



## IN THIS ISSUE...

### **The Role of AT in Schools: From Assistive to Accessible**

"It's not what it should be, it's not what it will be, but it's a sight better than it was." The origin of that adage has been lost in time, but the truth it conveys applies to the role of assistive technology in schools as this school year gets underway. Ten years ago, the AT we now take for granted was, for the most part unimagined. What existed was expensive and, for many schools and families, unattainable. As technology and state and national legislation have evolved, more and more families of children with disabilities have begun to enjoy the benefits of assistive technology. Still, though, budget constraints at all levels in all school districts have left families and schools largely unable to keep pace with the accelerating evolution of technology. Nevertheless, that evolution will only continue to accelerate and, in 10 years time, when principles of Universal Design for Learning may become the norm for U.S. schools, AT will stand for accessible technology, the direct descendant of today's assistive technology and available to all children in every school setting.

### **Joan Breslin Larson Speaks**

Today, she is a determined and energetic Assistive Technology Specialist for the State of Minnesota, one of only 15 AT professionals who hold that position in states throughout the U.S. When she was a child in Prince Georges County, MD, however, Joan Breslin Larson looked on in

bewilderment as her blind, illiterate Italian-born grandmother who spoke no English sat on the sofa and sang Italian songs to herself while settling into senility. "I couldn't communicate with her," Ms. Larson remembers, "so my experience with her had an initial negative impact on me; she scared me." Nevertheless, as a college student in Chicago, Ms. Larson had her grandmother in mind when she decided on a major: applying music therapy to the teaching of children with disabilities. After graduating from Mundelein College, now a division of Chicago's Loyola University, Ms. Larson worked in a group home in southeast Minnesota that housed 69 adults with developmental disabilities. From there she and her husband, who also counseled in group homes, moved to Rochester, MN and to smaller group home environments that housed just 4-6 adults. Later came a stint as head of a non-profit AT consulting program that she had started, also in southeast Minnesota "where I griped loudly and publicly that I was less than satisfied with what the state Department of Education was doing – or not doing -- in assistive technology." The state DOE, she explains, "was recommending that we go to an expert model consisting of a select core of AT gurus. I didn't think there'd be sufficient funding support for that approach." She adds, "I always had a vision of Universal Design for Learning (UDL) in which all kids had access to all the technology." Ultimately, she explained, "enough people challenged me to either apply for a position with the state DOE or shut up." To her amazement, in 1999, she was hired. She assists administrators, instructional and related service staff and

parents in developing special education programs focused on AT and provides leadership to Minnesota school districts and other service providers in meeting the state's AT service system needs. Ms. Larson, who earned a Masters degree from the University of Minnesota, wrote the 2000 and 2003 editions of the Minnesota Manual for Consideration and Evaluation of Assistive Technology, published by the state Department of Education.

In addition to our interview with Ms. Breslin Larson, we also feature members of our Knowledge Network. We invite you to contact these members for further information. Please share this newsletter with other organizations, families and professionals who may benefit from it. We invite you to contact us at <http://www.fctd.info>. We welcome feedback, new members and all who contribute to our growing knowledge base.



---

## **The Role of Assistive Technology in Schools: "Mommy, Mommy, I Did Word Processing!"**

---

*An Interview with  
Joan Breslin Larson,  
State Assistive Technology Specialist*

Joan Breslin Larson, Assistive Technology Specialist for the Minnesota Department of Education, marks her AT epiphany as she marks most of her life's special moments, by the age of her children. "My daughter is now 25. I started working in AT when she was in kindergarten – and she was the reason."

Ms. Larson was a technology resource specialist in a group home for adults with severe mental retardation and

developmental disabilities. "My daughter, Katie, came home from kindergarten and said, 'Mommy, Mommy, I did word processing!' I thought, oh, crud, now she knows more than I do." So Ms. Larson went to a nearby store to purchase a computer. "I was looking at Apple 2Es, and the store clerk says, 'Oh, no, you'll never be smart enough to use everything that computer can do. You need this old Apple 2C.'" That was not the response she wanted, so Ms. Larson tried her luck at another store. "I bought the Apple 2E. I started playing on it with my daughter. Then I began bringing some of the guys who lived at the group home over."

The response of the group home residents to her computer was nothing short of electrifying, she recalls. "Literally, you could see the lights come on and the wheels start turning and they said, 'Yeah, this is cool.' They got it." She remembers that she then said to herself, "If Jim can do this – and Jim has very significant disabilities – what could other people with disabilities – children -- do on this equipment?"

### **A National Wake-Up Call**

Her AT epiphany, she says, occurred at the same time that Alliance for Technology Access (ATA) centers were opening their doors in communities nationwide. Their opening, she claims, "was the wake-up call for this industry. The Apple 2E computer was like the big bang for all of AT. It was threshold to the future."

The kick-start that launched her career working with individuals with disabilities, she recalls with irony, "was my husband" who was a counselor in group homes. After she was unable to find a post-college job in her chosen niche – as a music therapist for children with disabilities -- and he had found one in Rochester, MN, he told her "If I can do this, you can do this, too."

Several years later, after stints as a technology resource specialist in several group homes, Ms. Larson hung out her shingle as a non-profit program consultant, where her desire for the state Department of Education developing a more aggressive approach to AT landed her a job as Minnesota's Assistive Technology Specialist five years ago.

On her first day at her new job, she set about to establish clear AT policy objectives. She recalls, "That was about the time that IDEA produced language that said that AT had to be considered for all students with disabling conditions. I call that my full employment language in IDEA." She felt empowered by the legislation's mandates "but lacked direction from the state agency on how to translate that language into policy."

