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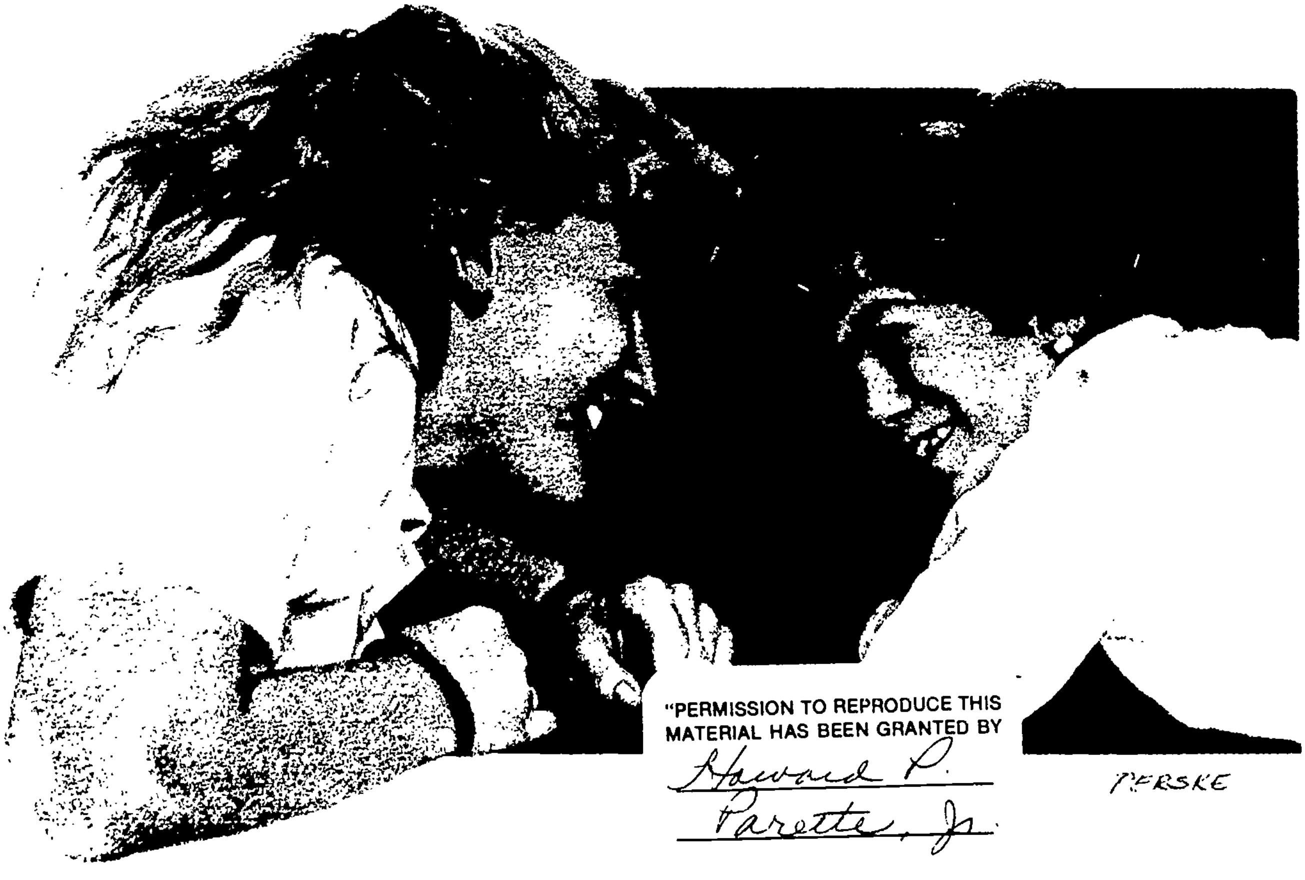
ABSTRACT

This guide, intended for parents and families in Arkansas who have school-age children with disabilities, shows parents ways to work with schools to assure provision of needed technologies. The guide is divided into five sections, each using a question and answer format. After defining "assistive technology and services," the first section answers questions concerned with technology and the role of the schools, including the importance of the Individualized Education Program in enabling students to obtain needed services. Next, selection of technology is addressed in questions about various personal factors (such as student needs, likes, and family activities) and technological factors (such as dependability, cost, and features). Funding for technology is the subject of the third section which stresses the legal responsibilities of schools as well as assistance available from insurance, private organizations, Medicaid, and TEFRA (Tax Equity and Fiscal Responsibility Act of 1982). Parent and student rights are specifically addressed in the fourth section. The last section considers advocacy for technology. Also provided are additional information on funding alternatives, a list of advocacy contacts, a parent checklist of questions to ask about technology, and a checklist for advocacy activities. (DB)

Assistive Technology and Disabilities

...A Guide for Parents and Students



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Partnerships in Planning for State Technology Service Delivery

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Assistive Technology and Disabilities

...A Guide for Parents and Students

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*Think people...
Think technology!*

A publication of the Technology Access for Arkansans (TAARK) Project

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Contents

The world in which we live and work is rapidly changing because of "assistive technology". For students with disabilities in the public schools, the promise of technology offers great hope. Technology often gives students a way to get around in classrooms and at home, to talk with others, to be more independent during the day, and to do school tasks. These are but just a few ways in which technology provided by schools can change the lives of students with disabilities.

Often, students, their parents, and the schools may be unaware of assistive technology that can help students to be more successful in school. When this happens, the student who needs technology doesn't get it.

This guide was designed for parents and families in Arkansas who have school-age children with disabilities. The guide shows parents ways to work with schools to see that technologies needed by students are provided. The guide is divided into five sections, each using a question and answer format. Four other helping sections are also included.

Toward a Definition

"What is assistive technology and services?"

For this guide, assistive technology means any device or service which can improve the quality of life for people. Assistive technology covers the entire range of human inventions from simple spoons for feeding, to wheelchairs, to complex computer systems that control our living environments. These and other technologies are helping to improve the quality of life for many people with disabilities. A service will mean anything that helps a student or family in choosing, getting, or using technology.

Technology and the Role of the Schools

"What is the role of the schools in getting technology?"

Schools must provide students who have disabilities with a "free and appropriate public education." This education must be provided in *the least restrictive environment.* This is required by a number of state and federal laws. Information about these laws can be found in the *Funding Sources* section (pp. 30-37). The school's responsibilities under these laws are to give evaluations, to help students learn by looking at their special needs, to allow students to do the same kinds of things that other students do in the school, and to provide technology that they need to learn.

"What is the purpose of school evaluations?"

Under state and federal laws, each student with a disability (ages 3-21) must be

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provided with an in-depth evaluation of what he or she can and cannot do. This evaluation reflects what the child does in the home, in their personal life, in the world around them, as well as in the school. This is usually done through parent interviews and a series of tests and examinations that may include testing by the teacher, occupational therapist, physical therapist, and speech pathologist. It may also involve psychologists, doctors, and other professionals.

"Why is the evaluation process important for technology?"

