



## **Assistive Technology (AT) Forward December Update**

Greetings Assistive Technology (AT) Forward Community of Practice Members! The AT Forward Update is a monthly publication, which provides information about the AT Forward Project, highlights the upcoming AT Forward Community of Practice (CoP) meetings, and includes additional AT resources and tips. We are now over 700 participants strong and growing!

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## **Exciting News: Micro-Credentials for Assistive Technology!**

The Assistive Technology (AT) Forward is excited to provide free supported micro-credentials and macro-credentials assistive technology learning opportunities for the 2021-22 school year. Micro-credentialing is an opportunity for educators to learn on their own time, pace, and place. Through this process, you can earn a total of twelve badges for each completed micro-credentials. If you earn seven badges, you will qualify for a macro-credential. The courses are self-paced and coaching support sessions are available to provide guidance and to answer questions. There are many topics from which you can choose and customize your own learning, including assessment, AAC, vision, transition, etc. If you would like to register for a micro-credential learning opportunity and join an

AT learning community from across the state, please visit the [AT Forward Micro-Credentials Home Page](#). Thank you to the 151 people who have started their journey towards earning their Micro- Credentials!

**Congratulations to the following individuals who have completed an AT Forward Micro Credential:**

Melanie Baumunk from the School District of Janesville

Melanie is a teacher of students with Visual Impairments. Melanie has earned two badges, one in Vision and one in IEP / Implementation Melanie stated...

“I have been a TSVI for 24 years and have found that the needs of the students I serve have changed over the years. As their needs have changed, so have the tools available to help them be independent learners. I participated in these microcredential/ these modules because I wanted to help my students to continue to grow!”

Kathleen Kasberg from the school district of Stoughton received her badge in AAC/ Communications She wrote “I am a speech-language pathologist at Stoughton High School, and I recently began working with our OTs to provide consultation related to assistive technology in our district. I am passionate about Augmentative and Alternative Communication and have greatly appreciated the resources and the depth of information provided in the AAC micro credential program. AT Forward has been a great resource for me over the past 2 years and I encourage all SLPs to check it out!”

Others who have received one or more badges are:

Ann Barry from Racine Wisconsin

Mike Hipple from Wisconsin AAC Network

Claire Habeck from Oshkosh Area School District

Nicole Nichols from Janesville Schools

**January AT Forward CoP Meetings**

There will be two Community of Practice meetings in January:

**January 10, 2022:** [AT in the IEP: Using Data to Document Assistive Technology](#) This one hour session will review the process of including assistive technology in the IEP and answer common questions regarding when AT should be included, how it should be documented, and how data is used to write effective IEPs.

**January 18, 2022:** [How to Determine the Need for Technology Versus the Benefit](#)

How do we determine what is assistive technology versus instructional technology? This presentation will identify the difference between technology that is beneficial for all versus technology that is needed by some, and examples of student users will be provided.

As a reminder, the December 16, 2021 CoP meeting was recorded offline due to a state-wide power outage. The session will be available online for on-demand watching. The content referred to engagement of students with various abilities and assistive technology.

### **What is the Quality Indicator Spotlight for January?**

Each month will highlight a Quality Indicator for Assistive Technology, which can easily be utilized to provide training for district staff. For January the spotlight is [Indicator 4 AT Implementation](#)

“Assistive technology implementation pertains to the ways that assistive technology devices and services, as included in the IEP (including goals/objectives, related services, supplementary aids and services and accommodations or modifications) are delivered and integrated into the student’s educational program. Assistive technology implementation involves people working together to support the student using assistive technology to accomplish expected tasks necessary for active participation and progress in customary educational environments.”

### **Common Errors (QIAT)**

1. Implementation is expected to be smooth and effective without addressing specific components in a plan. Team members assume that everyone understands what needs to happen and knows what to do.
2. Plans for implementation are created and carried out by one IEP team member.
3. The team focuses on device acquisition and does not discuss implementation.
4. An implementation plan is developed that is incompatible with the instructional environments.
5. No one takes responsibility for the care and maintenance of AT devices and so they are not available or in working order when needed.
6. Contingency plans for dealing with broken or lost devices are not made in advance.

## Family Connections

When we discuss assistive technology services, people often think only of the school environment. However, Assistive Technology can and does assist people throughout a lifetime. Recently Amazon launched its Alexa Elder Care. AT Forward is not recommending or endorsing these devices, but it does bring up an interesting and ongoing discussion about the usefulness of devices such as Alexa, Echo and wearable technology. Check out the article [here](#) and remember that AT does not stop when an individual leaves the school setting.