Fortunately, however, "I inherited a state leadership team whose job it was to help the state AT specialist develop vision. I sat down with this group and asked, 'What do we need?'" She says the team members responded, "We just need guidelines. We need to have a resource."

### **A View From the "Wrong Side" of the IEP Table**

She spent her first year writing the state's AT manual. "I tried to take the viewpoint of parents as I wrote. I'd been a foster parent of three kids with significant disabilities – developmental disabilities, severe and profound retardation. My own son has mild articulation issues." As she wrote, she remembered what it was like for her and her son to sit on "what I call the 'wrong side of the IEP table.'" It astounded her, she recalls, "how powerless you are on that side of the table." So she tried "to come up with ways to give both sides of the table some say about what is good for the child,"

including giving the child an opportunity to have some say about what works best.

"One of the things I've noticed," Ms. Larson comments, "is that parents have firm ideas about what their child needs: Parents say, 'This is the only approach that will work.'" However, she cautions, "The child, in the meantime, may say, 'I don't think so. I don't want to use that. You can't make me use it.'" She warns, "If the child doesn't want to use the equipment it is not going to work, no matter how perfect it appears to be, it won't work."

In Minnesota's AT manual "there is a set of forms we use that we suggest that parents bring to the IEP meeting. There's a form for parents where they can talk about their dreams for their child, the technology they think would be helpful and strategies that work well for their child."

There is also a form for the professionals who work in the child's educational setting, and another form that the child is encouraged to fill out independently or with a peer or a mentor, "but not the parent and not the case manager, because they've already given their ideas." The child, she notes, has the opportunity to talk about how he or she feels about using technology. "Has the child seen something she thinks is cool, and what does he think will work well for him?" Kids, she emphasizes, "know what works best for them."

For example, she advises, "When the child says, 'I tried this but I don't like it because it's green, and green is the Mayo (MN) High School color and I go to Century HS and our color is purple and I want [the device] in purple.'" Sometimes, she notes, "something as simple as color makes a big difference to a child."

## Parents are “Pretty Shocked”

Anticipating children’s occasional reluctance to give voice to their opinions in the presence of parents, Ms. Larson explains that children are asked to fill out this form prior to the meeting “because if the child is reluctant, if his parents are there stating ‘This is what we want, this is what we need,’ then we can act as a child’s advocate.” Obtaining a child’s preference before the meeting, she adds, “enables us to say to the parents, ‘What Timmy told me before is...’ and then we have the record of what Timmy said or wrote and then can set up a safe environment for Timmy to talk about his needs and preferences.”

Parents, she comments, “are sometimes pretty shocked” by her approach and by a child’s preference that might be contrary to theirs. Nevertheless, she adds, “I think it’s a good thing for everyone involved in the AT process.” Hopefully, she continues, “When your children tell you what they need, something that’s unexpected, parents will say, ‘Yeah, I can live with that.’”

## The Year’s Major Issues: Credentialing

With a new school year looming, Ms. Larson addressed the AT-related issues that most concern her at the state and national level.

Defining the role of a school AT specialist is a task whose time has arrived. According to Ms. Larson, there are many professionals in Minnesota, and throughout the nation, “who have simply announced, ‘We’re AT specialists.’” Others, she insists, have been assigned the role “by a special ed director or a principal only because that individual can use a computer with some facility.” Such individuals, she asserts, are told, “You’re the AT specialist.” There are others, she notes, “who do AT work on top of a significantly heavy caseload because they

are passionate about it, so they’re somehow squeezing the AT hours in.”

Nowhere, however, at the state level in Minnesota, does a job description exist for a school AT specialist. “Nowhere do we say, ‘This is who and what an AT spec is; these are their skills and competencies; this is how we should recognize them.’”

What is needed statewide, she asserts, is a credential. “We need to provide job descriptions and work assignments that give professionals time to do a good job. That means working well with kids, working with other members of the IEP team, providing professional development to their peers, training others, getting adequate training because the field changes so fast.” Additionally, “It means assigning AT specialists specific responsibilities to avoid being pulled in many other directions simultaneously so that they can’t do their assigned job well.” Resolving the credential issue, she declares, “is very important to me.”

Models exist, she says, for the credential she seeks. The RESNA credential is a possibility, she says, “but it’s mainly rehab oriented rather than educationally oriented.” C-SUN, she notes, “is terrific.” The RIATT credential, too, is well conceived. However, “I’d like to have something that is relevant to Minnesota.” Neighboring Wisconsin, she points out, “has a credential and I think Wisconsin’s may be similar to where we will end up, though perhaps a little more stringent.”

A national credential, she admits, would be an ideal outcome, but Ms. Larson senses little signs of a groundswell in other states for that objective. In fact, she notes, “There aren’t that many of us in other states.” She estimates that, nationwide, there are only 15 individuals with a title and statewide responsibilities similar to hers.

"The small number of us is a little frightening, because AT is such an important part of a child's education." Other states, she claims, "divide the job among other specialists in the special ed department."

To help build a national groundswell for a national credential, Ms. Larson says she has always envisioned a gathering of all the AT specialists in the US to discuss the topic in depth at a conference.

Such a conference would merely be a first step, however. "To make this national, we need to have a credential established on a state by state basis, with each state developing its own criteria." For example, she intends to use the indicators developed through the Council for Exceptional Children (CEC) as the basis for the Minnesota credential. "If we can get other states to establish a virtually identical process then perhaps we can start doing an exchange between, say, Wisconsin and Minnesota and expand that out." Then, eventually, "we can go to OSEP as a national credential authority, but before that happens, we need to be effective at the local and state level."

