

Assistive Technology Fact Sheet #1: Assistive Technology for Children with Hearing Impairments

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*Developed by the Department of Public Instruction in collaboration with
the Wisconsin Assistive Technology Initiative*

1. What is assistive technology? Assistive technology (AT) is 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 the functional capabilities of a child with a disability.
2. What are some examples of assistive technology appropriate for students with hearing impairment? Assistive technology for a child with a hearing loss may be used to either supplement or replace the auditory event depending upon the needs of the child. Assistive technology for a child with a hearing loss falls into three categories: Telecommunications equipment and peripherals, Assistive listening devices, and Alerting devices. Telecommunications equipment includes such things as amplified telephones closed captioning, and TDDs. Assistive listening devices include FM Systems and other classroom amplification devices designed to improve the auditory reception of speech information. They are further explained in Assistive Technology Fact Sheet #2. Alerting devices are devices that let the person know something is happening in his or her environment. They may provide a visual cue, amplify sound, or vibrate.
3. Why may assistive technology for students with hearing impairment be needed in the schools? In addition to assistive listening devices which are discussed in another fact sheet, assistive technology may be needed in the school to support a student's independence for functional life tasks such as using a telephone, alarm clock, or smoke alarm. Other items such as vibrating pagers may be used to gain the child's attention. Videotapes and television programs that are closed captioned provide visual information, allowing the student access to the program.
4. Which Wisconsin students with hearing impairment will benefit from assistive technology? Any student with a hearing impairment may benefit from assistive technology if it makes it possible for them to access their education, progress in the general education curriculum, gain independence, or achieve a specific educational standard. Individual need and potential benefit of the assistive technology are determined by the child's IEP team.
5. How do I find out about assistive technology? You can begin by talking with your teacher for Deaf and Hard of Hearing (DHH) or the Educational Audiologist. If you are not currently working with either of these, then contact the special education director in your local school district. In addition, the regional coordinators for the Bureau for Deaf and Hard of Hearing may have information. You can find the names and addresses for them at their web site, <http://www.dhfs.state.wi.us/sensory>. General information about assistive technology can also be obtained from the Wisconsin Assistive Technology Initiative, which has a consultant at each CESA. Their names and address can be found at their web site, <http://www.wati.org>.

6. Where do I get assistive technology for a student with hearing impairment? DHH teachers and Educational Audiologists are involved in procuring assistive technology for students with hearing impairment. They work with a variety of resources in Wisconsin. Some larger school districts may have an assortment of assistive technology devices. Many of the Cooperative Education Service Agencies (CESAs) have assistive technology lending libraries. In addition, the Wisconsin Assistive Technology Initiative, a statewide project of the Department of Public Instruction operates a lending library that is open to every school district and Birth to Three program in the state. Assistive technology devices may be borrowed at no charge from their lending library. In addition, the Center for Deaf and Hard of Hearing-Universal Link in Milwaukee and North Central Technical College in Wausau rent or lease a variety of assistive technology and most vendors will lease their products prior to purchase to help determine if they provide the necessary help. Finally the Independent Living Centers throughout the state all have assistive technology for individuals with hearing impairment, including alerting devices, telephonic devices, and assistive listening devices. These can be borrowed for children as well as adults.
7. How does the IEP team determine which assistive technology is needed? The determination of when assistive technology is appropriate and necessary is based on the needs of the child. It involves consideration of the student's unique needs related to the hearing loss and should also include his or her age, social interests, physical abilities and needs, maturity, and cognitive ability. For example, while one student might be able to use an older style assistive listening device with wires, another may be embarrassed by it, or find it gets constantly bumped due to a related physical disability. Each IEP team must think about all factors and then should try the specific assistive technology in the environment in which it will be used, before committing the school district to provide it on a permanent basis.
8. Is the school district required to pay for assistive technology? The school district is required to provide a free appropriate public education (FAPE). If the IEP team determines that assistive technology is needed in order for a child to receive FAPE, then the school district will need to provide it at no cost to the child's parent. "Provide" however, does not always mean "pay for". They may borrow an item, lease it, or receive it as a donation from some other source, as long as they provide it at no cost to the parent when needed to implement the IEP.
9. Can just anyone decide to use it? Federal and state law specifically empowers the IEP team to determine what is needed in order for a child to receive FAPE at school. Therefore, they are the group that must decide if assistive technology is an appropriate part of the child's program at school. Every IEP team is required to consider the need for assistive technology during the IEP meeting. During this consideration, any member of the team can suggest specific assistive technologies. If it is decided to try assistive technology, a trial period of use is recommended. The trial period can determine if the assistive technology is appropriate and has the desired outcome, before the school district commits to the long-term provision. Families may independently decide to use assistive technology at home for activities that take place there and which may not be part of their child's IEP, such as use of a TDD, a visual or vibrating alarm clock, or a visual doorbell.
10. How do I include assistive technology in the IEP? Assistive technology can be part of the specially designed instruction, a related service, or a supplementary aid or service. There is no one right place to write it. Rather the task is to write it where it best fits and best explains what the IEP team intends to have happen.

11. What is the school district's responsibility under the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA)? The ADA has a different standard than IDEA. It requires effective communication and consideration of consumer preference. School districts are impacted in two ways by the ADA. They must meet ADA requirements in making information and events accessible to the community and to their staff, in addition to considering it in the provision of services to their students with disabilities. Safety and access to information are general provisions for all students and others entering the school building. For students with hearing impairments, this could include providing captioned TV programs whenever possible and visual fire alarms in isolated areas where a student might be left alone, such as the rest rooms, study carrels, etc. Another example of a school supporting effective communication and independence of a student with a hearing impairment would be to provide a TDD along with the phone number to the telephone relay system. Using the TDD and relay system will promote greater independence and facilitate the achievement of communication standards.