The evaluation is important because it can help select technology that can be used to help a student. The results of the evaluation help to identify what technology a student needs, and justifies the purchase of the technology. For example, an audiologist may see the student and recommend that a hearing aid be bought for the student. A speech pathologist may suggest that a communication aid be provided for classroom and home use. A doctor may prescribe a special wheelchair. In each of these cases, a recommendation was made to the parents and to the school about technology that would help the student.

Parents should remember that schools will have test information about the student in some areas, but this will not be all the information that is important to select technology. Teachers can't see what happens in the home setting and other settings outside the school. Information about strengths in these specific areas of the student's life is important to the IEP committee and helps in deciding which technology will best meet the student's needs.

"Why is the IEP important to receive technology?"

One of the main ways that a free and appropriate education is guaranteed by law is through the individualized education program (IEP). The IEP is a written plan between the school and the student and his or her parents. The student should also participate when he or she is willing and able. An IEP can call for use of a particular technology if it is needed for the student's education. IEPs also state *in detail* how often and how long the student must receive educational services.

The IEP also states how often and how long *related services* are needed for the student. Related services are those special services such as occupational or physical therapy, audiology, medical and counseling services to be provided by the school. Parents should understand that the federal law says that related services can be *any services needed to help a student with a disability to benefit from special education.* Since technology can help students benefit from special education, it is often seen as a related service for students with disabilities.

Parents should remember that when working in the IEP process with school personnel, technology will only be provided by the school as a related service if it can be shown that it is needed for the student to benefit from special education. During the development of the IEP, questions such as *"Is there some technology that can help my son/ daughter to meet their school goals"* must be asked.

"If a student doesn't need special education services but has a disability, what technology services should be provided by the school?"

Both federal and state laws call for schools to provide students with disabilities with a free and appropriate education in the least restrictive environment. This means that students not only be allowed to participate in school activities, physical education, health, and transportation services, but that they have *an equal opportunity to participate.* In each of these areas, technology may be used to help the student to have an equal opportunity to participate. Technologies such as hearing aids, print enlargers, and wheelchairs allow students with disabilities to participate in school activities.

"What if the student is told that he or she cannot take their technology home from school?"

Sometimes devices are used only at school, and the student is not allowed to take them home. Parents must be able to show the school how the use of the technology at home allows the student the same opportunity to participate in school-related activities. For example, a language device used in school to talk to other students can be used to help the student discuss homework problems with his or her parents. It can also be used for the student to practice spelling and grammar skills. As another example, a device used at school to help the student in feeding at lunchtime would also help at home. Parents can show that if the student practices using the device at home, less teacher time would be needed to help the student to learn to use the device during mealtime in school. In each of these cases, the use of the technology at home can be shown to help the student's educational program.

"Should schools make changes to buildings?"

Under the federal law, schools are also required to provide access by making changes in the buildings and grounds. This includes putting in ramps and graded curbs on sidewalks, and widening stalls in bathrooms. The law does not call for schools to tear down and rebuild existing structures for students with disabilities. For instance, a school would not be required to put an elevator in a 3-story building for a third grade student in a wheelchair if no third grade classrooms are on the 3rd floor. However, if art classes that all students participated in were found on the 3rd floor, the school *would* be required to make the art classes available. The school might put all the school's art classes on the bottom floor of the building, allowing the student to participate in art activities in the building. They could also build an elevator or lift that would allow the student with a disability to get to the classes on the 3rd floor. The right to participate is present in either case, whether changes in modifications or rescheduling is used to give the student the chance to participate in the same art activities as other students.

"Can the IEP be changed so the student can get new technology?"

The IEP will be reviewed each year, with new goals being set for the student as needed by the committee. Parents may request a review at any time. This allows the opportunity for the student to get new technology, if needed, that would enable the student to continue to benefit from special education.

Key Points:

- Technology can help students get an appropriate education.
- Technology can make the school setting less restrictive.
- Schools must evaluate students and identify technology that will help students.
- The IEP is an important tool for students to get technology.
- Schools must provide technology that allows students to participate in school activities.
- Students' needs should be reviewed each year, and new technology can be provided by the school as needs change.

Selection of Technology

"What technology is best for the student?"

The parents and school should remember there may be many devices or services which might help a student. Choosing technology that is best suited to meet the needs of students is a task that calls for careful consideration of many factors. These factors can be grouped into two areas: *personal factors* and *technology factors*. Each area is important and must be given careful thought before an IEP decision about technology is agreed upon.

Personal Factors

"How are the student's needs an important personal factor?"

It is important to look at the needs of the child when choosing technology for a student. Needs would include such things as sitting without support, using one's hands to do

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certain tasks, dressing oneself, or speaking words. It is important to know a student's needs because some technologies will call for certain skills or strengths that the student may or may not have.

Some technologies require a lot of training, or certain physical and mental abilities, to learn to use them. For example, learning to use computers and other devices may call for special training provided by a teacher. Other technologies are easy to use and can be learned in a short time. By honestly looking at what the student can do, it will be much easier to choose a technology that suits the student's personal needs.

"Do likes for technology affect decision-making?"

All students have likes for certain things, and when choosing technology these likes must be considered. For example, a student may like to use a manual wheelchair rather than a powered wheelchair. The student may want a small device that talks that doesn't call attention to itself rather than a large, difficult to carry device that would cause people to look at the student. Parents should understand that the student may have likes that may differ from those of other people on the IEP committee. These likes need to be considered during the planning process.

"Do sex and age play a role?"

The sex, and the age of the student, may affect decisions about needed technologies. For example, if the student is a boy, he probably would not want a device which talks by using a female voice; a girl would not want a device which talks by using a boy's voice. Also, a teenager would not want some technologies that looked like preschool toys.

"Should the home and family activities be considered in the planning process?"

The parent/s and others must keep in mind where the student lives when choosing technologies. If the student lives in a rural part of the state, thought should be given to how the device will be repaired in as short a time as possible. If the student lives in a mobile home, a large, powered wheelchair might not be the best technology for the student if doors are not wide enough to allow the chair to enter the home.

"How does getting to and from the school, or where services will be provided, affect technology choice?"

Since many students must use public and school transportation, parents must think about whether technology chosen for the student will allow him or her to use this transportation. Some kinds of technology, such as powered wheelchairs, will need extra space, wheelchair locks, and ramps on buses and other vehicles in order to use them. If the student has a technology that is needed for him or her to benefit from special education, the school is responsible for providing the necessary transportation. If changes are needed in buses or other vehicles to get the child to and from the school, these changes must be made to meet the needs of the student. This would include the use of lifts, ramps, railings, and wheelchair locks. It would also include removing bus seats to make space for students in wheelchairs.

"If the student has hopes of a certain job, is this important in the IEP process?"

For all students, the promise of a job in our society is an important goal. Getting ready for the world of work begins early in life, and technology should be chosen that will help the student get skills that will help him or her in later life. Parents and others involved in developing an IEP for students should give careful thought to the job goals of each student, thinking about how these goals may be achieved by using technology. During the planning process, an important question that parents should ask is, *"Will this technology help or hinder my child's job opportunities?"*

Technology Factors

"Are the goals for the student important?"

