Guide to Supporting Assistive Technology, Accessible Educational Materials, and Accommodations

“The world of tech is changing, and instruction is changing. To promote inclusivity and equity, Assistive Technologies should never be removed, the easier you make access, the more things will be used.”

— Jeff Sisks, Manager, Assistive Technology Services, Fairfax County Public Schools, VA

The CITES Virtual Learning Project is focused on providing promising practices to promote inclusivity and equity for students with disabilities in face-to-face, blended, and virtual learning environments. Considerations for the acquisition, implementation, and support for assistive technologies, accessible educational materials, and accommodations are paramount to ensuring success for these students. Accessible educational materials and assistive technologies may mean the difference between learning barriers and learning opportunities.

Collaboration between Informational Technology and Assistive Technology teams ensures the best decisions regarding devices, platforms, and software are made in support of students with disabilities.

Below are specific steps to consider in relation to assistive technology, accommodations, and accessible educational materials with the opportunity to outline decisions for your program.

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# Considerations for Device/Software

| **Questions to Ask** | **Considerations/Resources** | **District/School Plan** |
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| What accessibility features are included in the devices used by students and educators? | Embedded AT and Accessibility Features in Devices:   * [ChromeOS](https://support.google.com/chromebook/answer/177893?hl=en) * [iPadOS](https://support.apple.com/guide/ipad/get-started-with-accessibility-features-ipad9a2465f9/ipados) * [iOS](https://www.apple.com/accessibility/) * [Windows 11](https://www.microsoft.com/en-us/windows/accessibility-features?r=1) |  |
| Do students, educators, and families know how to access accessibility features? | Embedded AT and Accessibility Features in Devices:   * [ChromeOS](https://support.google.com/chromebook/answer/177893?hl=en) * [iPadOS](https://support.apple.com/guide/ipad/get-started-with-accessibility-features-ipad9a2465f9/ipados) * [iOS](https://www.apple.com/accessibility/) * [Windows 11](https://www.microsoft.com/en-us/windows/accessibility-features?r=1) |  |
| Are educators encouraged to use these features with other students as well as those with disabilities? | Embedded AT and Accessibility Features in Devices:   * [ChromeOS](https://support.google.com/chromebook/answer/177893?hl=en) * [iPadOS](https://support.apple.com/guide/ipad/get-started-with-accessibility-features-ipad9a2465f9/ipados) * [iOS](https://www.apple.com/accessibility/) * [Windows 11](https://www.microsoft.com/en-us/windows/accessibility-features?r=1) |  |
| What accessibility features are included in the tools used by students and educators e.g., LMS? | Learning Management Systems (LMS) and Accessibility   * [Canvas Accessibility](https://www.instructure.com/products/canvas/accessibility) * [Blackboard Accessibility](https://help.blackboard.com/Learn/Student/Ultra/Accessibility) * [Google Classroom Accessibility](https://edu.google.com/intl/ALL_us/why-google/accessibility/) * [Schoology Accessibility](https://docs.powerschool.com/SGYH/en/system-administrators/getting-started-for-sys-admins/section-508-compliance-vpat) * [Microsoft Office Accessibility Suite](https://www.microsoft.com/en-us/accessibility) |  |
| Does the district provide specific software tools for students with disabilities ?  Are accessibility software tools provided for all students? | * [Texthelp](https://www.texthelp.com/products/) * [Read&Write for Google](https://chrome.google.com/webstore/detail/readwrite-for-google-chro/inoeonmfapjbbkmdafoankkfajkcphgd?hl=en-US) |  |
| Do students, educators, and families know how to access accessibility features in the tools and software they use? | Learning Management Systems (LMS) and Accessibility   * [Canvas Accessibility](https://www.instructure.com/products/canvas/accessibility) * [Blackboard Accessibility](https://help.blackboard.com/Learn/Student/Ultra/Accessibility) * [Google Classroom Accessibility](https://edu.google.com/intl/ALL_us/why-google/accessibility/) * [Schoology Accessibility](https://docs.powerschool.com/SGYH/en/system-administrators/getting-started-for-sys-admins/section-508-compliance-vpat)   Other Programs   * [Texthelp](https://www.texthelp.com/products/) * [Read&Write for Google](https://chrome.google.com/webstore/detail/readwrite-for-google-chro/inoeonmfapjbbkmdafoankkfajkcphgd?hl=en-US) * [Microsoft Office Accessibility Suite](https://www.microsoft.com/en-us/accessibility) |  |
| Are educators encouraged to use these features with other students as well as those with disabilities? | Learning Management Systems (LMS) and Accessibility   * [Canvas Accessibility](https://www.instructure.com/products/canvas/accessibility) * [Blackboard Accessibility](https://help.blackboard.com/Learn/Student/Ultra/Accessibility) * [Google Classroom Accessibility](https://edu.google.com/intl/ALL_us/why-google/accessibility/) * [Schoology Accessibility](https://docs.powerschool.com/SGYH/en/system-administrators/getting-started-for-sys-admins/section-508-compliance-vpat)   Other Programs   * [Texthelp](https://www.texthelp.com/products/) * [Read&Write for Google](https://chrome.google.com/webstore/detail/readwrite-for-google-chro/inoeonmfapjbbkmdafoankkfajkcphgd?hl=en-US) * [Microsoft Office Accessibility Suite](https://www.microsoft.com/en-us/accessibility) |  |

