chapter 7

defining responsibilities for an assistive technology team

With Great Power Comes Great Responsibility: Defining the Plan

Maybe it was from gamma radiation. Maybe you were born with a genetic mutation that altered your DNA. Maybe you were bitten by a genetically altered or radioactive insect. Or maybe your parents sent you on a rocket to Earth just as your home planet was about to be destroyed. Maybe you read this book. Somehow, anyway, you got your AT powers and knowledge. But with great power comes great responsibility. Whether you're the sole assistive technology trainer or just one of the members of your district's team of superheroes, you have a job to do.

Actually, you have many jobs to do—and the first one is to define everything you need to accomplish to establish the assistive technology team.

Your Granddaddy Master To-Do List

The First–Then board is a great behavioral support to introduce a student to a visual schedule. Picture symbols of the current and next activity are placed in the appropriate areas then adjusted for each subsequent activity. It can also be used as an intervention to reward a student for completing a task. For example: First: Complete worksheet—Then: Computer time. Simple and very effective. Try this same strategy with the team's master to-do list (Fig. 7.1).

Break out the interactive whiteboard if you have one, but a big ol' pad of paper will work nicely, too. As a team, sit down and make a list of all the things you need to accomplish as you move forward. This is your "Granddaddy Master To-Do List." Lucky for you, we made a start on all this work for you. Not only did we develop a list for you, but we also think we have answers to all of these questions here in this book. Be sure to discuss these as a team so that our solutions will lead to *your* solutions. If they work for us, they might just work for you.

Here are some things that should/could go on the Granddaddy in question format. Once you have created a list, prioritize the items on the list. Then, once you answer these questions, cross them off and give yourself a pat on the back. To make it easier for you to wrap your brain around, we've split the Granddaddy into two main categories—Internal Procedures and External Procedures. Internal procedures are the tasks that need to be completed by the team, for the team. External procedures are the tasks that need to be completed by the team, for other educators.

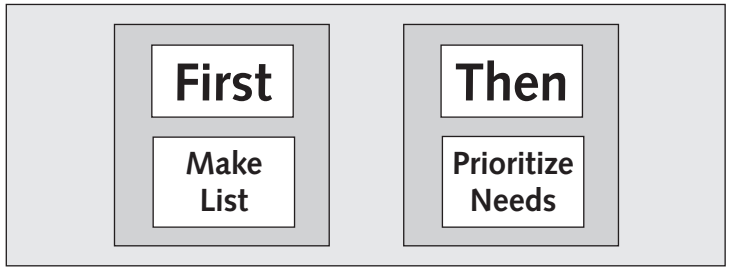

Figure 7.1 First–Then board for your Granddaddy Master To-Do List

granddaddy master to-do list

internal procedures

How will caseloads be distributed equally among all trainers?

Will each trainer have a set number of schools based on the number of special education programs in each school?

How will individual and classroom evaluations be conducted?

What data needs to be collected on assistive technology services and how will the data be collected?

How will inventory be tracked? Who will be in charge of inventory and purchasing?

How will caseloads/workloads be tracked?

How does the team learn what it needs to learn? How does the team conduct internal staff development?

When and how often will the team have team meetings?

What forms are needed and what will they look like?

What are the procedures for summer assistive technology services?

What other responsibilities does each trainer have? Who sits on committees? Who is the social coordinator? Who tracks external staff development? Who builds the website?

external procedures

How will an IEP team request an assistive technology evaluation?

How will an educator know when to request an evaluation?

How does an IEP team integrate recommendations from an assistive technology trainer into the IEP?

How can administrative support be fostered?

How will educators learn about assistive technology services?

How will trainers follow up with educators and students?

How many staff development workshops will be offered to educators?

How can the team promote awareness of its own existence to other entities in the school district?

It's Ours! We Own It: Team Power

One thing to note before the genesis of the Granddaddy Master To-Do List is that this list should be created and owned by the team. The assistive technology team leader should participate, and other higher-level administrators can be invited to participate; but ultimately, if the list is externally generated for the team, the team runs the risk of not having complete buy-in.