When trying to make a decision about technology for any student, the goals for using the technology must be carefully considered. Technologies cannot be chosen to best meet a student's needs without understanding what the technology is supposed to do. When the parent is working with an IEP committee, these goals *must be linked to the student's needs.*

Schools would look at how a technology can help a student in the classroom and other educational settings, *e.g.*, shopping trips to the grocery store. Parents, on the other hand, want technology that can be used *both* in the school and the home. For example, a device to help a student talk with others will be bought if it can help a student to speak with other children and the teacher *in the educational settings.* Parents must be prepared to show school officials how a technology they know will help the student at home will also help the child to benefit from special education services.

"What if the parents are told there is only one kind of technology that will meet the student's needs?"

There are usually many types of technology designed to help students to overcome any needs they may have at home, school, and in other places. There are many different types of devices which can help students to talk with others, or to feed themselves. Many varieties of wheelchairs have been designed to help students with physical disabilities get around. Before choosing any technology, parents and the IEP committee should look at as many choices as possible to choose the best technology for the student. Then the features of the device should be compared to the child's needs, skills, and the places in which the technology will be used. Parents who are offered only one type of technology for their child may request a second opinion which has to be paid for by the school. One option for a second opinion would be to contact the Special Education Resource Center at the Arkansas Easter Seal Society to request this service (see *Other Advocacy Contacts*, p. 38).

"What are the important features of the technology?"

Parents should think about specific features of any technology before making a decision that it is best to meet the needs of the student. Following are several questions about these features that should be asked.

"Does it do what it's supposed to do?"

Generally, technologies do certain things for students. Parents should be sure that the technology which they are thinking about buying does the things *needed to benefit the student*. Parents should think about how the device helps the student's living condition, the student's ability to do important tasks, and the student's ability to be independent. If the device does not do these things, then a different technology should be considered.

"How much will it really cost?"

Some technologies will have to be put together for the student before they can be used. For example, a computer system may need to have special wiring put into the home. A powered wheelchair may need special batteries not supplied by the company that sells the chair. Parents should ask about the costs of putting the technology together, additional parts needed in order for it to operate properly, taking care of the technology, or changing the technology to meet the student's needs.

Sometimes this information is not supplied by those persons who sell the technology. The cost of putting technology together, taking care the technology, or changing the technology is often added onto the cost of a technology *after* a commitment has been made to buy the technology.

Some types of technology, such as those needing batteries, involve expenses or operating costs. Parents should be aware of these costs before buying any technology. Once an IEP committee agrees to buy a technology for a student, however, *it must pay for the costs of keeping the technology working.*

"Can the student use it?"

Some devices are easy to learn to use while others need much skill, physical ability, training, or practice. The parent and the IEP committee should consider all that will be needed for a student to learn to use a device.

"Is it dependable?"

All parents, students, and schools want the technology they get to be dependable. Does the device work the same way each time it is used? Does it only work like it's supposed to under some conditions? Are there special conditions that must be met for it to work? These questions are important in choosing technology. Some of these questions can be answered if parents, student, and the school try the technology out before buying it.

"Can it be moved easily?"

Since students often need to use devices in many places, how easily the device can be moved and used in different places is important. The size and weight of the technology are especially important considerations. Some technologiescan only be used in a few places because they are big, heavy, or require a lot of space when they are used. Others can be easily carriedby the student and used almost anywhere.

"How long is it likely to last?"

How easily a device can be broken and whether it can serve the student over a long time is important for parents to think about when choosing technology to meet the student's needs.

"Can the technology be used with other devices?"

Another important consideration when choosing some technologies is how easily they can be used with other devices. Wheelchairs, for example, are usually designed so that other devices can be easily added on; other types of technology may not be so easily changed. Parents should give thought to both the student's present and future needs in looking at the ability of the technology to be used with other devices. For example, a device which uses computer speech to talk for the young student may be limited to the use of 50 words. As the student learns to use more words, the device should be modified to allow the use of more speech.

"Can it be tried?"

Parents should be good consumers. If they are buying a car, they would shop around at car lots to get prices and bargain on the sale price with dealers. If a student needs a wheelchair, parents should be able to look at chairs sold by several dealers. All persons who are making decisions about what device a student will receive should be willing to shop around. Local companies which sell technology can bring samples of technology to the home or school and show how it works. Also, parents and the student will be able to go to any of the technology access centers that are set up in the state under the Arkansas Technology Access Program (ARTAP) (see pp. 34-37). At these centers, parents and the student can try out various devices that might help the student.

"How comfortable is it?"

Depending on the design of the technology, some devices may be uncomfortable to use while others can be used with great ease and comfort. Other technologies can only be used for a short time before the student will become tired. For example, some students with physical disabilities may not be able to lift their arms or use their fingers to operate some technologies without discomfort. Similarly, a wheelchair that is too small or too large will also affect the comfort of the student. If the chair must be operated by hand and the student does not have good arm and shoulder strength, the student will tire from use of the chair quickly. In any of these cases, careful thought must be given to the physical demands placed on the student to operate or use the technology. These concerns may be most appropriately addressed by the therapist or technology expert who is working with the student. This person will then share their concerns and recommendations to the parents and school after carefully evaluating the child's needs. By allowing the student to try the technology, information about the comfort of the technology may be obtained.

"How safe is the student from injury?"

Some technologies can cause injury to a student if improperly used or maintained. If the device is made of a material that is easily broken, parents and the school should think about whether the broken parts might hurt the student if something should happen to the technology. Sharp edges on the device can also cause injury to the student. Sometimes devices which use electricity can cause a shock if used improperly. Other technologies are heavy and can cause injury if they happen to fall and hit the student. Finally, many things become soiled easily and can cause infections if they are close to the skin.

"How easy is it to put together?"

Technology is sometimes bought which must be put together by the parents. If a technology is being considered which must be put together, parents and school officials should consider how easy it is to put together, including whether it is packaged in a way that is easy to take apart.

"How easy is it to maintain the device from day to day?"

Some technologies will need regular repairs and/or cleaning. Others may need to be worked on and cleaned only after a certain amount of time has passed or when they don't work properly. Parents should give careful consideration to the ease with which a device may be maintained, as well as who will be responsible for maintaining it. This includes whether the parents, student, or the teacher can take care of all the things needed to keep the device working, such as cleaning the technology and oiling a wheel.

"How easy is it to get repaired?"

The parents and school *must* consider where a technology will be repaired before buying it. An effort should be made to find local shops or companies that can repair damaged devices bought from companies found elsewhere in the country. Thought must also be given to whether replacement parts are easily found, whether the manufacturer must make repairs, and what type of warranty is available.

Because of the cost of having local shops or firms to repair technology, some students, parents, and school personnel may prefer to repair their own devices. If this is a consideration, it is important to determine if the person who will do the work has the skills and the tools required to repair the device.

"What happens when the device breaks?"

If a device is broken and must be repaired, it is important to consider what the student will use during the repair period. Parents or school personnel should find out whether the student will have a backup device for use while the technology is being repaired. Many times companies will provide a "loaner" to the student while his or her device is in the shop.

