Accessible Instructional Materials (AIM)

Basics for Families

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Some students with disabilities have difficulty reading textbooks and other learning materials. For example, a student who is blind may not be able to see the book, and a student who has a physical disability may not be able to hold the book. To succeed in school, these students and others like them need learning materials in specialized formats called "accessible instructional materials" or "AIM." The federal special education law, the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), includes a requirement that schools provide AIM to elementary and secondary students with disabilities who need them. (See NIMAS Information from the U.S. Department of Education link at end of document.)

This booklet will help you and other members of your child's Individualized Education Program (IEP) team decide:

1. whether the student needs AIM,
2. what type of specialized format the student needs,
3. how to access the materials for the student, and
4. what supports the student needs to use AIM.

Does my child with a disability need accessible instructional materials?

Many materials used by students in the classroom are print-based, such as textbooks and handouts. Some students have difficulty reading these materials. To bridge this gap, accessible instructional materials provide the same information found in textbooks or handouts in a format that students with disabilities can use more easily. Examples of types of accessible instructional materials are braille, large print, audio and digital text.

How do I know if my child needs accessible instructional materials?

Students with disabilities may need accessible instructional materials for a variety of reasons. A general indicator that a student needs accessible instructional materials is if the student understands information that is presented in a book or other material but cannot read

What is the difference between *accessible instructional materials* and *alternative materials*?

As used here, *accessible instructional materials* present exactly the same content as a printed textbook or other type of instructional material. For example, if a student used an audio format of a book, the text read aloud would be the same as the text printed in the book. The only difference is the way the information is presented.

As used here, *alternative materials* contain content that addresses the same topic but is modified in some manner so that it can be understood by the student. For example, a student with an intellectual disability may need the content of a textbook modified so that the information is presented in a simpler way than the standard version.

or use the material on his or her own. For example, your daughter may understand the content of a science book if it is read it to her, but her disability prevents her from reading the book by herself.

Some information to think about when deciding whether your child may need accessible instructional materials includes the student's vision, hearing, physical abilities, reading abilities, evaluation results and grades. Following are examples of questions to consider:

- Can my child see the material well enough to read the information?
- Can my child hold a book and turn the pages independently?
- Can my child read a typical assignment in a textbook without getting tired?

If you answered "no" to any of these questions, you and other members of your child's IEP team should then determine if your child needs exactly the same content in one or more specialized formats or if your child needs modified content or alternative materials.

If I think my child needs accessible instructional materials, what should I do?

If you think your child needs accessible instructional materials, discuss it with the other members of your child's IEP team. The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) requires schools to provide accessible instructional materials to students with disabilities who need them.

How are accessible instructional materials selected?

There are four types of specialized formats that make print instructional materials accessible to students: braille, large print, audio and digital text. You and the other members of your child's IEP team will work together to decide which formats will best meet the needs of your child.

What types of specialized formats are available?

- **Braille:** Braille is a specialized format used almost exclusively by people with vision impairments. It is a system of reading and writing through touch, made up of raised dot patterns for letters, numbers and punctuation marks. Braille formats can be produced as either a printed document or as a digital file to be read using a computer or other technology with a braille display device.

- **Large Print:** Large print is a format for hard copy (printed) materials that have text that is larger than what is used in most standard print materials. Sometimes there may be more white space on the page than the original document. Some large print pages are the same size as standard textbooks, and some are larger.

- **Audio:** Audio formats provide information as speech that a student can listen to and understand. The voice may be human, or it may be synthesized electronic speech spoken by a computer or other device.

- **Digital Text:** Digital text formats present information in many different ways. If a print material is provided in digital format, the student can read it, listen to it, or both. It can be presented visually by displaying text on a computer or other electronic device. The size and color of the text can be changed. If a student is listening to a digital format, he or she can change the speed at which the words are read.

How do I know which format my child should use?

The IEP team will need to select which formats (braille, large print, audio or digital text) would be best for your child. In making the decision, the team should consider which format will best enable your child to:

- access information contained in printed materials,
- work as independently as possible,
- develop literacy skills, and
- participate in the classroom and access the general education curriculum.

Some students may use different formats in different locations or for different tasks. For example, the team may determine that it would be best for your child to use digital text at school but an audio version at home. Or a student may use a digital textbook for science but a large print workbook for math. You will work together with your child's IEP team to decide what formats will be used and when. Additionally, your child may need a trial period with different formats to determine which is most effective for different tasks and activities.

How are accessible instructional materials obtained for my child?

There are a variety of sources for acquiring accessible instructional materials for students who need them. However, some sources can only be used to provide materials in specialized formats for students who meet certain eligibility criteria. If you and the others on your child's IEP team have decided that your child needs accessible instructional materials, it is the responsibility of someone at the school to follow the policies and procedures developed by the state or local education agency to acquire the materials in the needed format. These policies and

procedures must be consistent with the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) requirements related to access to instructional materials for students with disabilities.

What are the common sources for acquiring accessible instructional materials?

