



FAMILY ENGAGEMENT NEWSLETTER

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Understanding Assistive Technology for Your Child with a Disability

By Wendy Overturf

Every child learns differently. For some students with disabilities, the right tools can make learning easier and help them participate more fully in school. One of these supports is called assistive technology (AT). Learning about assistive technology can help parents work with the IEP team to find supports that meet their child's needs.

Assistive technology includes devices, equipment, or software that help students complete school tasks that might otherwise be difficult. Some tools are very simple, such as pencil grips, slant boards, highlighted reading strips, or visual schedules. Others are more advanced, including speech-to-text software, text-to-speech programs, communication devices, audiobooks, or tablets with specialized learning apps.

During every IEP meeting, the team should consider whether assistive technology devices and services could help the student make progress in school. If the team determines that assistive technology is needed for the student to receive a free appropriate public education (FAPE), it should be included in the IEP. The IEP should describe the technology, when it will be used, and any services or training needed for the student or school staff. It is important that the technology be described rather than stating a specific brand or device because if the student moves to a different district, they may not have that specific brand but they may have a device that has the same features. Also, there may be something better that comes out and the team does not want to limit themselves to the brand or specific device.

Parents are often the first to notice when their child is struggling. Maybe homework takes much longer than expected, writing is difficult, reading is frustrating, or communication is challenging. Sharing these observations with the IEP team helps everyone better understand what the student needs. Parents can also ask questions such as:

- Has the team considered whether assistive technology could help my child?
- What learning, communication, or organizational challenges could assistive technology address?
- Could assistive technology help my child become more independent at school?
- Would an assistive technology assessment be helpful?
- Will my child be able to use the assistive technology at home for homework?
- Can our family receive training so we can support our child at home?

If the team believes more information is needed, an assistive technology assessment may be completed. This assessment may be conducted by a speech-language pathologist, occupational therapist, special education teacher, or assistive technology specialist. The evaluation looks at the student's strengths, challenges, classroom tasks, and learning

environment and may recommend tools that could be helpful. Sometimes students are given the opportunity to try different devices before deciding which one works best.

Some parents may be concerned that if their child uses assistive technology, they will stop learning important skills. It is important to know that assistive technology is intended to remove barriers to learning, not replace instruction. In many cases, assistive technology is paired with specially designed instruction through the IEP process. For example, a student with dyslexia may use text-to-speech software to access grade-level reading while receiving specially designed instruction in phonics, decoding, and reading comprehension. A student who has difficulty writing may use speech-to-text software to complete written assignments while receiving specially designed instruction in writing skills, such as organizing ideas, sentence structure, and editing. While assistive technology helps students access learning and demonstrate what they know, specially designed instruction teaches the skills the student needs to improve and make progress toward their individual IEP goals.

Providing the technology is only one part of the process. Students, teachers, and families may all need training to use the tools successfully. Parents can help by encouraging their child to practice at home and by staying in touch with teachers to discuss what is working well and what may need to be adjusted.

Assistive technology continues to change every year, giving schools more ways to support students with disabilities. When the right tools are matched to a student's needs, assistive technology can increase learning, confidence, communication, and independence. By working together with the IEP team, parents can help ensure their child has the supports needed to succeed at school and beyond.

HOME LEARNING



[Calculator Hopscotch](#)

Click the link above to get kids moving while they practice basic number skills with Calculator Hopscotch. We all know that exercise is good for children's health, but research also shows it can improve learning and academic performance. Many schools are adding movement to classroom lessons, and you can do the same at home. This fun twist on the classic hopscotch game helps children build math skills while staying active. Best of all, it's a game the whole family can enjoy!



Labor Day-September 7, 2026

Labor Day is celebrated on the first Monday of September. Labor Day is a great opportunity to help children learn about community helpers, jobs, history, and gratitude while practicing reading and writing skills. Here are some fun, hands-on learning activities for preschool and elementary-aged children.

What Do You Want to Be?

Have children draw themselves doing a job they might like someday.

Older children can write:

- What is the job?
- What does this person do?
- Why would you enjoy it?
- What skills would you need?