"How protected is the technology from theft and damage?"

Many technologies that help students cost a lot of money. Because of this cost, parents and schools should think about how the student's technology will be safe from theft or damage. If the school buys the device, they sometimes want the technology to stay at the school and not be taken off school grounds. This is often a policy decision rather than a rule based on law. What parents should ask is whether the device is covered by a school insurance policy against theft and damage. More than 1/3 of the schools in Arkansas are covered under a state insurance plan that fails to cover the monetary value of equipment in the event of theft or loss. Once the device leaves the school grounds, parents may become responsible for the device if something should happen to it. Some schools in Arkansas, however, may have insurance policies that protects technology which is bought by the school and leaves the school grounds with the student. If something happens to the device, the insurance company would pay to have it fixed or buy a new technology.

Parents who buy technology that is not needed for the student to benefit from special education should give thought to home owners or renters' insurance. Under these plans, a "rider" can be bought by the parents for a few dollars more which would pay for a new technology if the student's device is damaged or stolen.

"Where can I get information about selecting appropriate technology?"

There are several important places where parents and students can get information about appropriate technology. The Arkansas Technology Access Program (ARTAP) recently set up a number of technology access centers around the state that can show parents and students various types of devices. These centers can also provide evaluations to determine what devices are best suited to meet the needs of a student. Under the ARTAP system, there will also be a User-to-User network of parents and persons who use technology that may be contacted to get information about technology and services. There will also be an Equipment Exchange Program that will have want ads for used equipment. Other types of information services will also be available. Listed in *Funding Sources* (pp. 34-37) is a description of ARTAP and addresses and telephone numbers which may be used to get information.

Key Points:

- **The student's needs must be balanced with other factors to choose technology that is best for the student: These factors include:**
  - **student needs;**
  - **student's likes;**
  - **student's sex and age;**
  - **student's home and family activities;**
  - **student getting to and from school (or where services are provided);**
  - **student's job hopesrange of technologies available;**
  - **features of the technology;**
  - **cost of the technology;**
  - **how the technology is to be used;**
  - **dependability of the technology;**
  - **ease with which technology can be moved;**
  - **length of time technology will last;**
  - **usefulness of the technology with other devices;**
  - **ability of student to try the technology;**
  - **ease with which technology can be maintained;**
  - **safety of student from injury;**
  - **protection from theft and damage;**
  - **student's feelings about the technology;**
  - **comfort of the technology;**
  - **ease with which the technology can be repaired and parents' abilility to repair the technology; and**
  - **ease with which technology can be put together.**

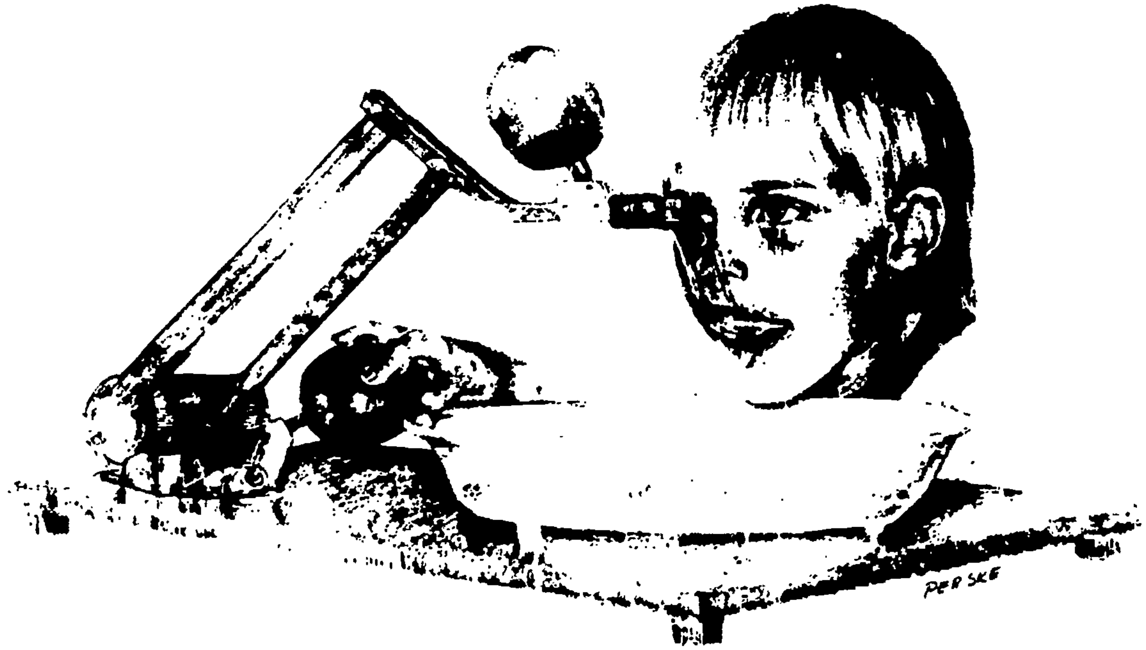
Funding for Technology

"Who pays for the technology that the student needs?"

Since the schools have a limited amount of money, it is easy to understand why paying for technology is important for schools. They are faced with great responsibilities about how money is to be spent for students. If a student is to get special education services, *the school must provide the technology* that is recommended by the IEP committee for the student to gain from these services.

"What if the school doesn't want to pay for the technology the student needs?"

If it is felt that the school will not choose technology that is appropriate to meet the needs of the student, parents should consider getting an advocate to help them with the IEP process. An advocate is a person who helps people get services that they need. One agency



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that has been quite helpful in helping parents with this process is Advocacy Services, Inc. (for more information about advocacy strategies and the appeal process, see *Advocacy for Technology* (pp. 24-29) and *Other Advocacy Contacts* (pp. 38-39).

For students who are not receiving special education services, other options are available to parents. Remember that not all students with disabilities will receive special education services, but some of these students may have technology needs that the school is responsible for providing. Under Section 504, schools are required to provide students with disabilities with a free and appropriate public education. They are also required under this law to provide these students with an equal opportunity to participate. For example, a student who needs a wheelchair lift on a school bus to ride the bus should be provided with this technology. If a school refused to buy a lift to help a student get to and from school to receive a free and appropriate public education, a Section 504 complaint may be filed with the Office of Civil Rights to get the needed technology. Information about how to get help in filing such complaints can be found in *Advocacy for Technology* (p. 25).

"Who can help pay for technology?"

In cases where the student does not need to receive special education services, but needs a special device, other choices for paying for the technology with the school system have to be considered. Civic clubs, churches, businesses, and other groups are all possible places to get help with paying for technology. Also, parents might think about working with a third party, such as an insurance company, or private agency to get money to buy the technology. Many insurance companies will pay for certain types of devices needed by persons who are covered under the policies. Private agencies and organizations such as the Association for Hearing Impaired Children and the Spina Bifida Association may also be able to assist families in buying needed technology.

