



Guiding Document for Administrative Support of Assistive Technology Services

Support from administration is absolutely essential for quality AT services to be developed and sustained. This chapter addresses the core components of administrative support for AT services, providing examples and resources.

Sometimes administrators do not recognize the important role they play in establishing and supporting fair, efficient, and cost effective AT services. They may assume that the AT team members “take care of all of that”, but without knowledgeable and supportive administrators, AT services may fail. The most common error in the area of administrative support occurs when there is no formal support provided. There may be personal support where one or more administrators express their personal appreciation of an individual or a team, but do not take action to provide guidance, allocate resources, or understand procedures. Personal support without programmatic support leads to statements such as, “Oh, assistive technology? I leave all of that to our AT specialist, John. He does a terrific job.” When this happens it is typical that AT leadership personnel try to or are expected to be the sole source all of the effort required to provide AT devices and services.

As evidenced in other indicator areas, especially consideration, implementation, and evaluation of effectiveness, all educators who come into contact with a student using AT have a role to play in supporting that student. This will occur only when an informed administrator holds every educator accountable to make it happen.

Administrators have influence over multiple aspects of the agency including funding, allocation of resources, meeting time, staff accountability, staff recognition, and other incentives. The individuals involved in the direct provision of AT services have little or no control over these areas.

Administrators can be leaders of change, cheerleaders, supporters, motivators, and providers of resources. The administrator sets the climate in the building or agency he or she leads and one who is knowledgeable about the core components of effective AT services is more likely to recognize the importance of AT for students with disabilities and to value the provision of those services.

This chapter includes specific suggestions for addressing each indicator for administrative support of AT services.

Indicator 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 AT devices and services they require for educational participation and benefit. Access to AT is ensured regardless of severity of disability, educational placement, geographic location, or economic status.

While 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 are a core component of AT services and support consistent delivery of services that are legal,
© The QIAT Leadership Team (2015), <http://www.qiat.org>. Citations listed in Reference document

ethical, and equitably available to all students. Guidelines include clarification of processes and procedures for referral, consideration, assessment, documenting in the IEP, device acquisition, and implementation. In addition to general procedural guidelines, education agencies may find it helpful to develop guidelines for actions such as: determining when AT needs to be taken home, addressing damages to AT devices, providing services to private schools, and resolving conflicts related to AT. Such guidelines enable educators and families to understand and follow agency practices. The Assistive Technology Model Operating Guidelines for Oregon, available from www.otap-oregon.org provide an example of the type of wording that might be used in guidelines for AT services. Of course, all processes and procedures are reviewed regularly and updated as necessary.

Example:

Mr. Mattson had a 3rd grade student with an IEP who was struggling in several areas of the curriculum, particularly with understanding print materials. He conferred with the student's parents and it was decided that the student's possible need for AT to support comprehension of print material 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 Indicator 1:

- What written procedures are in place to support equitable access to AT?
- What is the process for keeping the procedures current and adequate?

- How are current and emerging trends incorporated into the written procedures document?

Indicator 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, such as in print, on the website, and in the languages used by families in the agency's service area. These guidelines are disseminated to staff members at regular intervals and they confirm that they have been received. All team members, including families, have access to the procedures and are provided opportunities to learn more about them. All staff members learn about AT procedures through mandatory in-service presentations and are held accountable by their supervisors to follow the guidelines.

Example:

At the beginning of the year staff members in the Springfield School District received written AT guidelines and verified their receipt. They were also given the web address for the guidelines. The school principal gave magnets with the web address to all staff members in his building. When Mr. Brown joined the faculty in

January, one of his colleagues shared the web address with him. 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 a discussion about AT.

Key Questions Indicator 2:

- When and how are families and staff informed about the procedures and how to access them?
- How does the agency ensure that staff members know the guidelines?
- How is staff implementation of procedural guidelines supported?

Indicator 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 education teachers, administrators, related service providers, curriculum directors, paraprofessionals, etc.).

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 that 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 for

academic tasks and the ability to include it in instruction for students with disabilities. Similarly, speech/language pathologists (SLPs) generally knowledgeable about communication and language development, may not be skilled in the area of augmentative and alternative communication (AAC). Including knowledge about AAC in position announcements and job descriptions for all SLP's can increase the availability of skilled service providers.

Job descriptions that include statements of basic AAC and other relevant AT skills can guide administrators to seek and hire staff members who can enhance the district's ability 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 Lake 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 colleagues 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, AAC, and aids for daily living. He talked about lesson plans that he developed that allowed students using AT to participate fully in classroom activities.

After the interview, Ms. Williams felt comfortable that Mr. Chiba had the skills required for the job and proceeded to check his references.

Key Questions Indicator 3:

- 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 ensure that AT is included?

