Does your student require assistive technology? How does the IEP team know?

An IEP team from Techno Elementary School was engaged in a deep discussion about why Jessica, a fourth-grade student, was struggling with reading. The team questioned whether she was having difficulty following the text on the page, had decoding problems, and if she comprehended the reading material. They were confused by the IEP question "Does this student require assistive technology (AT) devices or services?" How could the team possibly know this? They were having difficulty identifying the specific task that was challenging for the student, and they had no idea what types of AT might help this student. They were told by their administrators to be very careful how AT is worded in the IEP because the school division might not have that specific device and there is no dedicated AT budget to purchase it. The team was stuck!

Ready….

Tzhis scenario is all too common. Many children with disabilities have difficulties in the area of reading. It's important for the IEP team to isolate the specific reading skill that is challenging for the student in order to identify appropriate assistive technology to try. The IEP team should include someone knowledgeable about reading, such as a reading specialist, who can help the team identify the specific area(s) of weakness. It's also important that someone who has knowledge about AT participate in these IEP discussions. AT is an ever-evolving field, with new devices, software and apps being developed every day. Someone with knowledge about these products and services can help guide this discussion. Assistive technology is not intended as a substitute for teaching reading; rather, it is a means for the student to access information and reading material that otherwise is difficult for the student to read independently (Rose, Johnston & Vanden Boogart, 2013).

Assistive technology is defined as both a device and a service. AT devices for reading include highlighters, reading frames, slant boards, dictionaries, apps that provide text to speech, and accessible instructional materials. These devices and supports are chosen based on the specific needs of the student. Assistive technology services include AT evaluations and training provided to students, staff and family members. Some students require both AT devices and services. Any potential AT device identified by the IEP team should be "trialed" for a period of time and supported with data to assist the IEP team in knowing whether the identified AT is an appropriate match for the student's needs. Once the IEP team determines that the student

needs AT, it is the responsibility of the school division to secure the device and identify funding needed to purchase the device (Wright & Wright, 2007).

Set…

IDEA 2004 requires IEP teams to consider the assistive technology needs of all children with disabilities (20 U.S.C. 1414(d)(3)(B)(v)). The Virginia Department of Education supports two tools to assist IEP teams with AT consideration.

- The VDOE-approved AT Consideration Guide is a decision-making process that can be used to consider the AT needs of students with disabilities. Many school divisions have adopted this guide or have modified it to use in their schools.   This process should include a review of standard classroom tools, accommodations, modifications and AT solutions that are currently in place and whether these strategies are effective in meeting the student's needs. If the student's needs are not being met, the IEP team should continue to generate potential solutions, including possible AT.
- The VDOE-approved AT Resource Guide provides the IEP team with a list of instructional areas, potential modifications and accommodations, and AT solutions.

Go…

The good news is that there are many free online resources to help IEP teams learn more about AT consideration and assessment and the effective use of AT.

The VDOE Assistive Technology Network's website contains definitions of assistive technology and information about Virginia's AT Consideration and Assessment process. Check out the steps for developing an Assistive Technology Team, an effective and collaborative way to build your division's capacity to implement AT in schools.

Virtual TechKnowledgy is sponsored by the VDOE AT Network and provides a series of live and archived webinars throughout the school year focusing on the successful use of AT with children and youth.

OCALI Assistive Technology Internet Modules are free professional development modules featuring student studies and instructional videos on AT consideration and assessment and specific AT topic areas.

References…
Rose, D., Johnston, S., and Vanden Boogart, A. (2013). Technology and dyslexia, part 1, Perspectives on Language and Literacy, Vol 39, No 4. Retrieved from:

Wright, P., & Wright P. (2007). *Special education law* (2nd ed.), Hartfield, VA: Harbor House Law Press.

Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, 20 U.S.C. § 1400 (2004).