

Greetings Assistive Technology (AT) Forward Community of Practice Members,

As we enter the month of November it begins the season of gratitude. Did you know that November is National Gratitude Month? It was an initiative started by Stacey Grewal and is now celebrated in the US and Canada. She “believes gratitude to be an essential ingredient of a happy and fulfilling life. When one embraces gratitude, they immediately shift their focus from the negative to the positive things in their lives.” Students with disabilities often see their disability first, not their strengths.

Take a minute and talk to your students about their strengths and how Assistive Technology can enhance their strengths and lessen their weaknesses. A great read can be found here: [“Rethinking Assistive Technology.”](#)
Thank you for taking the time to help students!

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Upcoming Assistive Technology Professional Learning Events

Assistive Technology CoP Meetings

Please mark your calendars for the upcoming AT Forward CoP meetings.

Thursday, November 9, 2023, 4:00pm-5:00pm.

Executive Function Skills and Augmentative Alternative Communication Connections

Paige Buckingham is back to talk to us about Executive Functioning Skills and AAC.

Executive Function skills are necessary to become independent in life and Language is necessary for a person to be able to develop Executive Function skills. What does this look like for a person who uses Augmentative Alternative Communication? We will do a crosswalk by looking at Executive Function checklists and various Communication and Language development checklists to see how these areas fit together. Strategies to support emotional control, sustained attention, and response inhibition will be shared and participants will practice picking vocabulary to support their student.

To join, please [click on this registration link](#) to register for the event.

Thursday, November 14, 2023, 4:00pm-5:00pm.

Frequently Asked Questions Around Accessible Educational Materials (AEM)

Do you have questions about determining the need for Accessible Educational Materials (AEM) or how to provide AEM to students? Then join us as the AEM team

answers frequently asked questions from the field around Accessible Educational Materials. The team will consist of CESA 2 and DPI staff.

To join please [click on this registration link](#) to register for the event.

Tuesday, December 12, 2023, 4:00pm-5:00pm.

Information Technology and Assistive Technology: Making it All Work Together

presented by Dr. Robert Smiley. Bringing Assistive Technology and Information Technology together in ways that enhance the outcomes for ALL students is at the core of this discussion. The School District of Janesville used creative and innovative internal structures to develop AT opportunities for ALL students. Join our discussion to learn how you too can take steps to enhance your students' use of Assistive Technology for the betterment of all. To join please [click on this registration link](#) to register for the event.

Tuesday, January 9, 2024, 4:00pm-5:00pm.

Assistive Technology Team: What does that mean to you? Presented by Dr. Penny Reed and Gayl Bowser. Across the country there are many ways to address the Assistive Technology (AT) needs of students. All of them require teamwork. As a result, there are many different ideas of what constitutes an AT team. And all of them can have merit, depending on your resources, expertise, and the circumstances of the individual student. This session will look at some of the commonly used models and how they can help you to design your agency's services.

To join please [click on this registration link](#) to register for the event.

Thursday, February 8, 2024 Time: 4:00pm-5:00pm

Bridging the Gap: School Teams and Specialists presented by Jennifer Seale. This talk will address the value of collaboration between school teams and providers at outpatient specialty clinics for students who can benefit from augmentative and alternative communication (AAC) Tools and strategies. This webinar will provide attendees with the opportunity to explore their role in the collaboration process including highlighting the role of AAC finder, speech and language pathologist, educator, paraprofessional and /or family member. Additionally, an overview of how a collaborative program for school teams, families and providers can support students who benefit from AAC will be provided.

To join please [click on this registration link](#) to register for the event.

Assistive Technology Resource Suggestions

What is Assistive Access? Written by Amy Snow

Every fall, Apple offers a major update to iPhones, iPads, and other products. This year, iOS 17 came out in September and included some new accessibility features, one of which is called Assistive Access.

So what is Assistive Access? It is a setting that enables a simplified interface designed for those with cognitive impairments, dementia, or simply benefit from a less cluttered screen or larger icons. It could also be beneficial for use with young learners.