### **The Year's Major Issues: Universal Design for Learning**

The advancement of the Universal Design for Learning concept is high on Ms. Larson's priorities for 2004-05 and beyond. She says she first became aware of UDL's benefits through her son, Tim, who has no disability. "He was in 10th grade and had abysmal grades in science. At a parent-teacher night his very enthusiastic young science teacher announced that the kids did not have to bring their textbook home because the whole textbook was on the Web." Every child in her son's class, she notes, was assigned an ID and was able to access the full electronic text. "Tim went from having low grades in science to an A. He's now

planning to go to school to become a physical therapist. The other day I came home to find him doing independent research on the theory of relativity. Imagine!"

She declares, "The thing I love most about UDL is that it will benefit kids with disabilities but also makes all that learning available to all kids. It enables all kids can do as much as they need to."

UDL, she acknowledges, is the linchpin for all she believes in and hopes for from her profession. "It allows kids to do what kids can do. It's so simple!"

When asked how universal she thinks UD will be in five years, 10 years from now, she replies, "The most important factor will be getting electronic access to textbooks. There's legislative impetus for that and I think it's something we must have in place."

Such universality, she concedes, is possible only when computers become as ubiquitous in U.S. households as the telephone. In Minnesota, she asserts, such universality is well underway. "We are fortunate in having a high socio-economic standard. We have programs like 'Computers for Schools' through our Stillwater state correctional facility, which redistributes computers." Minnesota schools, she says, "can do anything they want with those computers. If they want to place one in a child's home, they can. It works very well."

In Minnesota, she insists, UDL may become a statewide reality within the five-10-year window. "My optimism may be a product of my lack of patience, but I truly think it is possible in that time frame."

As advanced as Minnesota is in its march toward statewide implementation of UDL, another state, Kentucky, according to Ms. Larson, is even further ahead. Kentucky, she declares, "is doing a terrific job at

promoting UDL." California and Texas, she adds, have legislation in place promoting access to electronic text. "We're looking to put something like that in place in Minnesota, if the federal government doesn't beat us to it, which would be ideal." The federal New Freedom Initiative Act, she points out, promotes electronic text. "That's a very encouraging development."

Still, she notes, the Instructional Materials Accessibility Act has been before Congress several times "and it never makes it out of conference committee." Ms. Larson attributes the legislation's inertia in part to effective lobbying from educational "paper and ink" publishers. "For every textbook that goes to print," she asserts, "an electronic version of it already exists, because every major publisher works in an electronic format." She understands the publishers' concerns with copyright issues, she says, "but I can take an existing text book right now and make a photocopy of it, thereby violating the copyright. I choose not to do that, of course, but I could." When her son's class shared an electronic textbook, "the teacher controlled the password -- he gave one password to each student -- and nobody in the science class was asked by kids who were not in that class to share passwords to access the electronic book." She declares, "Kids don't read science books for recreation."

### **The Year's Major Issues: Funding**

As school budgets become ever tighter, funding looms as a critical issue for Ms. Larson in the year ahead. "If we're creative we'll continue to have adequate funding for AT," she states. "I believe it's appropriate for schools to bill out AT use to medical assistance." In Minnesota, for example, "schools can bill as 'medical assistance' devices for kids which are medically necessary and which allow children with disabilities access to a free and appropriate

public education." Other states may not share the Minnesota approach, she admits, "but, in this instance, they ought to."

Billing as medical assistance, however, she warns, will not provide all the AT a child may require. For example, she points out, "It wouldn't allow funding for an AlphaSmart because it would be very difficult to justify that as medically necessary." However, she adds, "It will allow access to expensive devices, like communications devices."

She strongly favors access to such devices, she declares, because a child will then "own his or her voice." She advocates for parents to utilize third party billing options, rather than school funding for those medically necessary items. However, she acknowledges, "some families don't have insurance or medical assistance that would cover the device."

She urges AT specialists to work with county caseworkers to make sure that families are aware of the benefits to which their children are entitled. "I can't say that teachers ought to take on more responsibility because they are already overwhelmed but we have to do better interagency collaboration to benefit children, nationally and statewide."

In Minnesota, she notes, "we have some very proactive counties working to benefit kids. We have lots of waiver slots that opened up a few years ago which enabled many kids who hadn't received benefits a few years before, because they were on waiting lists, to receive them."

Ms. Larson believes that children as young as pre-school, or even infancy, and their families ought to be exposed to the benefits and use of AT. "I recently saw a video produced here in Minnesota that showed a two-year-old using a power wheelchair." There are some professionals, she

concedes, “who say that little kids like that are too young to use high-end technology.” She disagrees with that notion. “A two-year-old’s ‘job’ is to explore her environment. If we deny a two-year-old the right to explore her environment through the power of mobility then she is not being allowed to do her job.” Seeing a child successfully manipulate such high-end equipment, Ms. Larson states, “dramatically changes how we think about their capacity to handle it.”

### **The Year’s Major Issues: Language**

Ms. Larson also believes that many children ought to be provided access to high-end communication devices at an earlier age. “A kid’s job is also to play with language, to make silly sounds, to babble. AT helps that process.” She supports providing very young children access to such equipment because “if you just give them a single-message communication device, how many times can they say, ‘I want more juice,’ before it becomes irrelevant?” Even in the best cases, she adds, “we don’t get those messages changed often enough.” After all, she asserts, “Kids deserve the right to say more than one thing at any given moment.”