One state agency which has been very helpful in getting technology for students less than 18 years of age is Children's Medical Services (CMS). This agency is designed for families that would be unable to pay for expensive technologies and services needed by children who are very ill or who have physical disabilities. A major funding source that CMS uses to pay for technology is the Medicaid program. If parents wish to apply for Medicaid, or get information about the program, this may be done at the County Human Services Office where the parents live.

A program which is being used by Children's Medical Services and parents across the state to get technology for students who do not qualify for Medicaid is the Tax Equity and Fiscal Responsibility Act of 1982 (TEFRA). This program is for people who are not able to get help under SSI. TEFRA is a very important program which parents can use to get needed technology for their children (see *Funding Sources*, pp. 30-37 for more information about TEFRA and other funding sources).

"What if we want to buy the technology ourselves?"

If parents are thinking about buying needed technology for the student, they may want to ask the company selling the technology about making payments over time. Parents may also contact banks and other lending places in the area. In Little Rock, for example, there are several places that will finance technology with a reasonable down payment from the family.

Key Points:

- **Schools must pay for technology which help special education students meet education goals.**
- **Parents can appeal a decision of the IEP committee.**
- **Insurance and private organizations can help parents to pay for devices.**
- **Medicaid and TEFRA are important sources for getting technology for students.**
- **Parents may sometimes pay for technology by making time payments.**

Parent and Student Rights

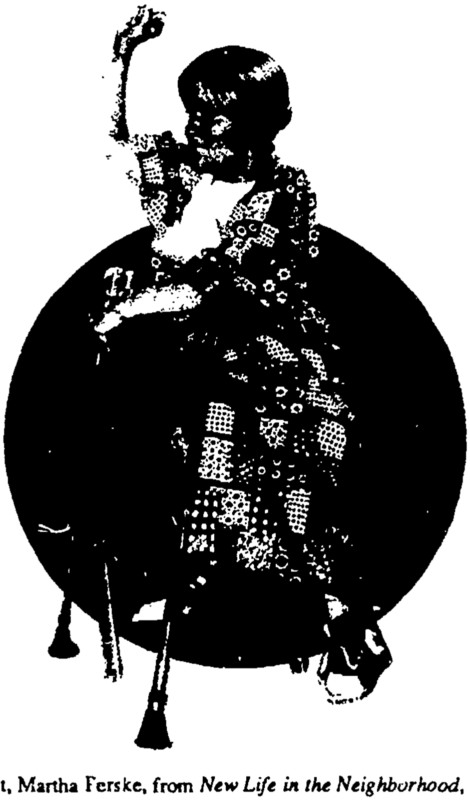
"What rights do parents and students have?"

Parents and students have many rights that have been set up by the legal system, and federal and state laws. These rights include:

- **The right to information.** Students and parents have a right to be given information about technology and related services in the state, and the right to get that information.

- **The right to advocacy.** Students and parents have the right to expect agencies and schools to help them get technology for students with disabilities. Students and parents also have the right to do all that they can do as persons to get needed devices.

- **The right to honest answers.** Students and parents have the right to get honest answers about the student's technology needs from professionals. This includes information



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about the results of evaluations, recommendations made by professionals following these evaluations, and other information about the student's technology needs.

- The right to independence for your child and yourself. Technology is a way to secure more independence by making students less dependent on other people. The right to independence for students with disabilities can be seen in no less than 35 state and federal laws. Independence should be the cornerstone for decisions made regarding technology for the student.

- The right to due process. This includes the right to receive notice about decisions made about the student's technology, the right to a hearing to protest these decisions, the right to be represented by an advocate in that process, and the right to appeal the decisions of the hearing.

- The right to disagree with professionals. Since parents and students have the right to be involved in decisions made about the student's technology needs, they also have a right to disagree with decisions which they feel are not in the best interests of the student. Sometimes misunderstandings will occur when parents disagree with professionals. This problem can be avoided often if both parents and professionals keep their discussions on the issues of technology needed by the student, and not allow feelings to enter into the discussions. However, parents and professionals should remember that the student's needs are most important. Parents and students should not be afraid to let professionals know if they disagree with them! Opinions can be presented in a way that will not cause hurt feelings. Ways to do this are presented in the following section called *Advocacy for Technology.*

- The right to have feelings. All students and parents have a right to feelings about technology that they would like to use. We all have choices for buying goods and services. Technology is no different.

Key Points:

- Parents and students have the right to information that is specific to their child's needs.
- Parents and students have the right to expect help from schools and agencies.
- Students have the right to get needed technology.
- Parents and students have the right to honest answers from others about student's technology needs.
- Students have the right to be as independent as possible.
- Parents and students have the right to due process.
- Parents and students have the right to their own opinions and to disagree with others.

Advocacy for Technology

"What is advocacy?"

Advocacy is a special way of helping students. It is things parents can do to protect the student's rights. It can also improve the services which the student can get in the community. Advocacy is important in working with the school because it can help the student get the technology he or she needs. Advocacy includes such activities as attending meetings and speaking up for the rights of the student, talking with an owner of a building that did not have a ramp for persons with wheelchairs and asking that he or she provide a ramp, and speaking to other parents who have students with disabilities about their rights.

"How does the parent let the school know about the student's needs?"

The parents and the student must explain the needs that the student has because of

Artwork reprinted by permission of the artist, Martha Perske, from *New Life in the Neighborhood*, by Robert Perske. Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1988, p. 31.

the disability. Whether it is a need for talking to others, dressing, or getting to the local grocery store, the need must be clearly stated. Parents should know how the student feels about the needs and who is affected by the needs. Parents and students should also know whether the student's needs are ongoing, or whether they occur only at some points in time, as this might suggest a need for different types of technology. It is also important for parents to give thought to the technology services that they want in education, medical care, transportation, and other areas that are important for the student. Thought should be given to who can provide needed technology services to the student. Finally, parents should think about what they need to get these services for the student. This information should be written down and shared with the school when decisions are being made about technology that should be purchased for the student.

"How do I get information?"

Parents can help professionals to make decisions about the student's technology needs in a number of ways. If the student has received services from any agency including the school, parents may ask to look at their child's case file and get important information. Under the *Family Educational and Privacy Act of 1974*, parents have the right to ask for and get copies of their children's records. Educational records are any records kept by the school or their agent about a student. Also, under Public Law 94-142 and Section 504, schools must allow parents to get information about their children. These laws apply to all records kept on children including records kept on a computer. If the parents are denied records which are requested, they have the right to a hearing to obtain needed records.

It is important to know something about the laws which can affect whether or not technology can be provided to the student. Few people know all the laws which are important for the parents and a student with a disability. However, it is important to know where to get this information. Parents should contact Advocacy Services, Inc. at 1-(800) 482-1174 or (501) 371-2171 to find out about what their rights are under the laws.

"Is it important to keep records of people and their roles in decision-making?"

Parents should also try to get to know the people who make decisions about the technology that a student may receive. Names, addresses, phone numbers, and other information about the people involved is *important* since parents may have to talk with many persons at the agency or school to get needed technology.

"What skills are important when speaking with professionals?"