You have no idea how excited I was to hear about this feature! I can't even count how

many times I've thought to myself "if only this app had three options that everyone needs/uses instead of having 10 extra ones that are rarely used by anyone". I was constantly looking for simple apps on the App Store, preferably free ones, but as long as it was under \$3 it was usually worth trying. I wanted apps that did exactly what Apple's native apps did, but had a simplified setup or fewer "bells and whistles" for my student to accidentally get into and be unable to get out of without assistance.

As a Teacher of the Visually Impaired and AT Specialist, I see Assistive Access being most useful for students who have cortical visual impairments (CVI). These students benefit from a less cluttered screen with only a few options to choose from because it is often visually taxing to narrow focus. Obviously, this feature would also be great for students who have cognitive disabilities or students that needed help staying focused.

What's especially cool about Assistive Access is that this feature can be enabled and disabled with a passcode. If a student needed to be more "focused" in class, this mode could easily be enabled when they were engaged in an activity, but disabled when not needed.

Assistive Access is very customizable, and it would take entirely too much space and time to explain all of the features in each application. Please explore the resources below to learn more!

Resources related to assistive access:

- [Assistive Access User Guide from Apple](#)
- [Change Assistive Access Settings - Apple](#)
- [Add, Remove, or Customize Apps - Apple](#)
- [How to Use Assistive Access - Guiding Tech](#)
- [Setting Up Assistive Access Walkthrough - YouTube Video](#)

Additional Resources

Accessible Educational Materials (AEM)

Are you looking for support in creating materials that are accessible for all learners instead of trying to retrofit materials for accessibility? If so, then we encourage you to visit the [National Center on Accessible Educational Materials \(AEM\)'s website](#).

Through the use of the POUR (Perceivable, Operable, Understandable, Robust) principles, it is a great resource for creating and designing accessible documents, slide decks, videos, and web content.

Wisconsin Talking Book and Braille Library (WTBBL)

Utilize the Wisconsin Talking Book and Braille Library (WTBBL) to Support Assistive Technology and Accessible Educational Materials in your School, District, or Share with Families. The Wisconsin Talking Book and Braille Library (WTBBL) is a network library

of the National Library Service for the Blind and Print Disabled (NLS), Library of Congress. WTBBL provides free braille and talking book library service for those Wisconsin residents with temporary or permanent low vision, blindness, or a physical or perceptual disability that prevents them from reading or holding the printed page. This includes individuals with reading disabilities.

Through WTBBL, the NLS offers books the way you want them: in braille or audio, mailed to your door for free or instantly downloadable. All books, equipment, services, and the mailing of materials are free to the print-disabled. WTBBL also offers additional services, including kits (print-braille and audio), audio-described movies, Braille and Audio Reading Download (BARD and BARD mobile) and NEWSLINE (free audio newspapers and magazines). For more information, please visit the [Talking Books website](#) or give us a call at (414) 286-3045 or toll-free 1-800-242-8822.

Wisconsin Center for the Blind and Visually Impaired (WCBVI) Update

WCBVI will be hosting our annual Giving Program November 17-19, 2023. Held at Lions Camp in beautiful Rosholt Wisconsin, this program focuses on giving to others and was created to build and enhance skills in the expanded core curriculum for students with visual impairments. Activities include making dog treats and cat toys for local humane societies, putting together “thank you” bags for police and self-care bags for the homeless, making blankets for residents of nearby nursing homes, and more. Attendees also have opportunities to meet new friends and take part in fun fall activities. Registration for this year is closed, however this is an annual event, so please check the [WCBVI website](#) when school starts next fall for an opportunity to sign up!

Virtual Social Hours at WCBVI

WCBVI Short Courses offer several virtual social hours throughout the year. Students who are blind or visually impaired may participate in any of the opportunities available. In November, the topic is “Apps for Assistive Technology! Bring your Tips, Tricks, and Troubles!”. To register for November’s event, or to see any of other topics happening throughout the year, please see the [WCBVI Virtual Social Hours webpage](#).

Sometimes All We Need To Do Is Start A Conversation....

Looking to increase awareness about AT? See what special events are happening worldwide in November. Awareness is the first step towards understanding and acceptance.

[International Stress Awareness Week](#) – November 7-11 School is stressful for many students, but students with disabilities can have higher levels of anxiety as they try to fit in. Helping students be aware of their stress levels with tools such as calming apps, wearable devices and fidgets can be helpful.