### **The Year’s Major Issues: Professional Development**

School administrators, Ms. Larson declares, “need to know more about what makes good AT practice, because in a school setting it is not going to work unless administrators provide the necessary support.” Two well known AT professionals, Penny Reed and Gayl Bowser, she says, “are publishing a wonderful book, *The Administrator’s Desktop Guide to Assistive Technology*.” The book, she explains, “talks about the levels of support administrators need to provide their staff. That’s a key factor. Once we get the administrator’s support to allow AT professionals to do their

job, plus providing the financial support so that kids can get access to the technology to do what they need to do, that’s when our job will really be a good job.”

At the FCTD Summer Institute, she says, “what consistently broke my heart, from what peers were telling me, was that there isn’t a school culture that allows kids access to skilled practitioners, to having AT across the board. I think it’s a cultural thing. We need administrators to be aware of it. We need administrators to at least know where the resources are in their state or region or facility. We need to make that happen.”

In Minnesota, she reveals, “we’re going to be spending some time doing professional development for administrators on AT, getting information to them in a useable format so that when a question comes up they can access this resource we’re developing, look at that 10 minutes worth of information and get what they need.”

### **The Year’s Major Issues: Teacher Training**

For Ms. Larson, teacher training is a primary concern. “Teachers are coming out of universities without knowing what they need to know about AT. And the first time a kid comes into the classroom and mentions IntelliKeys, the teacher doesn’t know what that is.” In most states, she claims, teacher licensing requirements demand that teachers acquire an awareness of AT. These requirements, she notes, “are generally met in an undergraduate or graduate program by someone like me coming in and giving a guest lecture for 1-3 hours. That’s all.”

What consistently surprises and pleases her, she declares, is the audience response to the information she presents. “They are entranced and enchanted. They think AT is the coolest thing.”

For many in the teacher audience, she says, these lectures often represent a first-ever exposure to AT. "Ideally, I'd like to see heavier exposure to AT become a key component in the preparation of teachers." Some universities, she remarks, "are doing an outstanding job with this, some are very deficient. There are probably some states where nothing at all is going on in this area." Minnesota, she insists, "is pretty advanced. We're looking at some resources here where we can make this happen a little more consistently perhaps through our summer institute or through online learning."

### **A Glimpse of AT's School Future: From Assistive to Accessible Technology**

In her "perfect fantasy," gazing a decade ahead, Ms. Larson sees "a school curriculum that is universally accessible. Computer labs and libraries are fully accessible. Websites are accessible to students with disabilities." She glimpses a future in which the demand for AT is actually reduced "because learning is accessible automatically without the need to retrofit it." She adds, "We'll have a broad base of knowledge across all educators, general educators, special educators and media specialists on accessible technology so that we have AT practitioners who are there to support the most significantly involved kids." For children with disabilities, "it should be automatic that they can turn on a speaking word processor and have instant access to the information they need in a format that's understandable to them."

Is there a fighting chance that her "perfect fantasy" may become reality by September 2014? Ms. Larson is convinced the pieces that ought to comprise the reality she seeks will be in place "because the technology is improving and moving in the right direction." In Minnesota, for example, "our school technology plan asks schools to

develop an accessible technology plan for all learners."

### **Benefits for Youngest to the Oldest**

Contemplating the future nudged Ms. Larson backward, to her past. "Once I saw what a computer could do for the group home residents, for whom I desperately cared, I introduced it to a client named Christine who was hearing impaired and had a series of other behaviors because she was unable to communicate with us." Using an old Apple computer "I developed a communication system for her. It lit her up! I started thinking about had this technology been around when my grandmother was alive what could we have done for her?"

Much could have been done for her, Ms. Larson notes. "She was born in Italy, grew up in Italy and, because she was blind, she was not allowed to go to school, which was the custom back then, more than 100 years ago, when kids with disabilities simply were not educated. My dad is now legally blind. While I was visiting with him recently I gave him a talking watch. It was thrilling to see him so happy about just being able to tell time." AT, she concludes, can provide simple, quality-of-life benefits and sophisticated technological assistance that can positively and dramatically impact the lives of the youngest among us to the oldest. "And that has always, will always, make me as excited as I was when little Katie announced, "Mommy, I did word processing!"



---

## RESOURCES

---

### Articles

#### **Unheard Voices and the Right to Communicate:**

#### **Augmentative Communication**

By Patrick Brune - PBS, January 2004

This short article, written by the augmentative communication coordinator of the Parkside School in New York City, is appropriate for families that are beginning the search for basic information on ways to help their child who is not developing speech and language skills as expected. The author encourages parents to ask their child's teachers, therapist or other health professionals to assist them in obtaining an evaluation through their local school district or via a local college or university program. This process can be begun, the author states, as soon as a delay in acquiring or using speech becomes evident. Pop-up links add life experience to the article, and a description of AT is highlighted as well. This resource is available at:

<http://www.pbs.org/parents/issuesadvice/inclusivecommunities/augmentative.html>

#### **Assistive Technology Service Delivery Models: Scalable to Meet the Needs of Students with High Incidence Disabilities?**

By Dave L. Edyburn, Ph.D. –  
ConnSENSE, 2002

The author questions the effectiveness and efficiency of existing systems for assessing students with high or mild-incidence disabilities for AT. Dr. Edyburn questions the amount of time, energy and money spent on the evaluation and referral process while lamenting the lack of adequate funding spent on implementation, training and follow-up for these students. The

author compares the current efforts to assess students with high incidence disabilities with the beginning efforts to assess and evaluate students for placement in special education services. He suggests that the overall process would be better served if the technologies that are most frequently used for students with these disabilities – including word prediction software, organization software and talking word processors -- were available routinely in classrooms, so that the students who need these interventions would have access to them without the need for long and costly evaluations, in an evaluation process that was created for students with more severe disabilities. He also points out the lack of training and preparation available to staff members who provide these evaluations and follow-up, and believes that types of AT technology that would provide cognitive and behavioral supports are not yet available. He concludes that we must develop new and better methods of providing AT technology services to students with high incidence disabilities, and lists five suggestions. This resource is available online only at:

<http://www.connsensebulletin.com/edyburnv4n5.html>

#### **Assistive Technology in K-12 Schools**

By Lisa Wahl

Alliance for Technology Access, 2001

This article is one in a series that focuses on the use of AT in classrooms to help all students achieve. A comprehensive definition of AT technology is included and clear examples are provided. This article examines the classroom as an environment consisting of many diverse learners and highlights the methods teachers might employ to present information to a variety of students as well as ways for students to participate within their unique abilities. The article also includes the account of a school

district that took proactive measures in order to be prepared to provide appropriate services to its special education population and a step-by-step explanation of how this district implemented its comprehensive staff development program. A listing of resources for conducting thorough assessments is included along with a listing of resources to be used for staff/parent training purposes. This resource is available at:

<http://www.ataccess.org/resources/atk12/default.html>

### **The Provision of Assistive Technology for Students with Disabilities**

By John Copenhagen

Mountain Plains Regional Resource Center  
2002

The author's stated purpose is to "inform parents and educators about the use of AT devices and services in the special education evaluation process and programming." The article is a resource for those participating in and planning IEPs. It defines AT and discusses issues such as equipment ownership, repair responsibility, providing for AT home use, AT integration into the curriculum and independent evaluations. This resource is available at:

Mountain Plains Regional Resource Center  
1780 North Research Parkway, Suite 112  
Logan, UT 84341

Phone: (435) 752-0238

Fax: (435) 753-9750

<http://www.usu.edu/mprrc/infoserv/pubs/ProvisionofAT.html>

### **Assistive Technology: Not Just for Special Educators**

By Eric Umstead - The Catalyst, 2003

The author argues that training on AT products should include mainstream as well as special education teachers, because

students with disabilities are often included in mainstream classrooms. Umstead maintains that AT will not be successful for individuals with disabilities without teacher preparation and teacher competence in employing software/hardware. He outlines a two-step training program for teachers, providing theory, principles and hands-on experience with textHelp!'s Read&Write Gold software. He lists the features of Read&Write Gold and explains the rationale for using the program with all students, not just with those with special needs. This resource is available at:

[http://www.thecatalyst.us/articles/19\\_4\\_Umstead.pdf](http://www.thecatalyst.us/articles/19_4_Umstead.pdf)

### **Promising Technologies**

By Terry Lankutis and Kristien Kennedy  
Technology and Learning – The Resources for Technology Leaders, 2002

Assistive technology is not just for special education students and individuals with disabilities, the authors declare. AT, they insist, is also for those who are struggling or simply want an easier method of writing, taking notes or completing homework and reports. Lankutis and Kennedy provide a list of tested software programs and adaptive devices that can assist everyone who needs assistance. Word prediction programs and software programs to improve the writing process are listed, as well as the companies that provide them. The guide also lists several programs that may be used to enhance music or art. This resource is available at:

[http://www.techlearning.com/db\\_area/archives/TL/2002/03/assistive1.html](http://www.techlearning.com/db_area/archives/TL/2002/03/assistive1.html)

### **Publications**

#### **The Catalyst**

Western Center for Microcomputers in  
Special Education, Inc.

This quarterly newsletter is geared to special educators but is a helpful aid to any individual with an interest in AT and special education. Contributors to the publication include professionals from many disciplines as well as parents. *The Catalyst* includes AT product reviews, individual success stories regarding the use of specific assistive technologies, software, educational models and general computer information. Select articles from the current issue and back issues may be downloaded in PDF. The resource is available at:  
Western Center for Microcomputers in Special Education, Inc.  
1259 El Camino Real, # 275  
Menlo Park, CA 94025  
(650) 855-8064  
Email: [thecatalyst@earthlink.net](mailto:thecatalyst@earthlink.net)  
<http://www.thecatalyst.us/index.html>

## **Websites**

### **Infintec**

The Infintec website is a joint effort involving the United Cerebral Palsy Association (UCP) of Chicago and UCP Washington that aids those with disabilities to obtain AT. Services provided through Infintec include information services, access to AT equipment, training and education programs as well as access to specialists. This resource can be accessed at:

UCP/Chicago Infintec  
160 N.Wacker Drive  
Chicago, Illinois 60606  
Phone: (312) 368.0380  
<http://www.infintec.org/>

### **AT Laws**

Designed as a training module, the AT Laws website provides a concise summary of federal laws that impact the educational

services of children with disabilities. The laws are categorized into three areas -- civil rights, special education and AT – and are listed chronologically. A major feature of the site is the link that the authors paired with each law to provide more in-depth information. This resource can be accessed at:

Assistive Technology Training Online Project  
University of Buffalo  
Center for Assistive Technology  
515 Kimball Tower  
Buffalo, New York 14214  
Phone: (716) 829-3141  
Fax: (716) 829-3217  
Email: [atto-webmaster@buffalo.edu](mailto:atto-webmaster@buffalo.edu)  
Website: <http://atto.buffalo.edu>  
<http://atto.buffalo.edu/registered/ATBasics/Foundation/Laws/index.php>

### **Parent Pals.com**

Designed by Ameri-Corps, this website comprehensively targets all aspects of special education. Parent Pals.com offers a number of resources in areas that are disability-specific, as well as broad topics such as AT and special education. The site offers recommendations for books, a dictionary of common terms associated with special ed as well as a newsletter. This website can be accessed at:  
<http://www.parentpals.com>