## What is the Assessing Student's Needs for Assistive Technology ([ASNAT](#))?

ASNAT is the acronym for the manual and process of assessment in the area of Assistive Technology. If your school district would benefit from a step-by-step AT assessment guide, this is the manual for you. This [link](#) will take you to the entire manual, but we suggest that you break it down into manageable sections. This month we will look at [Chapters 15 AT in the IEP](#). Our CoP meeting on January 10 will also focus on how to document AT in the IEP. Chapter 15 not only discusses the various laws associated with Assistive Technology, but it also discusses how to write good measurable goals and fully document AT into the IEP. The following excerpt gives you a little information about what can be found in this important chapter.

“In writing annual goals, both academic and non-academic, it is important to include three components: the area of need; the direction of change; and the level of attainment (Wright & Laffin, 2001). In addition, it is critical to relate it to the functional task that the child needs to complete. For instance, a technically correct annual goal might be, “Bobby will activate a single switch 75% of the time.” However, it fails the “So What?” test. Why is it that you want Bobby to activate a switch in the first place? What will he accomplish? Will he operate a toy? Will he operate a computer? Will he use it to call for help? Will he use it to indicate he is ready to be moved to a new position? Will he greet a friend? If we always relate the use of the technology to a functional outcome, we will avoid the mistake of focusing on the equipment as an end in itself rather than a means to an end.”

## AAC Device of the Month



The [Assistive Technology Lending Center \(ATLC\)](#) is a lending library of high-end Alternative and Augmentative Communication (AAC) equipment for trial purposes. [Please follow this link for more information](#) and registration.

This month we are highlighting the [Nova Chat](#). Nova Chats are made by Saltillo Company. Nova Chats are durable AAC devices designed solely for the purpose of communication. The first thing you might notice about the Nova Chat is that the symbols are from a symbol set called SymbolStix. Symbolstix were developed by (News2You) N2Y Inc. The symbols are described as, “SymbolStix depicts activities and people as lively, vibrant stick figures, drawn with a distinctive flair to create “stick figures with an attitude”. ([N2Y](#)). They go on to further explain that “SymbolStix symbols depict generic persons as stick people with no gender, age, or culturally specific attributes to ensure that learners focus on the concepts portrayed rather than being distracted or confused by detail.” There are approximately 11,000 symbols in this set.

Like many AAC systems the Nova Chat uses a system called a Fitzgerald Key. A Fitzgerald Key “is **an organization of words in declarative sentence order** (subject phrase + verb phrase + object phrase) developed by Edith Fitzgerald in 1929 as a means of teaching grammatical language to children who were deaf and hearing impaired.” The system used color coding to assist learners with understanding the meaning of various parts of speech, such as pronouns colored yellow. By employing this system, learners can be assisted with cognitive scaffolding to help remove some of the memory requirements needed to use an AAC system.

The Nova Chat’s like other AAC devices have the ability to employ a variety of vocabulary sets. Another vocabulary set used by Nova Chat is Word Power. “Word Power uses high-frequency core words to facilitate quick and easy sentence generation. It also includes

nouns and adjectives that are organized in logical categories. Grammatical word classes have been included. As a sentence is being built, you often find that the next word you want to say can be spoken with one or two button presses. A spelling/word prediction page is used to spell words that are not included in the vocabulary set (*note that word prediction is **NOT** available on the Standard Model*)." For a learner who has some ideas about language structure this system can be very helpful for constructing grammatically correct sentences. For some AAC users this can be difficult to hold each word in their head so that they can create the sentence they were intending to communicate. WordPower is available in language sets from 20 icons per page to the WordPower25 scan and Touch that has a layout of 140. Touch Chats has some phrase-based communication sets as well as categories to choose language from.

You can check out a Nova chat from the ATLC Lending Library and see if this device fits the needs of your student.

### **Where can I turn if I have an Assistive Technology question?**

The [QIAT Community](#) is a free AT resource, which includes a searchable question and answer support tool. If you are interested in learning about support, you can subscribe [here](#).

Recently someone wrote in and asked, *"Does changing the font make it easier for students to read?"*

### **Responses from the group...**

"The most recent research on this points to positive reading impacts can come from increased spacing between characters which reduces visual crowding. The current understanding is that (as far as what can be shown in controlled studies) most of the perceived benefits of dyslexic-friendly fonts come from the fact that they include this extra-large inter-letter spacing. Here's a recent study abstract:"

[Room to read: The effect of extra-large letter spacing and coloured overlays on reading speed and accuracy in adolescents with dyslexia - ScienceDirect](#)

## Resource of the Month



The resource of the month is resources from Karen Janowski, Assistive Technology Consultant. She shared her resources for executive functioning on the QIAT listserv. Her resources follow the CoP meeting in December that talked about behavior and executive functioning skills. [Check out the resource here.](#) Karen lists and explains the use of low and no cost ideas for assisting individuals with self-regulation and executive functioning deficits.