Let's try an analogy here to make this point crystal clear. Two similar students need assistive technology devices. One student—let's call him Jerry—doesn't have the opportunity to choose his preferred solution; he is just handed a device and told to use it. A second student—let's call her Maggie—works in conjunction with her teachers (and assistive technology trainer) to pick out a device she wants to use. If all other variables are equal, which of these two students will more effectively integrate the device? We'll place our money on Maggie, because she was given ownership in the decision. This same concept applies to the creation of the Granddaddy Master To-Do list. If the team members are given the opportunity and responsibility to develop their own policies, these individuals are more likely to value and practice those policies.

The Scenario Test Strategy: Try It On and See If It Fits

As the assistive technology team makes decisions on all of the items on the Granddaddy Master To-Do List, it is a good idea to run those decisions through a series of scenarios. We call this strategy "scenario testing." This strategy is basically just reviewing each procedure, from start to finish, using all sorts of different scenarios. Will our procedure work for teachers of the visually impaired? For administrators? For preschool students? For students transitioning from one school to another? Will our procedure work for someone who is using low-tech strategies? For a student who needs word prediction software? For a student who needs an augmentative communication device? For a student who needs to use a pencil grip? Will this procedure work if we are working with twins when the 63 moons of Jupiter align while Orion is in the southern hemisphere during high tide? If your procedure works in every scenario, then you know you have a good solution.

how to distribute caseloads

When an assistive technology team consists of more than one person, you need to decide how to distribute the caseloads equitably. In truth, there is no way to make the caseloads absolutely equal, because there are too many variables. Every single situation is unique and presents its own challenges. So, here is our suggestion. Get a list of all of the special education positions in the district per school, not including the related service staff. Add up the number of special education teacher positions in each school and score each school with that number. Then assign each school to a specific assistive technology trainer geographically, in a way that keeps the combined school scores as equal as possible. Each time a new team member is added (or subtracted), the scores can be used to reassign schools/cases. This model provides a way of keeping the caseloads as equal as possible by keeping one parameter constant: assistive technology trainers serve all special education teachers. Furthermore, this model makes it easy for teachers to get to know their assistive technology trainer because they won't be getting a different trainer for each request. Assistive technology trainers will feel more like a part of the school, and teachers will ultimately feel more comfortable going to that single person to brainstorm strategies.

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Team Meetings

In order for a fledgling assistive technology team to crack out of its shell, the collective minds that make up the team need to discuss exactly how they will develop into something that is going to spread its wings and soar through the sky. For the first few years the assistive technology team meetings will need to be held frequently. Initially, in fact, these meetings could be held as often as once a week. At team inception there are many policies that need to be established, both internally and externally, in order to establish a synergistic vision of purpose. Without these policies, individual trainers will be confused as to their respective roles and be left wondering what protocols are in place to help guide them through their job responsibilities. Even established assistive technology teams that have been in existence for a number of years need to meet periodically

to keep everyone on the same page, solidify a collective mission, and update members on current practices. The following are a list of strategies to help you stay on track during team meetings:

Agendas. One team member should be chosen to be the agenda creator. Everyone on the team submits items to discuss at the meeting to the agenda creator. This person collects all of these ideas in the agenda for the next meeting. If it makes things easier, using an online discussion board or other online tools (such as wikis) could serve as a strategy for creating an agenda. Using an open-ended, unfiltered agenda provides everyone with the opportunity to contribute to the creation of what will be discussed at each team meeting.

Time frames. When the team is discussing a topic of great importance, it might take some time to hammer out all of the points and reach a decision that everyone can accept. Extended debate on a whopper of an agenda item might lead to fatigue with the discussion, and people will start thinking, "I don't care. I give in, because I'm tired of talking about it." This is a bad situation. Decisions based on people relenting because they're tired of the discussion will breed resentment faster than a jackrabbit on a bullet train moving at the speed of light. Everyone needs to feel like the decision that has been made is based on logic and reason, even if they don't agree with the decision.

