and levels of understanding are required for various jobs, all understand and are able to fulfill their parts in developing and maintaining a collaborative system of effective assistive technology services to students.

While competencies vary across positions, there are critical roles that are inherent in direct service, support and administrative positions that are necessary to ensure an effective and efficient system for acquiring and implementing AT. For example, administrators must have a vision of the importance of AT and actively support its use by: 1) seeking, hiring and retaining knowledgeable personnel; 2) looking for and acknowledging appropriate AT use; and 3) encouraging ongoing learning and growth.

In addition to AT-related competencies, personnel have skills, knowledge and attitudes needed to collaborate and communicate with other professionals, departments, agencies and families. They are able to work in teams, solve problems, and listen to and work with other people. Initial job interviews and performance evaluations provide opportunities for personnel to demonstrate AT knowledge and skills. Experience and practice may be demonstrated by

answering specific questions, sharing sample portfolios and case studies and demonstrating AT skills. Performance evaluations are conducted regularly and include assessment of the employee's performance related to all competencies of their position, including the AT components. Good performance evaluations provide data and information necessary to develop and implement an effective professional development plan for each individual.

Example:

> *During Ms. Edgar's interview for a position in the business department, the administrator asked questions that enabled her to talk about the importance of collaboration across departments. Ms. Edgar gave an example about the importance of a purchasing agent's understanding of which AT device vendors are sole sources for purchases so that time was not spent on an unnecessary bidding process. Ms. Edgar offered to work with the appropriate personnel, such as teachers, SLPs, OTs and AT resource personnel to create a database of items available from sole source vendors.*

Key Questions
• How does the agency determine if employees across departments and positions have the knowledge and skills to support quality AT services? • How do employee performance evaluations assess the AT expectations included in job description? • What opportunities are provided to staff to improve or increase skills/competencies as a result of performance evaluations? • How does the agency encourage and support staff collaboration across disciplines in order to provide effective assistive technology services to students?

5. The education agency includes <u>assistive technology in the technology planning and budgeting process</u>.

<u>Intent</u>: A comprehensive, collaboratively developed technology plan provides for the technology needs of all students in general education and special education.

School districts' technology plans address the need for access for all students, including those with disabilities. Students in special education are recognized as part of the total school district population who need access to instructional technology as well as specialized services which may include AT. Recognition of the AT needs of students with disabilities is part of agency-wide technology planning (e.g., providing access to specialized software and hardware on the school network or purchasing academic courseware and online assessments that are built in an open environment that allow the use of AT). Furthermore, the district acquires universally designed technology that is usable by students with the broadest possible range of abilities and needs, including those with identified disabilities.

Technology planning committees include personnel with AT skills and competencies to articulate the unique technology needs of students with disabilities. Information is gathered from multiple stakeholders regarding the current and anticipated needs for technology. Planning includes a recognition of the need for access for all students, as well as recognition of school technology concerns for security, capacity and infrastructure (e.g., communication

about the system requirements for specialized software and devices and how it will match the district's protocols).

Funding sources are identified for use (e.g., general funds, IDEA funds, E-rate funds, discretionary grants) when purchases are needed to provide access for students with disabilities.

Example:

Mrs. Dubbels, a resource room teacher, is an active member of the school technology planning and budgeting committee. Her participation enables her to more fully understand district-wide technology needs and to help others understand how universally designed technology is both inclusive and cost-effective. When the technology committee acquired interactive boards for every classroom in the building, there was no question that the special education classrooms were included. The special education director and the technology director collaborated on funding the purchases. Interactive boards were purchased with general technology funds. Special education funds were used to purchase the assistive devices needed for specific students to access the interactive boards.

Key Questions
• What system does the agency use to gather regular input from general and special education staff when technology budgets are being developed? • How is AT included in the technology planning? • How is AT included in the technology budgets? • How do administrators ensure that there is special education input on technology committees? • How do technology-funded initiatives reach special education programs?

6. The education agency provides access to <u>on-going learning opportunities about assistive technology</u> for staff, family, and students.

<u>Intent</u>: Learning opportunities are based on the needs of the student, the family, and the staff and are readily available to all. Training and technical assistance include any topic pertinent to the selection, acquisition, or use of assistive technology or any other aspect of assistive technology service delivery.

Professional development and training needs of staff members and families are systematically identified based on program evaluation findings, needs assessments and specific student needs. A comprehensive plan is developed that provides ongoing opportunities for learning about various aspects of AT devices and services that address identified needs.