### **AT Online Training Project**

Developed by the University of Buffalo's Center for Technology, this web site provides AT-related information under the following headings: Assistive Technology Basics; Tutorials; Assistive Technology Decision Making; Resources; and Project Information. The site is easily navigable, features large print and a volume of information on each screen that is substantial yet not overwhelming. The screens have large print, are uncluttered,

and links are clearly marked. Pages are easy to print, and a printer friendly choice is offered. Website content is aimed at parents, caregivers and teachers who are beginning their introduction to technology use by children with special needs. The resource can be accessed at:

Assistive Technology Training Online Project  
University at Buffalo  
Center for Assistive Technology  
515 Kimball Tower  
Buffalo, NY 14214  
Telephone (716) 829-3141  
Fax: (716) 829-3217  
Email: [atto-webmaster@buffalo.edu](mailto:atto-webmaster@buffalo.edu)  
<http://atto.buffalo.edu>

### **TechIDEAS**

Designed by the U.S. Department of Education's Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP), the TechIDEAS site provides information on the use of technology to support the education of students with disabilities. The site posts announcements, background information on research projects funded by OSEP and offers forums for discussion on relevant topics related to the utilization of technology in special education environments. The site is geared to the informational needs of researchers, educators, families and policymakers. This resource can be accessed at:

<http://www.air.org/TECHIDEAS/home.html>



---

## **KNOWLEDGE NETWORK MEMBERS**

---

### **North Central Regional Technology in Education Consortium (NCRTEC)**



Specializing in the development of multimedia components in a professional development context, NCRTEC helps schools to integrate technology into their classrooms by working with strategic partners, states, and intermediate service providers. The Consortium develops and disseminates tools for teaching and learning, training and professional development materials, and technology planning information. NCRTEC also assesses and evaluates technology in schools. NCRTEC develops and brokers products and services for schools and school districts, education service centers, state education agencies, policy makers, adult literacy programs and colleges and universities in Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, Michigan, Minnesota, North Dakota, South Dakota and Wisconsin.

NCRTEC is one of 10 Regional Technology in Education consortia funded by the U.S. Department of Education's Office of Elementary and Secondary Education.

Most NCRTEC technical assistance is a collaborative effort in conjunction with state and intermediate service agencies. Many of the resources are available through the consortium's website. NCRTEC also works with partners to provide training programs for educators and school leaders, including the consortium's Learning With Technology and Leadership for Integrating Technology courses. In addition, NCRTEC representatives participate in and present at many regional and national technology and education conferences.

The NRCTEC portfolio consists of three fundamental areas:

*Professional Development*, which provides products and services to educators, including teachers, principals, administrators, technology coordinators and school board members.

*Technology Planning and Development*, which helps individual schools and districts build and evaluate the technical and support infrastructure necessary to sustain effective learning with technology.

*Tools to Enhance Effective Teaching and Learning with Technology*, which provides resources for use by teachers and students, including The Amazing Picture Machine, curriculum units and assessment guides.

For more information on NRCTEC, contact:

NRCTEC  
1900 Spring Road, Suite 300  
Oak Brook, IL 60523-1480  
Phone: (630) 649-6515  
Fax: (630) 218-4989  
[www.ncrtec.org/](http://www.ncrtec.org/)



### **Southwest Human Development AT Training Program School Training Project**

The project offers free AT training and technical assistance to educators working with special needs students in Arizona schools. Regional trainers are available statewide for on-site training. All Arizona school districts and charter schools are eligible for this service.

The project provides the following services: training on the assessment, selection, acquisition and operation of AT devices; guidance in the development and implementation of IEP-driven AT service delivery plans; development of district level AT resources; on-site technical assistance to support the use of AT devices in the classroom; promotion of inter-agency collaborative efforts to provide AT devices and services to students with disabilities.

The project's training staff includes special educators, occupational therapists, physical therapists, speech language pathologists and rehabilitation engineers.

For further information, contact:

Southwest Human Development AT Training program School Training Project  
2850 N. 24<sup>th</sup> Street  
Phoenix, AZ 85008  
Phone: (602) 266-5976; (602) 266-1034 (TTY)  
Fax: (602) 274-8952  
<http://www.swhdat.org/swhdat/training.asp>



### **American Council on Rural Special Education (ACRES)**

ACRES is the only national organization devoted entirely to special education issues that affect rural America. Founded in 1981, the organization is comprised of special educators, general educators, related service providers, administrators, teacher trainers, researchers, and parents who are committed to the enhancement of services to students and individuals living in rural America.

The membership of ACRES is geographically diverse, and is representative of all regions

of the country. The organization's diversity is an important ingredient in its effectiveness since rural issues are not only different from urban issues, but also may vary among specific rural areas. The communication network fostered by ACRES benefits rural educators, service providers and parents by helping to address the characteristics of rural America, including sparse populations, a tendency toward professional isolation and remoteness from resources. Rural areas thrive on warm personal relationships and close-knit communities. ACRES offers isolated rural professionals and parents an opportunity to forge a close-knit rural organization at the national level.

Held in March, the ACRES Annual conference is the lone national conference entirely devoted to rural special ed issues. Discussion topics include administration, at-risk issues, collaborative education models, early childhood gifted and talented needs, multicultural issues, parents and families, professional development, technology and transition.

