



Inclusionary Practices and Systems:

ASSISTIVE TECHNOLOGY

WHAT IS ASSISTIVE TECHNOLOGY?

Assistive technology (AT) is any tool that helps students access learning and increase independence. AT encompasses a broad category that includes both low and high tech. Low-tech AT includes manual tools such as pencil grips. High-tech AT includes electronics, software, and electronic equipment.

In the past, high-tech AT took the form of additional software or separate devices that served limited purposes. With advances in technology, AT is often already built into software, web browsers, and electronic devices—all of which makes it more widely available to both teachers and students.

Here are some examples of low- and high-tech AT.

LOW-TECH AT	HIGH-TECH AT
Pencil grips Raised lined paper Magnifiers Highlighters Sticky notes Paper graphic organizers Fidgets tools	Text to speech Audio books Dictation Electronic forms and graphic organizers Writing prediction software Math notation tools Apps for regulation

WHY IS ASSISTIVE TECHNOLOGY IMPORTANT? WHAT ARE THE OUTCOMES?

- Assistive technology can be beneficial to all students.
- AT increases access to instruction and provides multiple ways for students to participate and engage with core content.
- AT increases student independence.
- AT assists teachers in modifications and accommodations.

IMPORTANT THINGS TO REMEMBER:

- Many effective low-tech AT tools are available.
- AT is not solely for academics and adaptive skills. It can also support social-emotional learning.
- When introducing a new tool to students, teach the tool before the content to ensure they know how to use the tools.

CASE STUDY: Clovis Point Intermediate School, East Wenatchee, WA

Clovis Point Intermediate School likes to describe the technology they use to support all students as accessible technology instead of assistive technology. They use this term because it really illustrates their commitment to making sure all students are getting what they need and view the use of technology not as a special education support, but an inclusive education support that builds community, engagement, and accessibility for all students in the class.

Accessible technology can be defined as technology that is beneficial for those with and without disabilities (e.g., a smart phone with built-in speech-to-text capabilities), whereas Assistive technology is often described as any device or service that is used to increase, maintain, or improve the functional capabilities of an individual with a disability (e.g., screen reader software for a computer). What Clovis Point discovered when they started using technology initially to support students with disabilities is that these universal tools were good for everyone and that providing choice is good for everyone!

Sixth Grade Science and Math Teacher Kessley Grode found that when she was using technology, such as audio to read instruction or audio answers for students, when barriers were present in the curriculum for students with different reading or writing needs, that it not only helped students with IEPs, but that these tools increased engagement across her entire class. Students appreciated getting immediate feedback for answers and additional scaffolds built into the technology and Kessley found that the technology allowed her to create a variety of assessments and assignments for her class. Additionally, the technology Kessley used provided easy avenues to adapt assignments and provide choices for students and she noticed something in her classes --her students were feeling empowered. For the first time in her teaching career, she really felt like she was hearing all students voices and learned a lot about how her students were engaging in learning, which allowed for her to adjust her instruction accordingly.

Clovis Point started to realize that when they put systems in place to allow for student engagement, it ensured that ALL students were included in those systems. This was foundational in shifting their inclusive mindset from providing supports to just a few to providing supports for everyone to create a culture where all students were empowered to use differentiated tools and strategies to learn. This was also an important shift for teachers in understanding that universal tools were a pathway to a more inclusive learning environment.

To hear more of Clovis Point's story and to learn about some of the accessible technology tools they use in their school, download their webinars on our website at ipdemosites.org under Deep Dive Webinars.

RESOURCES

1. Assistive Technology for People with Disabilities. 2nd Edition Bryant, D. & Bryant B. (2011).