Talking with professionals is very important. To be successful in talking to professionals, parents should look at the skills that they have in communication. To communicate well with others requires parents to use a number of skills. These skills include keeping eye contact with the person with whom the parent is talking, keeping good body posture when speaking, using facial expressions to make needs known, using hand and body gestures when this is proper, and controlling the tone of voice while speaking. It is also important to express an understanding of things which professionals say to the parents, and to ask questions. These important skills tell the person with whom parents are speaking that they are prepared, that they are serious, and that they are listening to what is being said. If it is felt there are problems in any of these areas, parents should make an effort to develop these skills. Advocacy Services, Inc. is an important agency that can help parents develop these skills.

"What if I don't understand the questions?"

Sometimes words which are difficult to understand are used when professionals are speaking to parents. When this happens, parents should ask professionals to explain the meaning of the words they are using. It is not reasonable for anyone to expect parents to know all words used by professionals, so parents should not be afraid to say "I don't know,""I don't understand," or "Can you tell me what you mean by ____?"

"What about 'traps' in communication?"

Parents should not get trapped into saying things such as "If you don't ______, then I'll have to _______" People do not like being told that they "have to do something", or that they "take something or leave it." Generally, these types of statements make the task of getting technology for the student more difficult.

If such a thing is said to the parents, the parents should ask the professional questions. Parents should ask what other things were considered. They should also suggest other things that can be done. Lastly, the parents should ask if there are things which can be done other than what the professional has said.

"Who is served by the agency or school?"

Parents should also know whether the services offered by the agency or school are offered to everyone or only to certain kinds of people. If the student does not meet the criteria to receive services by the agency, the parent should try to find out what can be done for the student to get services. Parents should ask what kinds of information they need to be considered for services by the agency, as well as to ask about how to apply for services. Finally, the parents should get information about the appeal process if they are turned down for services.

"Is it important to keep records about the things that I do to help the student get the technology that he or she needs?"

When making telephone calls to persons working at agencies, parents should make notes of names, telephone numbers, and information given by the persons with whom they speak. Letters which are written and received and records that parents get can be very important. These notes, letters, and records should be kept in a folder for later use. Parents should also ask for a written statement of any actions taken by agencies or schools that affect the student. They should also get written statements of when actions or services are to begin.

"Is follow-up important to see that the student gets his or her technology?"

Follow-up is important to see that the needed services are being given. Parents should look at what technology and services the agency or school is giving to the student and how often the services are provided. If the child has other needs, the parents can use their advocacy skills to try and get the technology and services that are needed for the student.

"What if the IEP committee decides not to provide technology that I feel would help my child to benefit from special education?"

Parents have the right to appeal the decision of the IEP committee if the needed technology is not provided to the student. The appeal, or due process hearing, begins when parents or school ask for a hearing. If the parents ask for a hearing, the school will help the parents to write the request for the hearing. Once the appeal is written, the school will then file the appeal with the Arkansas State Department of Education. A date will be set for the hearing and the parents will be informed in writing of the meeting date and time.

Within 7 days of filing the appeal, a prehearing conference will be set up. This is a meeting between the school and the parents along with a person who helps to solve these kinds of problems. The meeting is to help find an answer to the problem which the parents have in getting technology for the student. If an answer is agreed on by the parents and the school, this is the end of the appeal. However, if no answers are found, or if only a part of the problem is solved, the appeal is then taken before an "impartial" hearing officer. The hearing officer is the person to whom the appeal is presented. He or she will make a decision based on the facts. Being impartial means that the hearing officer cannot be an employee of the school or an agency which is providing educational services to the child. They are trained to be hearing officers and make decisions based on law.

The hearing officer will review all the facts and information that is presented at the hearing and make a decision in writing which is then shared with parents and the school. If the parents are not happy with the decision made by the hearing officer, they have the right to file a legal action against the school in court. This can be a very costly process for parents, but it is one which may sometimes have to be considered.

Key Points:

- Advocacy helps to protect a student's rights and get needed technology.
- Parents should get information about a student to be good advocates.
- Communication skills are important when talking with professionals.
- Parents should keep records of the things they do to get technology.
- Parents should ask questions when they don't understand.
- Parents should avoid traps in communicating with professionals.
- Follow-up is important.
- Parents can appeal the decision of the IEP committee.

Funding Sources

There is no area that is more important to most parents of students who have disabilities than the issue of funding for devices. If the technology is to help a student benefit from special education, schools should provide the technology. But, there are other types of devices that the student may need that the schools will not pay for because they don't relate to the child's educational needs. In these cases, parents who cannot afford to pay for the technology should consider other ways to pay for it. Following is a description of several funding alternatives.

Private Insurance

Many families have health insurance policies which cover certain types of devices that are needed by students. In some instances, the student with a disability is the beneficiary of coverage secured by the parents through insurance offered by their employer. A standard health insurance coverage plan states what types of services will be paid by the company. Most coverage includes a deductible amount of costs that must be paid by the family before the insurance company will pay a percentage of the remaining costs. A typical policy covers 80% of the costs of physician and related services.

It is unlikely that the policy will list such services as rehabilitation engineering, or assistive devices. However, parents may find listed coverage for physical and occupational therapy, and therapeutic aids that are prescribed by a physician. In most instances, there is a great deal of flexibility allowed to the insurance company to cover technology that might be needed for the student. Parents who who do not have insurance and who are interested in getting information about what companies provide coverage that might help the parents' child get needed technology should contact local companies. They should ask whether devices are covered under the policies that are offered by the company.

The Education for All Handicapped Children Act Amendments of 1986 (P.L. 99-457; P.L. 94-142)

Under this legislation, school systems must provide an individualized education plan (IEP) to all school-age students ages 3-21 who require special education services. A team of persons—parents, professionals, and the child (when proper)—design the IEP. Technology may be supplied as a "related service" in the IEP. In Arkansas, there are many differences across school systems in funding technology as a related service. The rule of thumb, however, is that if the technology is identified as "specialized equipment" which is *necessary for the student to benefit from special education*, then the school has a responsibility for providing the technology.

If you have questions regarding the responsibility of the student's school in the provision of technology, parents should contact the Special Education Supervisor or Superintendent for the school district.

To get information about P.L. 94-142 at the state level, parents should call the Arkansas State Department of Education:

☎ 1-(800) 482-5859 or (501) 682-4221

The Handicapped Children's Act of 1973, Act 102

This state law guarantees the rights of all children with disabilities in Arkansas to a free and appropriate public education. P.L. 94-142, which was passed two years later, made this education a federally guaranteed right.

To get information about Act 102, parents may contact their local Special Education Supervisor, or call:

☎ 1-(800) 482-5850 or (501) 682-4227

Elementary and Secondary School Improvements Act of 1987 (P. L. 100-297)

This Act includes many elementary and secondary education programs, such as Head

Start, Magnet Schools Program, and Programs for Handicapped Children. One section of this law allows schools to provide equipment and devices that are needed to supplement special education and related services (such as occupational, physical, and speech therapy services).