For further information, contact:

American Council on Rural Special Education  
(ACRES)  
2865 Old Main Hall  
Utah State University  
Logan, UT 84322-2865  
Phone: (435) 797-3728  
<http://extension.usu.edu/acres>



### **Broward County Exceptional Special Education (ESE)**

In Florida, Exceptional Student Education (ESE) is the designation for special education students as well as for students

who are gifted. ESE consists of the following 19 areas of eligibility:

- Autism
- Deaf or hard of hearing (DHH)
- Developmentally delayed (DD) for ages birth-5 only
- Dual-sensory impaired
- Educable mentally handicapped (EMH)
- Emotionally handicapped (EH)
- Established conditions (EC)-for ages birth-2 only
- Gifted
- Hospital/homebound (H/H)
- Language impaired
- Orthopedically impaired (OI)
- Other health impaired (OHI)
- Profoundly mentally handicapped (PMHY)
- Severely emotionally disturbed (SED)
- Specific learning disabled (SLD)
- Speech impaired
- Trainable mentally handicapped (TMH)
- Traumatic brain injury (TBI)
- Visually impaired (VI)

In Broward County, as well as throughout the state of Florida, placements for services for students with disabilities range from the general education classroom with supports and services provided in the classroom, to pull out services, to cluster classrooms where students with more complex needs may be placed from several different schools, to center schools and other options in between.

Broward ESE students attend their respective boundaried schools whenever possible. Boundaried schools are defined by the county as those schools a student would attend if he or she were not classified as ESE-eligible. If a boundaried school is unable to provide the services identified on a student's IEP, another school will be selected by the county and transportation provided.

For additional information, contact:  
Broward County School Board  
600 SE Third Street  
Ft. Lauderdale, FL 33301  
Phone: (754) 321-0000  
Contact: Fay Clark, Executive Director;  
Meryl Angelo, AT Specialist  
[mangelo175@aol.com](mailto:mangelo175@aol.com)  
[clark\\_fay@bcpsgw.broward.k12.fl.us](mailto:clark_fay@bcpsgw.broward.k12.fl.us)  
<http://www.broward.k12.fl.us/studentupport/ese/>



**Consortium for Appropriate Conflict Resolution in Education (CADRE)**

Also known as the National Center on Dispute Resolution, CADRE utilizes advanced technology, along with traditional means, to provide technical assistance to state departments of education on implementation of the mediation requirements under IDEA '97. The organization also supports parents, educators and administrators by employing the available array of dispute resolution options for the ultimate benefit of all parties.

CADRE conducts annual assessments of the technical assistance needs of every state, plus U.S. territories, the Bureau of Indian Affairs and many localities to ensure that the organization correctly gauges technical assistance imperatives.

For more information, contact:  
Consortium for Appropriate Conflict Resolution in Education (CADRE)  
P.O. Box 51360  
Eugene, OR 97405-0906  
3411-A Willamette Street  
Eugene, OR 97405-5122  
Phone: (541) 686-5060 (voice); (541) 284-4740 (TTY)

Fax: (541) 686-5063  
Contact: Marshall Peter, Director  
<http://www.directionservice.org/cadre/index.cfm>



**National Monitoring Center for Special Education Accountability (NCSEAM)**

The National Monitoring Center (NCSEAM), through work plans based on self-assessment and continuous progress evaluation, provides technical assistance to states and agencies implementing focused monitoring and evidence-based decision-making. National Monitoring Center work plans specify the expected results, activities, and coordinated resources to be used to improve compliance with federal law and results for children with disabilities and their families.

Focused monitoring is a process that purposefully selects priority areas to monitor for compliance and/or results while not specifically examining other areas for compliance. Focused monitoring is performed to maximize resources, to emphasize important variables and to increase the probability of improved results.

Technical assistance from the National Monitoring Center generally focuses on two areas: data about special education and other services - its analysis and use; and accountability activities including program monitoring.

The center's effectiveness is determined by its ability to:

- Conduct the center in a manner that reflects the assumptions and practices of high quality monitoring

and that is responsive to state, local and national circumstances and that results in increased support for monitoring practices

- Develop capacities at the state and local levels for appropriately utilized focused monitoring practices
- Provide assistance to the U.S. Department of Education's Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP) that responds to national needs and reflects the lessons learned by the National Monitoring Center

For further information, contact:  
National Monitoring Center for Special Education Accountability (NCSEAM)  
Louisiana State University Health Sciences Center  
Human Development Center  
1100 Florida Avenue, Building 138  
New Orleans, LA 70119-2714  
Phone: (504) 942-8215  
Contact: Alan Coulter, Project Director  
[acoulter@lsuhsc.edu](mailto:acoulter@lsuhsc.edu)  
<http://www.monitoringcenter.lsuhs.edu/default.htm>

### **Nevada Special Education Technology Assistance Project (NSETAP)**

The Project's purpose is to provide resources to school districts for making informed decisions regarding AT technology devices and/or services which meet state and federal mandates. The Project provides a range of services to education agencies and the professionals that serve students with disabilities.

NSETAP AT specialists help school districts determine which students are eligible to receive AT and to assess which equipment is most appropriate and what options are available for students who are ineligible for AT.

NSETAP loans a wide range of AT equipment to school districts. The equipment includes augmentative communication devices, environmental control units, adaptive computer access, software, switches and mounting systems. The organization provides AT training and access to an AT print library.

For additional information, contact:  
Nevada Special Education Assistive Technology Project (NSETAP)  
P.O. Box 603  
Carson City, NV 89702  
Phone: (775) 283-1516  
Fax: (775) 283-1592  
Contact: Liz Isaacs, Project Coordinator  
Email: [nsetap@aol.com](mailto:nsetap@aol.com)  
<http://www.carsoncityschools.com/studentsupport/NSETAP/html/about.html>

### **Helen Hayes Hospital Center for Rehabilitative Technology**



Helen Hayes is among the nation's leading specialty hospitals, providing innovative care and treatment to individuals with physical disabilities and chronic disabling diseases. The Helen Hayes CRT offers a variety of AT services tailored to the needs of school children with disabilities. These services are aimed at providing adaptive interventions that reduce sensory, physical or learning disability-related barriers to a child's academic progress.

