

Assistive Technology in K-12: A Walk on the Tech Side

During the 2015 Hypersomnia Foundation Conference held in Atlanta, GA, two workshops focused on assistive technology (AT) in education. A discussion of AT follows and includes links to the PPPs (PowerPoint Presentations) of those workshops and to the workshop School Accommodations with Teeth.

Often referred to as the Tech Act for short, the Assistive Technology Act was first passed as the Technology-Related Assistance Act of 1988. It is “intended to promote people’s awareness of, and access to, assistive technology (AT) devices and services.” It “seeks to provide AT to persons with disabilities, so they can more fully participate in education, employment, and daily activities on a level playing field with other members of their communities. The Act covers people with disabilities of all ages, all disabilities, in all environments (early intervention, K-12, post-secondary, vocational rehabilitation, community living, aging services, etc.)” For more information, see www.parentcenterhub.org.

Assistive technology is defined in the Assistive Technology Act of 2004 as “any item, piece of equipment, or product system, whether acquired commercially, modified, or customized, that is used to increase, maintain, or improve functional capabilities of individuals with disabilities.” (29 U.S.C. Sec 2202(2)).

In the field of education, different disabilities require different assistive technologies for those challenged by reading, writing, remembering, learning, typing, focusing, pointing, speaking, seeing, etc. The range of technology is considerable, from “low tech” to “high tech,” and includes the following: computer software for voice recognition in writing papers; specialized learning materials, aids and equipment, including computers; peripherals or plug-ins, positioning devices or switches; and specialized equipment to help people learn and/or communicate. The consideration of AT for a student is made by a team of stakeholders that includes the student, family, and teachers. The technology is not limited to what is currently available in a district but by what is needed for the student to achieve their potential and have access to the curriculum.

Our two Assistive Technology workshops were offered in tandem and titled *Technology Tools for Hypersomnia 101* and *102*. In *Technology Tools for Hypersomnia 101* (<http://www.hypersomniafoundation.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/07/Tech-Tools-for-Hypersomnia-S.Lyons-Golden.pdf>), Ms. Shonda Lyons-Golden, EdS, a 25+ year veteran special education teacher and assistive technology specialist, focused her presentation on the Microsoft Accessibility Tools and One Note, and she provided the participants with the document *Comparison of Accessibility Features in Versions of Windows* (<http://www.hypersomniafoundation.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/07/Comparison-of-Accessibility-Features-in-Versions-of-Windows-S.Lyons-Golden.pdf>). Ms. Gigi Whiteside, EdS, a 20+ year veteran special education teacher and assistive technology specialist, presented

the workshop Technology Tools for Hypersomnia 102 (<http://www.hypersomniafoundation.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/07/Tech-Tools-for-Hypersomnia-G.Whiteside.pdf>). She focused her presentation on the iPad, iOS, and Google Tools, noting that “Today’s standard tools and accessibility features available in iOS and Google products far exceed some of their costly counterparts in the marketplace. What was formerly ‘specialized software’ is now available to all individuals with or without identified learning exceptionalities at little to no cost!”

In addition, there is an accessibility guide for Windows 10 that might prove quite useful in supporting people with hypersomnia. This guide discusses features such as text to speech, word prediction, and distractibility removal (<http://bit.ly/Windows10AT>).

There are two major pieces of legislation that govern the use of assistive technology in public education: Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 and The (1975) Education for All Handicapped Children Act, subsequently titled the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). In 2004, during the reauthorization period for IDEA, the National Instructional Material Access Center (NIMAC) was created, which provided a repository of accessible text, including publisher's textbooks, to students with a qualifying disability.

The funding source for public school assistive technology is typically the school system, provided the student with hypersomnia either (1) qualifies for a 504 plan under circumstances Kate Pece eloquently described in her 4-part series *Crash Course: Public School Accommodations for Children with Hypersomnia* (see below) based on her conference workshop *Accommodations with Teeth* (http://www.hypersomniafoundation.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/07/School-Accommodations-for-Students-with-Hypersomnia-K.Pece_.pdf); OR the student (2) qualifies under an IEP if the student has a documented learning difference. Other sources of funding may be private health insurance for physician prescribed assistive devices, civic organizations, religious organizations, private foundations, and charities.

Crash Course: Public School Accommodations for Children with Hypersomnia by Kate Pece, MEd, Educational Consultant, www.katepececonsulting.com

- **Part 1 (504 Primer)** 9/15/15
www.hypersomniafoundation.org/crash-course-public-school-accommodations-for-children-with-hypersomnia/
- **Part 2 (Understanding 504 vs. IEP)** 10/6/15
www.hypersomniafoundation.org/crash-course-public-school-accommodations-for-children-with-hypersomnia-part-2/
- **Part 3 (Developing Stellar Accommodations)** 11/17/15
www.hypersomniafoundation.org/public-school-accommodations-for-children-with-hypersomnia-part-3/
- **Part 4 (Squeaky Wheel Strategies)** 12/15/15
www.hypersomniafoundation.org/crash-course-public-school-accommodations-for-children-with-hypersomnia-part-4/



Each state and territory receives a federal grant for an Assistive Technology Act Project (ATAP) to provide services to persons with disabilities, as well as to those involved in providing services such as education and employment. To learn more about the AT Project in your state, see <https://www.ataporg.org/>.

Assistive Technology Specialists Shonda Lyons-Golden, EdS, and Gigi Whiteside, EdS presented the 2015 Hypersomnia Conference Assistive Technology workshops. These education specialists can be reached at GoldenS@fultonschools.org and whiteside@fultonschools.org respectively.

Approved by Hypersomnia Foundation Board of Directors and Education Legal Counsel

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