Check out a few of these:

- [Sound Therapy Sound Machine](#)
- [Fidget Toys](#)
- [Smiling Mind](#) meditation (iOS, Android, Web)
- [Epilepsy Awareness Month](#) November

- SmartWatches - for fall detection, accelerated heart rates or unusual movements ([SOS Smartwatch](#), [SeizAlarm: Seizure Detection](#))
- Mattress devices for epilepsy ([Emfit Movement Monitor](#), [MP5v2 Bed Movement Monitor for Seizures](#))

Augmentative and Alternative Communication (AAC) Corner

AAC or Augmentative and Alternative Communication is any method or multiple methods that a person may use to communicate. Most often people associate AAC with a communication device, but it can be many other forms of communication. For example, it might be written language, signing, gesturing, picture exchange and or a speech generating device. Janice C. Light stated: "Communication is a basic human power that allows people to articulate their personal, educational, vocational, and social goals and to achieve their full potential. As a person develops communication competence, he or she meets this human need, realizes this human right, and attains this human power." As teachers we need to recognize that communication does take many forms and we as teachers need to accept and honor a person's form of communication.

When entering the world of AAC many parents will fear their child may not ever speak because of the use of a device. However, research tells us the exact opposite. By modeling communication and the process of asking and answering questions is a great way to teach language. Need more information? Read the [research](#) here. On the site [Expressable.com](#) they list 10 different ways to support AAC users. Having articles and information available to help educate parents is an important part of the process of teaching AAC.

From the Desk of Mike Hipple, an Adult who Uses AAC

Hello Forward Assistive Technology Community, I hope this finds you well. My name is Mike Hipple. You might know me if you were in a forward webinar with me, you might know me if you are a part of the Wisconsin AAC Network, or you might know me from going to conferences and training sessions. If you don't know me, please Google my name to get to know me better. The forward team asked me if I was willing to write something up for the monthly email and I said of course. Since we are in November, I chose the topic of the role of family play in assistive technology.

My own family played an important role in my personal use of assistive technology, they knew that it was and still is important to me that I had and have assistive technology tools such as a communication device, wheelchair, power chair, stander, and walker just to name a few. My father and my mother make sure that my tools are charged everyday so I can use them. My older brother bought a ramp so I can get into his family's house. My sister in law and my brother always make sure that the house that they have is power chair friendly. My nephew and niece love to play with my device and sit with me in my power chair {this is my favorite part of the visit too}. Family is more than mom, dad, brother or sister, and their family. We have grandparents, aunts, uncles, and cousins to talk to, remember stories, and make lifetime memories.

Please make sure that your students have all of those people's names on their communication device so they can say their family member's name when they are talking to them or talking about them at school. It is very likely that you will never get to meet them, but you can still ask your students questions about them. I think this happened in middle school or high school but I remember one of my teachers asked me how was my aunt and I was surprised that they cared enough to ask me that. That was a nice thing for my teacher to do and I will remember that.

I will always end with some tips for you to use in your classroom or home. Talk about the assistive technology tools that their family members use, offer to help explain the tools and why they need to use them, and ask your students about their family members. I hope you enjoyed this story. You can always email me at mikehipple4@gmail.com with any questions or ideas. I am available to help you. I am wishing everyone a Happy Thanksgiving.

QIAT Community, Help Me Out!

QIAT is a nationwide grass roots organization that supports the identification, dissemination, and implementation of the Quality Indicators for Assistive Technology services in school settings. Posting a question is free. Often the people who are answering the questions are users of AT themselves and or family members. Consider [joining QIAT](#) to assist you and your team in learning, and connecting with others who are willing to share and coach others.

Question: "Hello QIAT team! We are seeking an app to practice spelling at the high school level. This is for a student with Dyslexia and higher than-average to average intelligence."

QIAT community, help me out!

Answers from the group:

I would look into Co-Writer by Don Johnston.

Are you looking for an app to help him learn to be a better speller or to help him with spelling errors as he composes/edits text? Co:Writer is definitely the standard for spelling support while composing text.