The following is a list of common sources for acquiring AIM for students:

- **National Instructional Materials Access Center:** The National Instructional Materials Access Center (NIMAC) is a national library of electronic source files that can be used by state education agencies and districts that are authorized by states to produce specialized formats. The source files are used by accessible media producers, states and some districts to produce braille, large print, audio and digital text versions of textbooks and instructional materials. Only certain students with disabilities qualify to receive specialized formats through NIMAC.

- **Accessible Media Producers (AMPs):** Accessible Media Producers are organizations that produce instructional materials in specialized formats that can be immediately used by students who qualify for their services. Some organizations focus on digital formats, while others may create braille or large print versions of textbooks.

- **Publishers:** Some textbook publishers offer digital versions of books that can be purchased. Under some circumstances, when accessible formats are not available for purchase, some publishers will agree to provide a digital file at no cost to the school or permit the school to scan the book and create their own electronic copy.

- **Other Sources:** There are many places online where accessible books can be purchased or are available free of charge. Online bookstores, audio book websites and libraries are all possible sources for accessible

instructional materials. Although textbooks may not be available, materials such as novels and other general books can sometimes be acquired from these sources.

- **Locally Created:** Although this should be the source of last resort, if no other source of accessible materials is available, schools may need to create them locally, such as by scanning printed materials or some other means. This will certainly be the case for non–published materials, such as teacher-made handouts and tests. When published materials are involved, copyright must be respected, and it is always best for the school to ask permission from the publisher before scanning or otherwise duplicating copyrighted material found in textbooks.

How do I ensure my child receives accessible instructional materials if they are needed?

The requirement for providing accessible instructional materials to students is still a relatively new part of special education law. Not all schools may have a clear system in place for acquiring accessible materials. Your child's IEP should list what staff person is responsible for locating needed materials and by what date (preferably at the same time other students receive their standard print materials). If you have done your own research on the different sources of accessible instructional materials, you can share that information with the IEP team. Just remember that if the team has agreed that your child needs materials in a specialized format, it is the school's responsibility to locate and purchase the required accessible instructional materials.

Additionally, as a parent, there may be situations when you want to acquire accessible materials to supplement what your child is learning in school. You may be able to acquire some accessible materials on your own through accessible media producers or purchase them from other sources.

What supports does my child need to use accessible instructional materials effectively?

The process does not end when it is decided that a child needs accessible instructional materials and the materials are acquired in braille, large print, audio or digital text formats that meet the needs. Your child, your family and the professionals working with your child may need additional supports to ensure the accessible instructional materials are used most effectively.

What types of supports may be needed?

You and your child's IEP team should consider whether the following types of supports are needed for your child to use the selected accessible instructional materials effectively:

- **Technology:** In some cases, special equipment may be needed to use accessible instructional materials, especially those in audio or digital text formats. For example, if your child uses audio materials, will he or she listen to them on a computer, an mp3 player or another device? If your child uses digital text materials, is special software needed that lets your child enlarge the font or change the color of the text? When deciding what technology is needed, the team should think about the different places your child will be using the materials and what would be the best fit for your child's needs and preferences.

- **Training:** Different levels of training will be needed depending on the type of accessible instructional material your child uses. If your child uses a large print textbook, he or she probably will not need much help to learn how to use it. However, if your child is using a more digital text format, training will probably be needed for your child, your family and school staff on both the use of the format and supporting technology. It is important that you as a parent are trained in

addition to the professionals so that the accessible instructional materials can be used at home as well as at school.

- **Accommodations:** Your child may need other accommodations in addition to accessible instructional materials. For example, if the audio format is being used, a quiet place for reading may be needed. Additionally, in some instances, other accommodations, such as providing oral responses to tests or assignments may be needed.

- **Support Services:** Your child may also need additional support services in order to use accessible instructional materials. For example, a student who uses materials in braille format will need instruction from a certified teacher of the visually impaired (CTVI). If your child is using technology, someone may need to be assigned to provide regular maintenance on the equipment. If your child has physical disabilities, services from an occupational or physical therapist may be needed to ensure proper positioning.

How do I ensure my child receives needed support services?

You and other members of your child's IEP team should work together to determine the supports needed. All supports should be listed in writing on the IEP document, including who is responsible for providing them and when they will be provided. If your child is just beginning to use accessible instructional materials, the team may wish to include a trial period for certain supports (such as a technology) and schedule an IEP meeting in a few months to discuss how the supports are working.

Conclusion

Accessible instructional materials (AIM) can help students with disabilities succeed in school. It is important that families know that schools are required to provide specialized formats to students who need them. The IEP team should work together to determine whether AIM are needed and how they can be provided to best support the student's learning and classroom participation.

Additional AIM Resources:

Accessible Instructional Materials (AIM): *A Technical Guide for Families and Advocates*:
http://aim.cast.org/learn/aim4families or
http://www.pacer.org

National Center on Accessible Instructional Materials:
http://aim.cast.org/

National Instructional Materials Access Center:
http://www.nimac.us/

NIMAS Information from the U.S. Department of Education:
http://idea.ed.gov/explore/view/p/%2Croot%2Cdynamic%2CTopicalArea%2C10%2C

Contact your local Parent Center:

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ACCESSIBLE INSTRUCTIONAL MATERIALS**

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