The education agency ensures that a range of professional development activities are available to all staff, students and families. Effective administrators support the participation of educators and others in relevant training. Administrators set expectations that people will take advantage of PD related to their professional goals, provide time for learning activities and hold staff responsible for meeting learning goals. Individuals who provide AT support are a valuable

resource for training others within the agency and providing technical assistance when time is made available.

The agency ensures access to text-based and online resources, technical assistance, technology problem solving support and a variety of training alternatives (e.g., face to face training, virtual learning, coaching and mentoring). There are many training resources available from national, state and local AT programs, universities and vendors which can be utilized. Agencies might also need to develop targeted professional development to meet unique local needs.

The QIAT Professional Development Indicators and the related guiding document can offer additional information about planning for professional development.

Example:

> *Students-First School District (SFSD) conducted a needs assessment to identify the knowledge and skills needed by staff, family members and students to improve systemic and student-specific AT services. The needs assessment identified three priority areas: accessible instructional materials, AT decision-making and appropriate documentation in the IEP. Mrs. Kriss, the SFSD Director of Special Education, worked with others to identify a variety of internal and external resources that could be used to provide needed information and build identified skills. A comprehensive plan was then developed that used local, regional and national entities. Workshops, study groups and individualized support were made available online and in-person to staff and family members at a variety of convenient times. Mrs. Kriss also provided resources and time for staff to attend the state conference as a means to network and build internal resources.*

Key Questions
• What evidence is used to identify the need for ongoing learning opportunities? • What opportunities for ongoing training are available for staff and families? • How does the administrator facilitate and monitor staff learning about AT? • How is staff participation supported (e.g., registration fees, leave time or other incentives)? • How is family participation in AT training supported and encouraged? • What agency resources (e.g., time, personnel, money) are allocated for on-going learning opportunities? • How does staff demonstrate skills they have learned in professional development?

7. The education agency uses a systematic process to evaluate all components of the agency-wide assistive technology program.

Intent: The components of the evaluation process include, but are not limited to, planning, budgeting, decision-making, delivering AT services to students, and evaluating the impact of AT services on student achievement. There are clear, systematic evaluation procedures that all administrators know about and use on a regular basis at central office and building levels.

Program evaluation is the systematic assessment of the processes and outcomes of a program. Whenever possible, the same framework that is used throughout the agency to evaluate similar programs is used to evaluate the AT program. The Quality Indicators can be used to identify aspects of the program that should be evaluated. Use of the QIAT Self-Evaluation Matrices highlights strengths and weaknesses within AT services. This information is used to further the development and improvement of the agency's AT services to support student achievement.

Three critical views of AT services that might be assessed as a part of the evaluation of an AT program are:

- Effect of AT devices and services on student achievement;
- AT skills and competencies of various staff members, and;
- Service provider and parent satisfaction with AT service received.

Data collected about these aspects will help to show program strengths and challenges. For example, an agency may find that AT services are ethical, effective and efficient in some settings but not in others. Data may indicate that a particular group of key people does not have the skills and competencies needed in order to support AT use. Student data may show that particular groups of students are underrepresented in their use of AT.

Program evaluation findings lead the agency to determine priorities for program improvement and also suggest actions that might be taken to facilitate the necessary changes. As a result of program evaluation activities, the agency can make both short and long term plans for improvements in the design of AT services, allocation of resources, and administrative supports that are provided to facilitate improved outcomes.

Example:

> *As a part of regular program evaluation activities, the Students-First School District conducted a comprehensive evaluation of the district's instructional technology services. Most recently, the agency made the decision to include it's AT services in the evaluation cycle. The data gained from the evaluation demonstrated that when students transitioned from elementary to middle school, achievement decreased disproportionately in comparison to past performance. The QIAT Self-Evaluation Matrices were used to analyze whether AT services could be related to the decreased achievement. The analysis suggested that the staff in the middle school settings did not have the knowledge and skills needed to support implementation of the AT as part of their strategies. In the past there were insufficient opportunities for them to learn about AT, so a plan was developed to focus improvement efforts on AT service in the middle school for the next three years.*

Key Questions

- How are the AT services evaluated?
- How is AT included in the agency-wide program evaluation process?
- How and to whom are results of program evaluations communicated?
- What actions are taken in response to the results of program evaluation?
- When and how are improvement actions and results monitored?