If he is looking for ways to improve his spelling, I would look at resources that help him understand word morphology and English spelling patterns. Especially given that he has good comprehension and a strong IQ, he is going to benefit much more from understanding spelling patterns and rules rather than memorizing spelling words. [Click here for a nice summary of some English morphological rules](#) that influence spelling. In addition, Wordwall.net has lots of games and activities for many different study topics, including spelling and morphology that he might find engaging for practice.

[Common Sense Media](#) has reviews of lots of spelling apps that you can check out, too. Personally, I have had some nice luck just playing Wordle from the New York Times with students. While you only get to spell 5 letter words, it is a wonderful problem-solving opportunity to consider spelling rules--what letters can go together, etc. You might also

try their online Spelling Bee games.

Feature Match: Executive Functioning

Feature matching occurs when you look systematically at what a student needs and the features of various programs. Below is an example of feature matching as it relates to students who display difficulties in the area of writing- specifically the physical aspects of writing.

When conducting an IEP and having the conversation about “whether the student needs assistive technology services or devices,” consider the following questions. Please remember that Assistive Technology involves, *increasing, maintaining, or improving functional capabilities of a child with a disability.*

| ✓ | Area of Student Concern- Executive Functioning | Potential Solution Feature Match |
|---|---|--|
| | Are there accessible supports in place to manage larger tasks like research papers or other large projects? | Consider programs such as graphic organizers or outlining programs Get Ready, Do, Done! by Sarah Ward |
| | Are there accessible supports in place to assist with managing time or time related concepts? | Consider items such as Visual Timer Smart Watch Low tech reminders like adding sticky notes to a students desk area to warn about upcoming schedule changes or events like fire drills |
| | Are there accessible supports in place to assist with self management - like anger, stress or emotional regulation? | Consider a self checklist or program such as <i>How does your Engine Run</i> Social Stories Video Modeling Apps like Calm , or Go Noodle |
| | Are there accessible supports in place to help the student follow a schedule? | Consider Google Calendar Check In and out system with an adult Smart tech like Alexis Reminders or Smart Watch Reminders Visual or Picture Schedule First Then App or board Setting alarms on iPads |

| | |
|--|--|
| Are there accessible supports in place to assist with listening and taking notes? | Consider outlines, teacher or peer student created notes Using the camera feature on a phone or iPad to take pictures of the board Livescribe Pens |
| Are there accessible supports in place to assist with elapsed time? | Consider a stop watch so the student can “see” time elapsing Time Timers or visual timers /apps |
| Are there accessible supports in place to keep papers organized ? | Consider keeping things digital Teach the student to use a system like Google Drive or Keep |
| Are there accessible supports in place to assist with following verbal multiple step directions? | Consider written directions and / or an auditory text to speech program that read written directions Picture directions (LessonPix) |
| Are there accessible supports in place to assist with writing in an organized manner? | Consider outlines or graphic organizers or tools such as Snap&Read with outlines, or make your own digital outline |

AT Forward Micro-Credentials Update

Congratulations to the following people who have earned badge(s) over the summer. We have now awarded 295 badges! We are empowering learners and raising the awareness of Assistive Technology!

Tiffany Reynolds-Prairie Du Chien Area: 1 badge

Sarah Harke-Oconto Falls: 2 badges

Heather Maydak: 4 badges

Cassandra Wohlert-Milton: 7 badges Congratulations on Marco

Certification! Kirsti Romenesko-Fond Du Lac: 3 badges

Jeanna Kaland-Plymouth: 1 badge

What is AT Forward?

The Assistive Technology (AT) Forward Project works with self-advocates, educators, practitioners, caregivers, and families to increase student autonomy in utilizing Assistive Technology tools to support access, engagement, and progress in learning. The AT Forward Project provides a variety of free resources and learning opportunities, including [Community of Practice \(CoP\) meetings](#), [micro-credentialing](#), and [monthly email updates](#). See all past recorded CoP meetings on the [AT Forward CoP Video Resource Library](#). Please help us grow our AT community in Wisconsin and refer others to the [AT Forward CoP](#), by visiting the [AT Forward Registration page](#). From AT beginner to expert, the AT Forward CoP welcomes all knowledge level backgrounds!

Together we can and are moving AT Forward!!

If you have any questions or comments about the AT Forward Project, please contact Kathy White at Kathy.White@CESA2.org or Stacy Duffy at stacy.duffy@cesa2.org.