# Considerations for Supporting Educators and Families

| **Questions to Ask** | **Considerations/Resources** | **District/School Plan** |
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| Does your program have devoted staff for training students, educators, and families in the use of the device(s) and/or accessibility features, and assistive technologies? | * Live training, in-person or online * Online videos that can be accessed 24/7 by educators and families * Online videos that can be presented simultaneously to educators across the district (prevents duplication of live presentations at individual schools) * Coaches assigned to educators and families |  |
| Once students, educators, and families are trained, what ongoing support is provided? | * Coaches/mentors who support educators and families, especially when AT devices and/or accommodations are new * Online videos available 24/7 * Office hours for support |  |
| What procedures/systems are in place to provide support when AT devices/accommodations are not working properly?  Who will troubleshoot and solve the problem?  How is this individual notified when support is needed? | * Identify staff to troubleshoot and solve the problem * Identify how educators, students, and/or families will notify this individual * Inform all staff, students, and families of the procedure to obtain support |  |
| Are expectations and roles clearly defined for students, educators, and families? | * Clearly define expectations, procedures, schedule of check-ins, and meetings between educators, families, and students |  |
| What system is developed for ongoing communication between the student, educators, and family per accessibility features and AT? | Regular check-in through email, LMS parent portal, phone, and virtual software   * If devices and accommodations are new, check-in schedules should be more frequent (eg. weekly) * Communicate what hinders or what supports implementation |  |

# Considerations for Consistency

Devices and accommodations should be consistent for students, educators, and families. In some settings when students change classes, they are expected to use different devices, which may or may not have consistent accessibility features. Students may also be asked to learn new devices if and when they move between classes or grade levels within the same school or when they move from an elementary to middle or high school within the same district. The consistency of devices and accessibility features is critical, so students, educators, and family members can focus on learning content, instead of constantly having to learn or use different systems and accessibility features.

| **Questions to Ask** | **Considerations/Resources** | **District/School Plan** |
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| Are the accommodations and assistive technologies that students use consistent or do changes from location or grade levels require them to learn different systems, devices, or software programs regularly? | Ensure students have consistency when moving from:   * Classroom to classroom * School to home * Moving up grade levels, eg, moving from elementary to middle to high school * In a blended program when moving from face to face to virtual |  |
| Are the accommodations and assistive technologies that educators support consistent or do changes require them to learn different systems, devices, or software programs? | * Ensure there is consistency when moving from: Classroom to classroom or when * Teaching face to face vs. blended or online programs |  |
| Are parents informed when their child with disabilities must learn a new assistive technology? | * Parents have the right to advocate for the accommodations and assistive technologies used by their child |  |

# Resources

* [Assistive Technology Tools and Resources for Computer Access](https://www.fcps.edu/node/40869): Developed by the Assistive Technology Team in Fairfax County, VA, this guide provides an overview of assistive technologies, including single switches, Eyegaze, and accessible educational websites. Resources from Fairfax County Public Schools.
* [Fairfax County Public Schools Digital Ecosystem Resource Search:](https://del.fcps.edu/home) This database, developed by the Assistive Technology Team in Fairfax County, VA, for their staff, provides information about accessibility solutions and Assistive Technology devices. It is searchable by grade and content area.
* [The Quality Indicators for Assistive Technology (QIAT)](https://qiat.org/): The QIAT provides resources to support the development and delivery of quality assistive technology services.
* [The Accommodations Toolkit](https://publications.ici.umn.edu/nceo/accommodations-toolkit/introduction): Developed by the [National Center on Educational Outcomes](https://nceo.info/), this toolkit provides research summaries and policy analyses on accommodations commonly used by students with disabilities.
* [Using Accessible Formats](https://aem.cast.org/use/using-accessible-formats): The National AEM Center provides guidance on the supports needed to use accessible formats.
* [Sample Parent Resource to Support WIFI Connectivity and Accessibility (Dated 2023)](https://castudl.sharepoint.com/:b:/s/citesteam/EctkR8ogWIBHsCykmyHVqpkBDbfsO9_G2o26fwGfXPQ4dw?e=WW9BLb)
* [Sample Tutorial for Accessibility for Chromebooks (Dated 2022)](https://castudl.sharepoint.com/:b:/s/citesteam/EZ-8wTKof1VEgSuOTVzf_AsBA6AAEukRdI_dd-S4kneHWw?e=VvLtod)

# Resources for Virtual Schools

* [Aligning IT, AT, & Accessibility for Virtual Learning:](https://cites.cast.org/binaries/content/assets/cites/resources/cites-vs-itata11y-a11y.pdf) The Center on Inclusive Technology and Education Systems (CITES) provides guidelines to support schools in selecting materials that address accessibility right from the beginning.
* [Assistive Technology for Online Learning:](https://oae.stanford.edu/students/remote-learning-coping-during-covid-19/assistive-technology-online-learning) The Office of Accessible Education, Stanford University, provides online learning resources. Although written for its faculty, the resources and suggestions are applicable to online learning environments.
* Center on Inclusive Technology & Education Systems | cites.cast.org | CAST logo.
  This content was developed under a grant from the US Department of Education, #h327T180001. However, the contents do not necessarily represent the policy of the US Department of Education, and you should not assume endorsement by the Federal Government. Project Officer: Anita Vermeer, M.Ed.
  This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-ShareAlike 4.0 International license.[Access and Equity for All Learners in Blended and Online Education:](https://www.aurora-institute.org/wp-content/uploads/iNACOL-Access-and-Equity-for-All-Learners-in-Blended-and-Online-Education-Oct2014.pdf) From the Aurora Institute, this publication provides guidance and resources to virtual schools to ensure all students have access to the educational opportunities provided in virtual learning environments.