

AACCESSING COMMUNICATION

Assessment and Funding Considerations for AAC Service Delivery

YOUR PRESENTERS TODAY



April Newton, M.S.,
CCC-SLP is an ASHA
certified speech-
language pathologist
and AAC Consultant
for Covered Bridge
Special Education
District (CBSED).

Speaker Disclosure:

- Financial—salaried employee of Vigo County School Corporation
- Nonfinancial—member of the ASHA Special Interest Group 12 AAC



Beth Browning, M.A.,
CCC-SLP is an ASHA
certified speech-
language pathologist
and Regional
Consultant for the
Prenlike Romich Co.
(PRC).

Speaker Disclosure:

- Financial—salaried employee and employee-owner of PRC
- Nonfinancial—member of the ASHA Special Interest Group 12 AAC.

LEARNING OUTCOMES

- At the conclusion of this presentation, participants will be able to:
 - Explain the legal responsibility of AAC service delivery in the schools
 - Identify resources for developing an AT team and assessment protocol
 - Name three considerations for AAC assessment and funding

BECAUSE OF AAC...



DISCLAIMER

- As awareness and knowledge of AAC grows, more families are going to be advocating for these services.
- Much of what we're discussing comes down to a Case Conference Committee decision and may vary depending on the student's individual needs.
- We encourage districts to be proactive when it comes to AAC service delivery and have procedures in place before questions are asked.

LEGAL CONSIDERATIONS

- Federal legislation (IDEA) and state rules for special education (Article 7) define the school system's responsibility to **provide assistive technology devices and services** to students with disabilities.
- School staff, including administrators, teachers, and related service providers, and parents should be knowledgeable about the requirement for providing assistive technology which includes AAC.

OUR CURRENT CRISIS

- On last year's alternate assessment, 19% of students were deemed ineligible to take the exam due to having no functional communication system!
- This is a CRISIS in our state that MUST be addressed!
- Students who may benefit from AAC devices and services
 - Those who are nonverbal
 - Those who have difficulty being understood with verbal speech
 - Those with severe expressive language impairments
 - Common diagnoses include ASD, Apraxia, Down Syndrome, Cerebral Palsy, and others with Cognitive and/or Physical Impairments

OTHER REASONS WHY

- Augmentative-Alternative Communication (AAC):
- Provides a means to communicate (comment, request, protest, direct others, ask questions, participate in conversation, etc.)
 - Supports cognitive and language development
 - Facilitates speech production
 - Decreases frustration and negative behaviors
 - Increases interaction with family and peers which fosters development of friendships
 - Allows us to target literacy and develop reading and writing skills
 - Affects future academics and employment opportunities
 - Enhances a person's quality of life

THE HESITATION

- There continues to be concerns in many districts throughout the state of Indiana in the area of AAC.
- Most school districts understand their legal responsibility in providing AAC services. However, some districts avoid providing these services often because of **lack of knowledge and understanding, logistics, attitudes, fear of financial obligations, or untrained staff.**
- Schools may not understand the benefits to their district and the long term impact AAC can provide to their students.

ASSISTIVE TECHNOLOGY DEVICES

According to IDEA, the term 'assistive technology device' means any item, piece of equipment, or product system, whether acquired commercially off the shelf, modified, or customized, that is used to increase, maintain, or improve functional capabilities of a child with a disability.

All Augmentative-Alternative Communication (AAC) systems

- no-tech, paper-based, manual communication boards
 - low-tech recordable voice output devices
 - high-tech speech-generating devices (SGDs), including iPads and dedicated devices
- are considered forms of Assistive Technology.

ASSISTIVE TECHNOLOGY SERVICES

According to IDEA, the term 'assistive technology service' means any service that directly assists a child with a disability in the selection, acquisition, or use of an assistive technology device. This includes—

- a functional evaluation
- providing for the acquisition of AT devices
- selecting, designing, fitting, customizing, adapting, applying, maintaining, repairing, or replacing AT devices
- coordinating and using other therapies, interventions, or services with AT devices
- training and technical assistance for the team

ASSISTIVE TECHNOLOGY TEAMS

• AT Teams are developed in schools to meet the diverse AT needs of students. The AT Team may consist of

- Speech-Language Pathologists (SLP)
- Physical Therapists (PT)
- Occupational Therapists (OT)
- Vision Specialists
- Assistive Technology Professionals (ATP)
- Rehab Engineers
- Special Educators
- Administrators
- Parents or Caregivers

• If you don't have an AT Team established, consider using the National Center and State Collaborative (NCSC) Communication Tool Kit

PROVIDE (NOT NECESSARILY PURCHASE)

- Consider no-tech and low-tech options
- Use tablets with communication apps
- Borrow from lending libraries: PATINS, INDATA
- Borrow from AAC vendors: PRC, Sattillo, Tobii-Dynavox, Lingraphica
- Rent devices from AAC vendors
- Reach out to local agencies for support – ARC, UCP, etc.
- Apply for grants

WHY STUDENTS NEED THEIR OWN DEVICES (NOT OWNED BY THE SCHOOL)

Lewis Golinker, Esq. (lgolinker@aol.com), Director of the Assistive Technology Law Center

- It is recommended that whenever a child has insurance/Medicaid coverage, funding for AAC should be sought there first because:
 - The device is required for medical (not just educational) needs
 - The child will own the device that is funded by insurance/Medicaid
 - Device repair and replacement will be pursued through the funding source(s)

Only if the child is not covered by insurance/Medicaid or if the funding request is unsuccessful should attention be directed to the school as a funding source for AAC.