Thank You Card Project

Choose someone who works in your community, such as:

- Mail carrier
- Teacher
- Police officer
- Nurse
- Sanitation worker
- Librarian

Have your child write or decorate a thank-you card expressing appreciation for their work.

Labor Day Read Alouds

Read books about work and community helpers.

Suggested titles:

- [Whose Hands Are These?](#)
- [Career Day](#)
- [What Do People Do All Day?](#)
- [Helpers in My Community](#)



National Grandparents Day **September 13, 2026**

National Grandparents Day is a holiday that honors grandparents and celebrates the important role they play in families and communities. For children who do not



First Day of Fall **September 22, 2026**

The first day of fall is a wonderful opportunity to celebrate the changing seasons while building learning skills

have grandparents or whose grandparents are not part of their lives, the day can also be used to celebrate another caring older adult, such as a neighbor, family friend, mentor, or senior community member. The focus is on appreciating the wisdom, kindness, and life experiences that older generations share. Below are some possible activities to celebrate the day.

Grandparent Interview

Help children become reporters by interviewing a grandparent. Possible questions include:

- What games did you play as a child?
- What was your favorite subject in school?
- What did you want to be when you grew up?
- What is your happiest childhood memory?
- What advice would you give me?

Children can write the answers in a journal or create a "Grandparent Biography."

Hispanic Heritage Month

Hispanic Heritage Month celebrates the cultures and histories of people with heritage from Spain, Mexico, the Caribbean, and Central and South America. It's also a way to honor the many achievements and contributions by Hispanic people in the United States and around the world. Here are some ways to mark the occasion with books, recipes, music, and more!

through fun, hands-on activities. Here are a few fall themed books that families can enjoy together.

- [Leaf Man](#)
- [We're Going on a Leaf Hunt](#)
- [Goodbye Summer, Hello Autumn](#)
- [The Busy Little Squirrel](#)

Recipe Reading

Cook a favorite family recipe together. Children practice literacy by:

- Reading the recipe.
- Following directions.
- Identifying measurement words.
- Writing the recipe in their own cookbook.

Book Adventure

Let each person choose one book to share. Read them together or read a passage using technology if distance is an issue. Discuss together what you enjoyed most.

Reading, talking, and sharing stories help children develop vocabulary, comprehension, listening skills, and a lifelong love of books. Just as importantly, these activities strengthen the special bond between grandparents and grandchildren, creating memories that both will treasure for years to come.

WI FACETS EVENTS

Transition Planning for Student Health Needs

Date: September 2, 2026

Presenter: Louise Wilson, WI DPI

IEP 1: Special Education Basics (Pre-recorded)

Date: September 8, 2026

Presenter: Ann Zielke, WI FACETS

Thinking about Supported Decision Making

Date: September 9, 2026

Presenter: Danielle Tolzmann, Family Voices

Serving on Groups: Opportunities to Get Involved and Types of Groups (Sections 1 and 2)

Date: September 10, 2026

Presenter: Jan Serak, Serak Consulting

Conociendo el IEP desde el principio (Pregrabado)

Date: September 10, 2026

Presenter: Nathaly Silva, WI FACETS

What is Wisconsin Special Education Mediation System (WSEMS) and How to Use It

Date: September 14, 2026

Presenters: Courtney Salzer, WI FACETS and Heidi Siebert, CESA 7

IEP 2: Special Education Referral Process (Pre-recorded)

Date: September 15, 2026

Presenter: Ann Zielke, WI FACETS

Neurodivergence and 2e: From Understanding to Action, Practical Tools for Parents and Educators

Date: September 16, 2026

Presenter: Teresa Nair, Parent Community & Services Program Manager at REEL (Resilience and Engagement for Every Learner)

Partners in Positive Attendance: Essential Information on Policy and Strategies/Socios en la asistencia positiva: Información esencial sobre políticas y estrategias

Date: September 23, 2026

Presenters: Eva Shaw and Julie Incitti, WI DPI

Serving on Groups: Processes Groups Use (Section 3)