Indicator 4

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

Intent: 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 AT 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: seeking, hiring, and retaining knowledgeable personnel; having expectations for effective AT implementation; acknowledging instances of high quality AT use; and encouraging ongoing learning and growth. Effective implementation of this indicator requires that all educators recognize, value, and support the use of AT for students who need it to demonstrate what they know or to participate actively in instructional

activities. The administrator holds teachers accountable so that students have access to their education and learning opportunities in all educational settings where they receive instruction. See some the components below of effective AT use by students. It is part of the form, *Administrator's Planner for Effective Technology Supervision and Leadership*, found on the QIAT site <https://qiat.org>

- Students regularly use technology, including AT, as required to participate in learning activities, complete assignments and interact with peers.
- Students who experience difficulty with reading use technology to access information, acquire knowledge and demonstrate skills.
- Students who experience difficulty with writing use technology to demonstrate knowledge and skills.
- Students who experience difficulty with physical or sensory access to classroom materials use technology to access the curriculum and demonstrate knowledge and skills.
- Students who experience difficulty with math use technology to access information, acquire knowledge and demonstrate skills.
- Students who experience difficulty with oral communication use technology to support communication efforts.

In addition to AT-related competencies, personnel have skills, knowledge and attitudes needed to collaborate and communicate with other professionals, departments, agencies, and families. AT services require the ability 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 allowed 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 Indicator 4:

- 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 descriptions?
- What opportunities are provided to staff to improve or increase skills/competencies in response to performance evaluations?

Indicator 5

The education agency includes *assistive technology in the technology planning and budgeting process*.

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

Education agencies' technology plans address the need for access for **all** students,. 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 that may include AT. Recognition of the AT needs of students with disabilities is part of agency-wide technology planning, (e.g., allowing access to specialized software and hardware on the school network and avoiding purchase of academic courseware and assessments which have a closed environment that does not allow AT use). The district can acquire universally designed technology that is usable by students with the broadest possible range of abilities and needs, including those with identified disabilities. The acquisition and provision of AT are included in the agency's periodic assessment of overall technology competence.

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 current and anticipated needs for AT. 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 curriculum access for students with disabilities. The members of IEP teams know how to request funding for needed AT purchases.

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, 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 AT needed for specific students to access and use the interactive boards.

Key Questions Indicator 5:

- How does the agency regularly seek and use input from general and special education staff so that budgets include both accessible technology and AT?
- How do administrators ensure that there is special education participation on technology committees?
- How do technology-funded initiatives involve special education programs?

Indicator 6

The education agency provides access to *on-going learning opportunities about assistive technology* for staff, family, and students.

Intent: 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 AT or any other aspect of AT 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 is available to all staff, students, and families and effective administrators support the participation of educators and others in relevant training. Administrators set expectations that people will take advantage of professional development related to their professional goals, provide time for learning activities, and hold staff responsible for meeting learning goals. Individuals who provide AT support are recognized and used as a valuable resource for training others and offering technical assistance within the agency. Errors in meeting the AT needs of students occur when it is not clearly understood that the primary purpose of AT in school settings is to support the implementation of the IEP for the provision of FAPE.

© The QIAT Leadership Team (2015), <http://www.qiat.org>. Citations listed in Reference document

The agency ensures access to text-based resources, technical assistance, support for technology problem solving, and a variety of training alternatives (e.g., face to face training, virtual learning, coaching, and mentoring). Agencies will need to develop targeted professional development to meet their own unique local needs. There are many training resources available from national, state, and local AT programs, universities, and vendors. Proactive leadership provides information about training opportunities and supports staff participation.

Example:

Bayview School District conducted a needs assessment to identify the knowledge and skills needed by staff and families to improve systemic and student-specific AT services. The needs assessment identified three priority areas: accessible instructional materials, AT decision making, and appropriate documentation. Mrs. Kriss, the 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 AT conference as a means to network and build internal resources.

Key Questions Indicator 6:

- What evidence is used to identify the need for ongoing learning opportunities?
- How does the administrator facilitate and monitor staff learning about AT?
- How is staff participation in learning opportunities supported? (e.g. release time or other incentives)
- How is family participation in AT training supported and encouraged?
- What agency resources (time, personnel and money) are allocated for on-going learning opportunities?

Indicator 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 and the QIAT Self-Evaluation Matrices highlight strengths and weaknesses within AT services. This information is used to further development and improvement of the agency's AT services to support student achievement.

Failure to evaluate the provision of AT services is a common error. All programs, including AT programs need to be evaluated on a regular basis in order to improve and to better meet student needs. Three critical views of AT services that might be assessed as a part of the evaluation are the effect of AT devices and services on student achievement, the AT skills and competencies of staff members, and the satisfaction of service providers and parents 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 necessary changes. As a result of program evaluation activities, the agency can make both short and long term plans for improvements in design of AT services, allocation of resources, and provision of administrative supports in order to facilitate improved outcomes.

Example:

As a part of regular program evaluation activities, the Big Valley School District conducted a comprehensive evaluation of the district's instructional technology services every three years. Most recently, the agency made the decision to include its 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 AT. They needed staff development in both transition planning and implementation of AT. In the past there were insufficient opportunities for them to learn about AT and the new professional development plan focused improvement efforts on these identified areas for the next three years.

Key Questions Indicator 7:

- 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?