To get information about this law, parents may contact their local Special Education Supervisor, or they may contact the Arkansas Department of Education at:

☎ 1-(800) 482-5859 or (501) 682-4221

The Vocational Rehabilitation Act Amendments of 1986 (P.L. 99-506)

This law is designed to provide work programs and independent living for persons with disabilities; rehabilitation technology services are an important part of this law. Technologies in the areas of education, rehabilitation, employment, transportation, independent living, and recreation may be provided through the Division of Rehabilitation Services (DRS) for students who qualify.

To get information about DRS, parents may contact their local DRS office, or at the state level they should call:

☎ 1-(800) 482-5850 or (501) 682-6697

The Developmental Disabilities Assistance and Bill of Rights Act Amendments of 1987 (P.L. 100-146)

This legislation was enacted to provide states with money to plan and carry on activities for students that lead to a greater ability to live and work in the community. Money under this act may be used for direct services which includes rehabilitation technology services. Through the Division of Developmental Disabilities Services (DDS), some funds are available through Medicaid waivers for therapy-related services for students of *all* ages who are eligible for Medicaid who are currently receiving services. The Division actively helps students to get needed technology through cooperative agreements with other agencies. Funding for therapeutic technology is provided directly to young students ages 0-5 years who receive help from DDS programs.

To obtain information about DDS, parents may contact their local DDS office or at the state level they may call:

☎ 1-800-482-5850 or (501) 682-8665.

Social Security Act, Budget Reconciliation Act of 1986 (P.L. 99-509)

This act includes several programs that provide medical and related services including technology to a variety of persons. These programs are:

Medicaid (Title XIX). This program provides persons with chronic disabilities, who meet the federal Supplemental Security Income (SSI) test of disability, with medical help. In order for a device to be funded under Medicaid, it must fit the definition of a *prosthetic device*. This means replacement, corrective, or supportive devices prescribed by a physician or other licensed person. In Arkansas, devices covered under Medicaid include canes, crutches, walkers, manual wheelchairs, manual hospital beds, and side rails for beds. Hearing aids and eyeglasses are covered up until age 21.

To obtain information about Medicaid, parents may contact their local DHS County Services Office, or call:

☎ 1-800-482-8988 or (501) 682-8233.

Intermediate Care Facilities for the Mentally Retarded (ICF/MR). Recent regulations under this section will provide a potential source of funding for assistive technology services for students *in active treatment* (who live in an ICF/MR). An interdisciplinary team determines what is necessary for active treatment for each student in an ICF/MR. Active treatment could include mechanical supports to achieve positioning, toilet and bathing facilities, communication aids, and other devices.

To obtain information about ICF/MR, parents may call their local DDS office, or call:

☎ 1-800-482-5850 or (501) 682-8667

Tax Equity and Fiscal Responsibility Act of 1982, Section 134 (TEFRA)

This Act permits all students in the state who are less than 18 years of age who are at risk for long-term care placement who qualify to receive technology benefits. Students must have a disability acording to SSI definition and their resources must not exceed $2,000. The student's income must be less than $30. TEFRA is specifically designed to allow parents to keep a student at home as opposed to sending the student to a nursing home or other type of institution. Eligibility for TEFRA will depend upon one of the following:

(1) A plan of care prescribed by a physician requiring that the student get daily use of a certain technology or service;
(2) That special technology-related medical care is needed if the student is at risk for institutionalization;
(3) That parents must receive special training to implement the medical portion of the plan for the student; or
(4) That the student would be unable to do activities of daily living proper for their age without the help of a care giver or related technology.

To obtain information about TEFRA, parents should call:

☎ 1-800-482-5850 or (501) 682-8207

Omnibus Reconciliation Act of 1990 (P. L. 101-239)

Among the nine services that Arkansas is required to provide to persons under the age of 21 receiving Medicaid benefits is the Early and Periodic Screening, Diagnostic, and Treatment (EPSDT) program. Beginning April 1, 1990, Arkansas will be required to treat *any physical or mental problem* identified during EPSDT screenings and assessments. These treatments must be coverable under federal Medicaid law, but do not have to be contained in the Arkansas Medicaid plan. The law suggests that physical therapy, occupational therapy, speech and language/audiology services, and specific assistive devices may now be provided through EPSDT.

To obtain information about EPSDT, parents should contact their local DHS office or call:

☎ 1-800-482-1141 or (501) 682-8297

Arkansas Technology Access Program (ARTAP)

ARTAP is designed to provide a range of technology services to students with disabilities. To receive information about ARTAP and the various services which are offered by contacting any of the following:

Arkansas Technology Information System (ARTIS)

This is a consumer-responsive statewide system of information, storage, and retrieval enabling all parents and students to get information about assistive devices and services. This system has a number of important goals which include making information available to all persons regarding technology and services, training, marketing the system on a statewide basis, improving cooperation among agencies, developing a User-to-User network, creating a system of regional technology specialists to act as resource persons in local communities, and creating an equipment exchange program of used assistive devices. ARTIS will use a publicly distributed database accessible to all persons. The system will output information in print, large print, Braille, and auditorily.

ARTIS may be contacted by calling or writing the center at:

ARTIS
2201 Brookwood
Little Rock, AR 72203
☎ 1- (800) 828-2799 or (501) 371-3566

Technology Access Centers (TACS)

Five TACs have been developed, each providing specialized technology-related services in one of the following areas: visual impairments, hearing impairments, cognitive and language development, communication, and independent living. The TACs will serve persons *of all ages* and *all disabilities*. TACs will be designed to freely provide information and hands-on demonstration about technology devices and approaches to consumers, parents, employers, business, and the general public. The TACs will also provide and participate in training activities concerning technology and awareness and provide technical assistance to consumers, professionals, and policy-makers. Additionally, TACs will provide formal evaluations/assessments and other services, such as therapy and device construction, for a fee. Each TAC will maintain a record on a database of the technology information resources which it possesses, and this database will be shared with the ARTIS, other TACs, and persons across the state concerned with technology access.

Communication and Learning Technology Access Center. Two TACs in Communication and Learning Technology have been set up at the Arkansas Easter Seal Society in Little Rock. The Communication TAC will focus on augmentative communication and related types of technologies for non-speaking persons, as well as access to computer equipment. The Learning TAC will serve persons having learning disabilities, head injuries, and other types of learning and language problems. It will provide information, demonstrations, and training on software for word processing, mathematics, and related technologies.

To get information about this TAC, parents should write or call:

Communication and Learning Technology Access Center
Arkansas Easter Seal Society
P. O. Box 5148
Little Rock, AR 72225
☎ (501) 663-8331

Assistive Listening Devices Center. The TAC for Deaf and Hearing Impaired was awarded to the Arkansas Association for Hearing Impaired Children (AAHIC). This TAC will provide information, hands-on experiences, training, and assessments in assistive devices for persons with hearing impairments. Examples of such technologies would include signalling systems, telephone amplifiers, hearing aids, amplification systems, speech training aids, manual sign training computer programs, and telecaption equipment.

To get information about this TAC, parents should write or call:

Assistive Listening Devices Center
Audiology and Speech Pathology, Room 105
University of Arkansas at Little Rock
2801 South University
Little Rock, AR 72204
☎ (501) 569-3155

Technology Center for Independence. The TAC in Independent Living was awarded to Life Styles of Fayetteville. This TAC will focus on technologies that will assist *anyone with a disability* to function more successfully in the community. It will provide information, hands-on experiences, training, and assessments on assistive devices concerned with home management, personal care, home modifications, architectural modifications, home health, and recreation.

