

## Assistive Technology - ESSERF Funding

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The CARES Act, signed into law on March 27, 2020, provides economic stimulus to individuals, businesses, hospitals, and Local Educational Agencies (LEAs) in response to the economic distress caused by the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic. The [ESSER Grant Program](#), part of the CARES Act, provides funds to help LEAs respond to changes in student needs due to COVID-19 ([CARES Act, Section 18003](#)). The DPI is awarding more than \$158 million in ESSER funds directly to LEAs through grants.

As part of [Ensuring Equitable Access of ESSER funds to All Students - Compliance with GEPA 427](#), LEAs are able to utilize funds in their application for the “Educational Technology” program type. In order “to ensure students with disabilities receive FAPE (free appropriate public education), funds will be used to purchase assistive technology including alternative augmentative communication (AAC) devices to support communication and linked to learning strategies at home.”

When considering how assistive technology fits within a district-wide or school-wide educational technology system, educators are encouraged to leverage the knowledge, skills, and systems of matching Assistive Technology supports to individual students who receive special education services to further advance equitable access for each and every student in the education community. For example, in considering expenditures in the area of educational technology to address the gaps in distance learning, the Council for Exceptional Children (CEC) recommends the following supports:

- Investment in educational technology (which includes assistive technology) so that students are able to access virtual learning
- Training of staff in use of technology so that students are able to be given appropriate supports to engage in distance learning
- Training of families, especially of young students, so they can ensure students are able to use the technology to engage in learning opportunities

The following recommendations were developed by WI DPI to better assist LEAs in determining how to utilize CARES Act funding to advance Assistive Technology within the context of broader educational technology systems of control to meet the needs of each and every student. Many of these recommendations may also be helpful in determining the use of IDEA 619 and Part B funding available to LEAs specifically for the purpose of supporting assistive technology training, resources, and systems of control to meet the needs of students with IEPs.

**Provide devices and access for students, families, and educators so they are able to utilize digital learning resources to facilitate communication and learning between home and school.**

- Purchase mobile devices, assistive technologies, and access to the Internet in alignment with the school's comprehensive needs assessment and school wide plan (e.g. access to broadband, appropriate mobile device or laptop, communication tools).

## **Increase access to high-quality digital content and resources for students.**

- Access to digital resources (Open Educational Resources).
- Access to Accessible Educational Materials (AEM).
- Access to supplemental technology for special populations. For example, first language supports for English Learners (ELs).
- Access to online resources ensuring accessibility of content and navigation that align with Web Accessibility Guidelines.

## **Support the use of technology in classrooms.**

- Select an accessible Learning Management System (LMS) for housing learning resources and learning technologies to facilitate online learning.
- Invest in apps and online tools that meet data security and cyber security practices.
- Expand the use of technology for IEP processes (e.g. virtual IEP meetings, access to student data by IEP team members across educational environments).
- Explore the use of technology aligned to UDL principles as well as the use of assistive technology for students with IEPs in general education, both to support access to general education curriculum.
- Identify tools and processes to help secure and monitor student data to ensure no personally identifiable student data is being released and data is secured.

## **Provide accommodations and Assistive Technology (AT) to support the ability of students with IEPs to access, engage, and make progress in general education, as well as to promote accessibility.**

These supports may be required for any student with an IEP with a hearing, communication, vision, cognitive, or other unique disability-related need. In addition, technology that is assistive can also be used to benefit any student, with or without an IEP, in their learning so they are able to access instruction and educational environments.

- Ensure access to assistive technology devices and tools (including AAC devices) that are identified in IEPs to provide a Free Appropriate Public Education (FAPE).
- Identify hardware and software that supports assistive technology (e.g., screen readers, standers to assist with blood circulation, word prediction software, calculator extensions, eye gaze and scanning technology).
- Provide accommodations, including assistive technology devices to access and benefit from virtual learning, for students with IEPs and 504 plans, or for any student who receives support through an equitable multi-level system of support.
- Double up on assistive technology including alternative augmentative communication (AAC) devices to support communication and linked to learning strategies at home. This includes low-tech assistive technology such as manipulatives (e.g. calculators, pencil grips).
- Identify and purchase assistive technology add-on applications to support the ability of students with IEPs to access general education curriculum and instruction (e.g. text to speech, changing online text complexity, closed captioning, access to online interpreters, listening technology, and visual overlays).
- Since many students benefit from speech to text translation, consider the use of applications such as auto captioning or providing Communication Access Realtime Translation (CART) services to support spoken words to text.
- Provide appropriate transparent masks or face shields that allow students to see the mouths and facial expressions of adults and peers so they are able to access instruction and group communication.

### **Improve and personalize professional learning and other supports for educators.**

- Provide online professional development or blended learning opportunities for school staff.
- Provide professional development on ways to support English Learners with additional digital or online methods.
- Implement systems to collect, manage, and analyze data to improve instruction and to manage student privacy.
- Support teachers' use of digital learning tools and integration of technology into their practice through coaching.
- Provide training in the principles of Universal Design for Learning (UDL).
- Provide professional development opportunities to learn how to secure and protect student data in a blended learning environment.

### **Use technology to facilitate student and educator connection and communication to educational resources in the community.**

- Identify a variety of college, career, and community learning opportunities (e.g. use of technology to connect schools with STEM professionals, virtual field trips, virtual mentoring).

### **Additional Resources**

- [Council for Exceptional Children: Key Considerations for School Reopenings](#)
- [WI DPI Assistive Technology Web Page](#): Information on Federal and State Laws, Lending Libraries, Online Modules, and State and Federal AT Resources
- [WI DPI Virtual Learning Time for Public Schools Web Page](#): District planning and implementation resources for a continuity of learning.
- [WI DPI Information on COVID 19 Web Page](#): A variety of information and resources organized by topics such as virtual, online, blended learning, student mental health, special education, literacy and mathematics, and many other areas related to supporting students and families throughout the public health emergency.