



From the Source

Meet Gina Gelinas

Gina Gelinas talks the benefits of assistive technology at school and at home.

What is your job at GaDOE?

I am currently serving as the Program Manager for Georgia Project for Assistive Technology (GPAT). GPAT supports local districts in their efforts to provide assistive technology (AT) devices and services to students with disabilities.

The mission of GPAT is to improve student achievement, productivity, independence and inclusion by enhancing educator knowledge of assistive technology and increasing student access to appropriate assistive technology devices and services.

What should parents know about the use of assistive technology in their student's school?

Many students with disabilities require assistive technology to participate in and benefit from their educational programs. A range of technology solutions is available to support student performance, achievement, and independence in the following areas: academic and learning aids, aids to daily living, assistive listening and environmental aids for the hearing impaired and deaf, augmentative communication, computer access, leisure and recreation, seating, positioning, mobility, and vision. Students who have access to the appropriate assistive technology solutions that they need are more likely to be successful in their educational programs.

Parents should know that assistive technology can be most anything that can help a person with a disability do something they cannot do without it. Pencil grips that help a student grasp a pencil to write is assistive technology. A magnifying bar or colored overlay that makes print easier to see is assistive technology. Built-up fork/spoon handles to help a student grasp for eating is assistive technology. Assistive technology is also software that speaks when the student types a word or a sentence. It is also more forthright tools such as devices that speak when a student presses a button (augmentative communication) or a braille for a student with a visual impairment. There is no “master” list of assistive technology tools because it really comes down to what the tool does for the student as to whether it is determined to be assistive technology for that particular student or not. What is assistive technology for one student may not be assistive technology for their peer.

Under IDEA, AT must be considered for children with disabilities and determined if it is needed to receive a “free and appropriate public education.” If AT is determined to be

necessary, it is the school district's responsibility to help select and acquire the technology, as well as provide training to the student in the use of the technology, and, all of this at no cost to parents. This is done on an individual, case-by-case basis. It is the IEP team, which includes parents and students, which make a determination as to the necessity of assistive technology. Determining the appropriate tools may be accomplished through a defined consideration process such as [GPAT's Consideration Process](#) or the [SETT Framework](#) or a comprehensive assistive technology evaluation. ***How much or how little should parents be involved in coordinating, supporting, and using AT at home and how important is their input on the IEP team when it comes to AT use in the school?***

Parents are equal partners in contributing to their student's education. Selecting an appropriate assistive technology tool for a student requires a team of parents, educators, and other professionals to take a comprehensive view of the student, the educational tasks to be performed, the settings where it will be used, and ultimately the potential technology tools. Keep in mind that this assistive technology tool "selection process" is a dynamic process, and it is important to periodically re-evaluate the tool "match" even after a technology tool has been selected.

Cecilia Robinson, Region 4 Educational Service Center in Houston, TX says regarding parent involvement and assistive technology, "Not only do you need to be a big player in helping your student get the technology, you also need to learn about the technology and ask about how to support the technology used at home. And then if you don't understand something, be – be really up front about asking for examples so that you will get a better understanding on how your student may be using the technology."

Parent involvement at every level from the beginning stages of knowing that your child needs some support with their educational tasks all the way to fitting it into what is happening into the classroom and at home for homework if needed is critical for the long-term success.

[AT Pointers for Parents](#) is an assistive technology workbook for parents developed by Gayl Bowser and Penny Reed. The workbook is sixty-six pages long and includes worksheets, stories about children who use assistive technology and resource and reference information that parents will find valuable in exploring assistive technology. GPAT has a comprehensive website with assistive technology information at <http://gpat.org/>

You may contact any one of the GPAT team for additional information about assistive technology.

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