AAC EVALUATION

- In Indiana, any licensed SLP who maintains the CCC from ASHA is legally qualified to request funding for AAC devices through insurance/Medicaid.
- School-based SLPs can perform AAC evaluations
 - If he/she does not have the experience/competency/skills to do so, a referral should be made
- If a school-based SLP performs an AAC evaluation and concludes that a particular device is the most appropriate communication solution for the child, it does not automatically require the school to pay for the device!

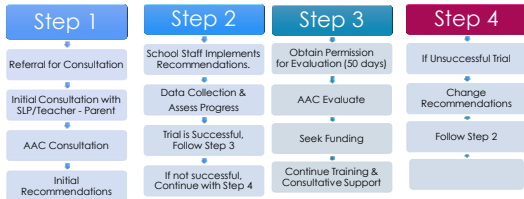
DECIDING WHO SHOULD PROVIDE THE AAC EVALUATION

	School	Outside Agency
ADVANTAGES	Convenience, daily practice and consistency, periodic monitoring, access to staff who work directly with the student, extended time to evaluate, follow-up and support are team-centered.	May have more resources and expertise.
DISADVANTAGES	May lack resources including trained personnel and access to equipment	Distance, time, expense, difficulty monitoring progress and training communication partners

Beware the double-edged sword!

INDIVIDUALIZED ASSESSMENT

"Decisions about AAC systems **ARE** based on the learner's abilities, needs, and potential...**NOT** on their diagnosis...**NOT** on the system of choice from the adults...**NOT** on what everyone in our class/school/district uses...and **NOT** on what the IT department gives us!" -Beth Waite-Latever



INDIVIDUALIZED ASSESSMENT (ANOTHER DISTRICT'S PROCEDURE)

Step 1	Step 2	Step 3	Step 4	Step 5
Case Conference Committee requests an AT evaluation & obtains parent signature. 50-day timeline begins.	Team members complete the "Request for Consultation" form and submit to the AT Coordinator who will assemble the team and schedule a date for the evaluation.	Evaluation is conducted and findings and recommendations are provided in a report (by the 50-day deadline). Typically, recommendations are for trials of AAC devices that match the features the student needs.	Recommendations are carried out - trials of the different AAC systems are conducted; data is collected; team works to determine the most appropriate AAC solution to meet the student's communication needs.	Funding process begins - SLP creates a funding packet to pursue insurance/Medicaid funding of the AAC device so that the student will have his/her own system to use across all environments.

OPPORTUNITY BARRIERS

- Policy Barriers
 - Legislative, regulative, or agency policies that govern or restrict the evaluation or implementation of AAC in schools
- Practice Barriers
 - Routine activities that constrain the use of AAC (i.e. only taking the device out during snack time)
- Knowledge Barriers
 - Staff are not knowledgeable about the variety of AAC options available or do not know how to acquire these devices/services for students.
- Skill Barriers
 - Staff are not trained in proper AAC assessment or implementation techniques.
- Attitude Barriers
 - "Money is never the real issue; attitude is." – Beth Waite-Lafever

IMPORTANT CONSIDERATIONS

Assessment Questions

- Can schools refer to an outside agency to conduct the AAC evaluation without having to pay for that evaluation?
- What if the school team does not agree with the device recommendation from the outside agency, do they have an obligation to implement it anyway?

Financial Questions

- Who is responsible for damages incurred by school-owned or personally-owned AT devices that are travelling between home/school?
- If we borrow devices for trial, is there coverage available through the school for damages incurred?
- What about paying for return shipping of these free trial devices?




September 29-30, 2017 at The Palms, Plainfield

The Indiana AAC Summit is a grassroots initiative to increase Indiana's capacity for providing high-quality augmentative-alternative communication (AAC) services to individuals with complex communication needs. Our annual conference brings together educators, therapists, administrators, parents, and AAC device users from across the state for networking, sharing resources, working through AAC challenges, and celebrating successes.

www.indianaaacsummit.com

Facebook: "Indiana AAC Summit"



REFERENCES & RESOURCES

- Title 511 Article 7 December 2014
- Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA updated 2006)
- Beukelman and Mirenda (2013). Augmentative & Alternative Communication
- National Center and State Collaborative (NCSC)
"Communication Tool Kit"