To get information about this TAC, parents should write or call call:

Technology Center for Independence (TCI)
Life Styles
P. O. Box 1114
Fayetteville, AR 72702
☎ (501) 521-8476

Technology Access Center - Visual Impairments. The TAC for Visual Impairments reflects the coordinated efforts of agencies serving persons with visual impairments and blindness. The lead agency is Lions' World Services for the Blind in Little Rock. This TAC will provide information, hands-on experiences, training, and assessments on assistive technologies for persons with visual impairments. Examples of these technologies would include auditory and tactile time and temperature aids, talking file storage, electronic sensing devices, navigation aids, and tactile Braillers.

To get information about this TAC, parents should write or call:

Visually Impaired Technology Access Center (VITAC)
Lions' World Services for the Blind
2811 Fair Park Blvd.
Little Rock, AR 72204
☎ (501) 664-7100

Other Advocacy Contacts

Arkansas Association for Hearing Impaired Students

P.O. Box 7630
Little Rock, AR 72217
☎ (501) 661-1444

Arkansas Association for Visually Impaired Students and Youth

P.O. Box 34021
Little Rock, AR 72201
☎ (501) 835-8548

Arkansas Association for the Deaf

9005 Lew Drive
Little Rock, AR 72209
☎ (501) 225-3949

Arkansas Easter Seal Society

P.O. Box 5418
Little Rock, AR 72225
☎ (501) 663-8331

Arkansas Division of Services for the Blind

411 Victory Street
Little Rock, AR 72203
☎ 1-(800) 482-5850, Ext. 2587 or
(501) 371-2587

Arkansas Disability Coalition

10002 West Markham, Suite B7
Little Rock, AR 72205
☎ (501) 221-1330

Arkansas Occupational Therapy Association

P.O. Box 22082
Little Rock, AR 72221

Arkansas Special Education Resource Center

1405 North Pierce, Suite 101
Little Rock, AR 72202
☎ (501) 663-3835

Arkansas Speech and Hearing Association

111 Center Street, Suite 1400
Little Rock, AR 72201

☎ (501) 374-7701

Association for Retarded Citizens/Arkansas

Union Station Square, Suite 412
Little Rock, AR 72201

☎ (501) 375-4464

Camp Aldersgate

2000 Aldersgate Road
Little Rock, AR 72205

☎ (501) 225-1444

CornerStone Project

4800 West 26th Street
Little Rock, AR 72204
☎ 1-800-359-5541 or (501) 664-0963

FOCUS, Inc.

2917 King Street, Suite C
Jonesboro, AR 72401

☎ (501) 935-2750

Independent Case Management
5917 "H" Street
Little Rock, AR 72205
☎ (501) 664-7254

National Federation for the Blind/Ark. Chapter
508 South Valentine
Little Rock, AR 72205
☎ (501) 666-2469

Northwest Arkansas Family Support Group
P.O. Box 697
Bentonville, AR 72712
☎ (501) 273-0338

Physical Therapy Association of Arkansas
1 Spring, #330
Little Rock, AR 72201
☎ (501) 378-7508

Post-Polio Support Group/SAILS Project
827 3rd Street
Hot Springs, AR 71913
☎ (501) 624-7710

Spina Bifida Association of Arkansas
2000 Aldersgate Road
Little Rock, AR 72205
☎ (501) 224-2300

Unified Community Resource Council
Arkansas Division of Volunteerism
Donaghey Plaza South
P.O. Box 1437
Little Rock, AR 72203
☎ 1-(800) 482-5850, Ext. 27540 or
(501) 628-7540

United Cerebral Palsy
10400 West 36th
Little Rock, AR 72205
☎ (501) 224-6067

Frequently Called Numbers

Agency/Group	Number

Parent Checklist of Questions to Ask About Technology

If the item has been considered, place a check (√) mark.

____ What are my child's needs?

____ What are my child's (or my own) preferences for technology?

____ Is the evice what a boy or girl would use?

____ Is the technology right for my child's age?

____ Have my child's home and family activities been considered?

____What are the transportation needs for my child?

____What are my child's wishes for a future job?

____Will the school pay for the technology my child needs?

____ Am I able to pay for the device that my child needs?

____ How can technology help my child meet his or her educational goals?

____ How many different types of devices can meet my child's needs?

____ Does the technology do what it is supposed to do?

____ How much will the device really cost?

____ Can my child comfortably operate the technology?

____ Is the device dependable?

____ Can the technology be moved easily?

____ How long is the device likely to last?

____ Can the technology be used with other devices?

____ Will my child be able to try the device before it is bought?

____ How easy is it to take care of the technology from day to day?

____ How secure is the device?

____ How easy is it to learn to use the technology?

____ How easy is the technology to put together?

____ How easy is it to get the technology repaired?

Checklist for Advocacy Activities

If the item has been considered, place a check (√) mark.

Understanding the Problem

____ What are the needs that my child has because of the disability?

____ How does my child feel about the needs?

____ Is the need one that has been present for a long time? Or is the need one which only occurs at certain times?

____ What are solutions to address the need? What agencies or people might help me address the needs?

____ What has been already been done to meet my child's needs?

____ What has the school done to help meet my child's needs?

Gathering Information

____ Have I called people in the community to find out who provides services that my child needs?

____ Do I have copies of documents from community agencies that discuss my child's rights and services provided?

____ Do I have information about the chain of command in community agencies that might help my child?

____ Do I have information about the laws that affect my child?

____ Do I have copies of tests and reports about my child?

____ Have I reviewed my child's case files?

____ Have I kept notes of people's names and what they have said as I have made calls to people who work for agencies?

Putting Suggestions into Action

____ Have I written down how to get needed technology for my child?

____ Do my communication skills need to be improved? These include:

- keeping eye contact with people when talking to them;
- keeping good body posture when talking with people;
- using facial and body expressions when talking with people;
- controlling the tone of my voice when talking with people;
- letting people know that I understand what they are saying; and
- asking questions.

Taking Action

____ Have I suggested to professionals that the meeting to discuss my child's technology needs take place in my home?

____ Have I suggested that the meeting to discuss my child's technology needs take place in a church, library, or public building?

____ Have I made myself familiar with the meeting place?

____ Can I get to the meeting place early?

____ Have I looked at the seating arrangements for the meeting?

____ Do I know who will be at the meeting and what their roles are?

____ Will other family members or friends be with me at the meeting?

____ Have I made a list of things to discuss with the people present at the meeting? Are the most difficult issues listed first or last?

____ Have the people at the meeting agreed on the meeting length?

____ If I become upset at the meeting, will I be able to ask for more information or ask for a short break?

____ If words are used at the meeting that I don't understand, will I be able to ask people to explain what they mean?

____ Can I keep from telling people that they have to do something?

Notes

The following pages are provided to you to make notes about your efforts to get assistive technology the student.

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