## Additional AAC Links

The weather outside might look like winter, but we can always be thinking about summer, and with summer, comes summer camps! **Summer Camp Opportunity at UW-Whitewater for Students who use Augmentative and Alternative Communication (AAC) and Their Families**

UW-Whitewater is accepting applications for their Chatter Matters summer camp for kids who use AAC and their families. Through partnerships with a variety of children's charities in Wisconsin, up to 15 WI families will be able to receive scholarships to attend camp (an AAC user and up to two additional family members). For additional details, review the [flyer about this summer camp opportunity for students who use AAC.](#)

Looking for more information on AAC? Try Mike Hipple AAC Network on [Facebook](#). Recently Mike shared his perspective on AAC in an article titled, "[PrAACtical Perspectives: AAC and Special Education](#)," which was posted on PrAACtical. In the article, Mike raises a great point about stating that, "There are many false facts about the augmentative alternative communication community that may interfere with students getting what they need. One AAC false fact that always bugs me as an AAC communicator is all AAC Communicators have a cognitive disability. Mmm, this couldn't be more wrong. Yes, some do but there is a large number like me that do not. Google says 5.7% of students in public schools during the 2018-19 school year had a cognitive disability. Sadly, when doing research for this paper, I couldn't find the percentage of students who use AAC in public schools."

Sometimes all we need to do is start a conversation....



January is [Glaucoma Awareness Month](#). Glaucoma is the leading cause of irreversible blindness.

January 4 is [World Braille Day \(United Nations Day\)](#). This day is set aside to help spread awareness and recognize the importance of the use of braille as a form of communication.

January 24 is [Moebius Syndrome Awareness Day](#). "Moebius syndrome is a **rare congenital** (present at birth) condition that results from underdevelopment of the facial nerves that control some of the eye movements and facial expressions. The condition can also affect the nerves responsible for speech, chewing and swallowing."

### **Where can I find additional Assistive Technology resources?**

If you are looking for general Assistive Technology information, please refer to the resources found on the [DPI Website](#). **We have added a button to link all of the past Updates so you can return to them as a resource.**

Looking for more Assistive Technology information???? Check this out:

[SET-BC](#) is a virtual conference from British Columbia Canada. They run a yearly conference that this year will be all virtual and brought to you at no cost. You will need to register, but you can then view sessions either live or recorded. The conference focus is on inclusion, communication, vision, and access for students k-12. Sign up today for the February 1-4 conference. <https://set-bc.ourconference.ca/index.php>

### **What is the AT Forward?**

The [Assistive Technology \(AT\) Forward Project](#) works with educators, practitioners, caregivers, and families to increase student autonomy in utilizing Assistive Technology



tools to support access, engagement, and progress in learning. The Assistive Technology (AT) Forward provides a statewide Community of Practice (CoP), and by joining this CoP, members can attend [AT Forward CoP meetings](#), learn from experts in the field of AT, participate in micro-credential learning opportunities, and receive monthly email updates with AT information and resources. From AT beginner to expert, the AT Forward CoP welcomes all knowledge level backgrounds to [join the AT Forward CoP!](#)

### **Where can I find additional information about upcoming AT Forward CoP Meetings?**

For additional AT CoP meeting registration information, links to last year's AT Forward CoP presentations, and for a preview of the 2021-22 meetings, please visit our [AT Forward website](#). All AT Forward meetings will be held in a virtual format and will run from 4:00p.m.-5:00p.m. on their respective dates. In addition, all of the meetings will be recorded and published on the [AT Forward website](#).

### **Upcoming AT Forward CoP Meetings:**

**January 10, 2022:** AT in the IEP: Using Data to Document Assistive Technology

**January 18, 2022:** How to Determine the Need for Technology Versus the Benefit

**February 2, 2022:** Accessing Grade Level Content

**February 17, 2022:** Accessible Educational Materials (AEM) Resources: Accessible Electronic Texts for Students with Visual Impairments or Print Disabilities

**March 7, 2022:** Low and No Cost Resources to Support Assistive Technology

**April 26, 2022:** Finding Tools to Fit the Needs of Today's Students

**May 11, 2022:** Non-Academic Activities: Engaging Students in Social and Leisure Activities

**May 19, 2022:** Supporting Students with Medical Complexities

Let's move AT Forward together this year!

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