Date: September 24, 2026

Presenter: Jan Serak, Serak Consulting

¿Qué hago si creo que mi hijo necesita educación especial? (Pregrabado)

Date: September 24, 2026

Presenter: Nathaly Silva, WI FACETS

IEP 3: Evaluation and Eligibility in the IEP Process (Pre-recorded)

Date: September 29, 2026

Presenter: Ann Zielke, WI FACETS

Turn that Down! Music and Disability

Date: September 30, 2026

Presenters: Tim Markle, Forgiveness Factor and Hunter Markle, Self-Advocate

UPCOMING STATE EVENTS

Leadership in Action: Finding the Leader in You [Click Here for Flyer](#)

Dates: October 8th, and October 22nd

Time: 6:00pm-8:00pm

Location: Virtual

Parent leadership goes beyond volunteering. This 2-part series focuses on empowering parents and family members to join a school group that promotes and builds strong family-school partnerships.

Participants will learn about:

- Working in partnership to effectively communicate with schools
- Building engagement and ensuring relevant parent participation
- Supporting teams to work together by setting up clear meeting guidelines and using conflict resolution to turn problems into success.

All participants will receive printed training manuals from Serving on Groups and Leading by Convening.

*Spanish Interpretation provided upon request

[DPI Special Education and Pupil Services Pre-Conference-Save the Date](#)

Date: October 14, 2026

Starting in fall 2026, DPI has made some changes to the State Superintendent's Conference on Special Education and Pupil Services Leadership. In partnership with the Wisconsin Council of Administrators of Specialized Services (WCASS), DPI is coordinating a pre-conference day called the DPI Special Education and Pupil Services Pre-Conference. The agenda for the DPI pre-conference will follow a similar structure as DPI's previous Special Education and Pupil Services Leadership conferences. The full day pre-conference will continue to include content identified by DPI to support special education and pupil services leadership including:

- Keynote speakers
- DPI legal updates
- A variety of sectionals highlighting DPI speakers, projects, and resources

[Self-Determination Conference-Save the Dates](#)

Dates: October 19-21, 2026

Location: Kalahari Resort, WI Dells, WI

Self-determination means taking control of your life. This is one of the biggest events for people with disabilities and the people who support them. Learn how to live more independently, participate more in your community, and direct your public funds efficiently.

[Children Come First Conference-Save the Dates](#)

Dates: November 16-17, 2026

Location: Kalahari Resort, WI Dells, WI

As one of the largest and longest-running family-driven events in the state, this conference is dedicated to addressing the pressing needs of children and families living with mental and behavioral health issues.

ONLINE RESOURCES: ASSISTIVE TECHNOLOGY (AT)

[Center for Parent Information and Resources \(CPIR\)](#)

This site has links to resources related to assistive technology. It also has links to checklists that IEP teams can use when considering assistive technology.

[Wisconsin DPI Assistive Technology Website](#)

This website includes the following:

- [Assistive Technology Information Update Bulletin 22.02](#)

This bulletin describes assistive technology and includes informative questions and answers

- [Assistive Technology Learning Modules](#)

[WI DPI-Accessible Educational Materials Website](#)

Accessible Educational Materials (AEM) are print- and technology-based learning tools such as textbooks, digital documents, and videos that are specially designed or converted to be usable for students with wide-ranging learning, physical, and sensory needs. They include formats like braille, large print, audio, and flexible digital text. National resources can also be found on this website.

[Assistive Technology Forward Website](#)

The AT Forward Project supports educators, practitioners, caregivers and families to increase student autonomy in utilizing Assistive Technology tools to support access, engagement, and progress in learning. This project includes a community of practice with 10 meetings during the year that are recorded so individuals can go back and watch previous videos.

[Book share](#)

Book share® is an eBook library that makes reading easier. Members can access a huge collection of eBooks and read "their way" with the most customizable eBooks for people with reading barriers. Book share is free for U.S. students with qualifying reading barriers. People with [qualifying](#)

[conditions](#) who are not U.S. students, and organizations serving them, pay a low membership fee. [Educators](#) may also sign up for an account to access books for their students.