An augmentative communication program provides services to students who have a disability or impairment of expressive communication. AAC services attempt to compensate permanently or temporarily

for those with severe speech-language and writing impairments. For young children, the CRT designs AAC interventions to increase communication opportunities, teach specific communication and social interaction skills and encourage communication readiness.

Adaptive computer equipment and software are available to help enhance a student's use of computers in a variety of ways: for persons with learning disabilities, computers can be an excellent tool for learning, writing and planning; students with difficulties in keeping up with the documentation requirements of school can utilize a computer with voice-recognition software or a word-prediction program to achieve appropriate grade level performance; for persons with limitations in hand function, alternate ways of typing and using a mouse are available; for persons with visual or other perceptual impairments, alternate types of displays can facilitate computer use.

Classroom seating accommodations are available to students with disabilities that compromise balance and the ability to sit in a standard classroom chair. CRT provides seating systems/desks that offer proper body support and easy access to their books and materials. For children who use a wheelchair for mobility, ergonomic considerations involve the determination of fixtures and workstation adaptations which maximize access to materials. CRT clinicians assess these ergonomic needs for each student and develop cost-effective options to address those needs.

Environmental accommodation includes any change to a student's tools or educational environment that will accommodate a disability and allow him

or her to successfully function. CRT provides architectural modifications such as ramps and widened doorways for wheelchair users, rearranging work spaces to make them more functional, instructions and reminders for those with memory difficulties, access to laboratories, gyms and all other environments.

In circumstances where off-the-shelf products do not effectively meet the functional, vocational or educational needs of an individual with a disability, Helen Hayes CRT rehab engineers apply a custom approach. They modify existing products or create new ones in response to an individual's requirements. CRT engineering includes fully equipped electronics and mechanical workshops staffed by professional and technical staff with experience in developing engineering solutions for people with disabilities.

For more information, contact:  
Helen Hayes Hospital Center for  
Rehabilitative Technology  
Rte. 9W West Haverstraw, NY 10993  
Phone: (845) 947-3187 (TTY)  
Fax: (845) 947-3097  
[http://www.helenhayeshospital.org/crtsc\\_hool.htm](http://www.helenhayeshospital.org/crtsc_hool.htm)



**Assistive Services to  
Schools for Education, Technology  
& Training (ASSETT)**

**ASSETT**, funded by the New Hampshire Department of Education, provides supplemental support services to New Hampshire schools serving students who have sensory and/or communication impairments. Members of our professional staff possess advanced training and expertise working with

students who are deaf or hard of hearing, blind or visually impaired, and those who have a communication impairment. The objective of ASSETT's collaborative relationship with educational teams is to help these students access the curriculum.

**Consultation:** Students referred for ASSETT services are initially observed within the school environment while completing academic and social activities. In concert with the educational team, ASSETT consultants interpret these observations along with test results and evaluation reports. These findings are further analyzed to determine the student's performance level and how effective and/or appropriate current systems or devices are in meeting the student's needs. When indicated, recommendations for specialized equipment, educational materials, training, and/or modifications to the classroom environment, teaching strategies, or curriculum are made. In addition to these recommendations the ASSETT consultants help design implementation strategies and are available for ongoing consultation as needed.

**Loan of Equipment and Materials:** Specialized equipment and materials are vital to a student in pursuit of educational success. Our Instructional Materials Center (IMC) loans an assortment of assistive technologies to schools including: FM amplification systems, low vision aids, Braille equipment, adapted switches, and augmentative and alternative communication devices. The IMC also facilitates the acquisition of Braille and large-print books for students who are blind or visually impaired. A wealth of additional resources is available for both students and teachers to borrow.

**Training:** ASSETT provides training programs throughout the academic year on topics that range from the Use of Equipment and Materials, to Curriculum Modification Techniques. Workshops are conducted in schools throughout the state as well as at our Concord office. These practical, hands-on workshops are designed to meet the needs of educators, administrators, and parents alike. If you're not already on our mailing list, please call our office for the current training schedule.

**Support Activities for Professionals:** ASSETT provides networking and peer support opportunities for professionals throughout the state. "Care and Share" days for teachers of students who are visually impaired, and informal meetings for teachers of students who are deaf, are ways in which information is shared, concerns are voiced, and new trends are examined.

**Special Opportunities for Students with Visual Impairments:** With help from the Gibney Family Foundation and in collaboration with Inter-Actions, ASSETT provides recreational and educational experiences for students who are visually impaired, such as ski trips, museum tours, career exploration, and much more. Contact us for a list of upcoming activities.

Donna Furlong  
Administrative Assistant  
117 Pleasant Street  
Dolloff Building  
Concord, NH 03301  
Phone: (603)226-2900  
Fax: (603)226-2907  
[dfurlong@nhaat.mv.com](mailto:dfurlong@nhaat.mv.com)  
<http://www.nhassistivetechology.org/asset/>



## Freedom Machines

"Leave your misconceptions and low expectations behind". *Freedom Machines*, a new film airing on PBS, explores the power of assistive technology in the lives of people with disabilities. Hear personal stories of how assistive technology helped accomplish the impossible. The film challenges viewers to look at the gap between potential and reality for many Americans with disabilities - and what can be done about it.

Please check your local listings for broadcast dates and times.

<http://www.pbs.org/pov/pov2004/freedommachines/about.html>