[SETT Framework](#)

The SETT Framework is an organizational tool to help collaborative teams create student-centered, environmentally useful, and tasks-focused tool systems that foster the educational success of students with disabilities. The SETT Framework is built on the premise that in order to develop an appropriate system of assistive technology devices and services, teams must first gather information about the student, the customary environments in which the students spend their time, and the tasks that are required for the students to be active participants in the teaching/learning processes that lead to educational success.

[Free Assistive Technology Apps](#)

Check this website for links to online assistive technology tools to help with reading, writing, and math. Do a search for “free assistive technology apps” and the search results will provide even more links.

[Assistive Technology for Kids with Learning Disabilities: An Overview](#)

This is a link to an article for parents about the role of AT in helping their children with a learning disability. The better informed that parents are about AT, the greater the chances their child will experience success in school, in recreation and, eventually, at work.

[Closing the Gap Resource Directory](#)

The Resource Directory is a guide for exploring the most recent advancements in assistive technology products. From software to hardware, the directory is regularly updated with the latest offerings and their manufacturers. This guide will help you find, learn about, and compare the newest assistive technology products currently available.

[The 5 C's of Media Use](#) - From the American Academy of Pediatrics

Based on current research and evidence, the website has information for parents about their children's developmental stages, how this influences media use, and how to implement healthy media habits at home.

FOR YOUR INFORMATION

[A Parent's Guide to Using AI for Advocacy in Special Education](#)

This guide was developed by CADRE (The Center for Appropriate Dispute Resolution in Special Education). AI tools (like ChatGPT) can be powerful supports for parents navigating special education. This guide is designed to help you use AI confidently and safely in ways that strengthen your advocacy, protect your child's privacy, and support positive working relationships with your child's educational team.

Highlights in this guide include:

- Key facts about AI and effective ways to use it
- How to protect your child's privacy and understand potential risks
- Positive and productive ways to use AI during dispute resolution

[Guarding Your Child's Data Footprint](#)

Children and adults may not realize how much information AI tools collect. Check the website for conversation starters and simple activities to help families talk about data safety in an AI world.

RESEARCH

**Artificial Intelligence in Mathematics Education of Students
with Special Educational Needs**

[Read Full Article](#)

This study looked at how artificial intelligence (AI) can help students with special educational needs (SEN) learn math. Researchers reviewed 30 studies to see what types of AI tools were used, how well they worked, and their benefits and challenges.

The most common AI tools included educational games, chatbots, personalized learning programs, and intelligent tutoring systems. All the studies found that these tools helped improve students' math skills. Many students also felt less anxious about math, were more motivated to learn, and became more independent. The review also found some challenges, including the cost of AI technology, concerns about privacy and ethics, the need for teacher training, and unequal access to technology.

Compared to traditional teaching methods, AI can better identify learning difficulties, provide more personalized instruction, and make learning more accessible. AI showed particular promise for students with disabilities such as dyscalculia (difficulty with math) and autism. The researchers concluded that AI is not a replacement for teachers. Instead, it is a helpful tool that can support teachers by providing more individualized math instruction for students with special educational needs.

CONTRIBUTIONS TO THE NEWSLETTER

Upcoming Newsletter Topics

October: Learning Disabilities

November: Emotional Behavioral Disabilities

December: Communication

To submit contributions of articles, events, or resources you may use the [Word document](#). Send submissions to [Wendy Overturf](#). If you are unable to access the form, you may send the information in an email.

Material appropriate for the monthly newsletter include web links to family involvement/parent leadership resources, advertisements for statewide trainings for parents, youth or parent/educator audiences, information about statewide parent agencies, recent research pertaining to family engagement, and family engagement success articles.

This monthly update is provided by Wisconsin Family Assistance Center for Education, Training & Support (WI FACETS) to share statewide information regarding parent leadership and family involvement. If you would like to receive this monthly update or if you would like to have your name removed from the distribution list, please email [WI FACETS](#).

The WI FACETS Family Engagement E-Newsletter can be found online: www.servingongroups.org/newsletter



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