In order to prevent this fatigue, set time frames for how long a discussion will last. If time is growing short and a decision has not been reached, then take the last 15 minutes to list everyone's ideas so you have a starting point when it is time to resume the discussion. This will provide everyone the time to consciously process what's been explored as well as allow everyone's subconscious a crack at absorbing the discussion. When it is time to revisit the discussion, everyone on the team will feel rested and the team as a whole can be assured that the decisions will be made thoughtfully and with fresh perspectives.

Minutes. Using a rotation model, everyone on the team should get to experience the joy of being the person to record the minutes of the meetings. The meeting minutes, or summary of items discussed, will serve as documentation of the decisions made. As time marches on and as decisions begin to pile up, some decisions might become cloudy and vague or be forgotten entirely by individual team members. By archiving the minutes, the team has a running record of every decision, which can be used as a source of reference. The minutes can

also serve as a mini to-do list for each trainer. Using various colors to highlight portions of the minutes is a way to delineate collective decisions, stressing tasks that need to be accomplished, and to emphasize responsibilities. A final copy of the minutes can be saved in a shared location readily accessible to all team members. In the distant future, the minutes will also provide a historical perspective to reflect on team growth and accomplishments.

Divide, conquer, and share. No one person, or even an entire team, knows everything there is to know about assistive technology. The field of assistive technology is dynamic and growing. People around the globe are perpetually coming up with new tools and new ways of implementing existing tools. The best you can do is learn as much as possible whenever you can.

It's easy to get caught up in the hustle and bustle of meeting the daily needs of students and teachers. There never seems to be enough time to learn new tools and strategies. However, one way to ensure that new tools and strategies are being explored is to schedule an internal staff development time for each meeting. The team could generate a list of tools and strategies of interest to everyone on the team. This list should include an exploration of the tools already available within the school district, as these are the tools that will be most readily accessible to students and most frequently recommended by trainers. Each trainer could research an item from the list and give a short presentation about it during the meeting. Vendors or other presenters also could be invited to come and demonstrate their innovations. These short introductory trainings will give the team a working knowledge of the tool or strategy while minimizing the time it takes to prepare the presentation.

You are not alone. Most days you're out there doing your job on your own—evaluating students, providing consultations, and conducting trainings. When your team meets again, take time to share success stories during meetings. Find time to brainstorm tools and strategies that could be used for more difficult scenarios encountered in the schools. Brainstorming can create a positive energy that will inspire and encourage those in need. Always remember, especially during rough patches, that you're a team working together to provide for students who need your services. As a team member, one trainer is never alone and has built-in supports to lean on.

The team that plays together stays together. In order for a team to jell, there needs to be trust. Earning the trust of another person and learning to trust other people takes time. As in any relationship, the more quality time that can be spent fostering and caring for the relationship, the more likely it is that the parties in the relationship will begin to trust each other. If you need ideas for activities that team members could do together, watch any sports-centric movie. Any sporting movie worth its salt will have a scene where the star athlete bonds with the rest of the team during an enjoyable activity. In most cases, the scene involves the team heading to an establishment to partake of some nourishment followed by a few frosty beverages. If that sort of thing works for the team in the movies, why wouldn't it work for your assistive technology team?

Other activities that bring a team together could include golf competitions (miniature golf works if not everyone on the team can swing a five-iron), go-cart racing, movie nights, dining out at a restaurant, video game competitions, trivia contests, food drives, charity walks, orienteering, geocacheing, apple picking, hiking, rock climbing, spelunking, attending sporting events, poker nights, skydiving, synchronized snake charming, grizzly wrestling, scorpion juggling, and tornado chasing. Any activity you can think of that might be fun to do with more than one person can be organized and done together as a team. If the event is planned far enough in advance, arrangements can be made so that everyone on the team can be present to participate in the fun. Teammates who trust each other will work better together and be more willing to share thoughts, experiences, and concerns—ultimately leading to a more productive team.

ATlantis Online. Assistive technology teams produce stuff, loads and loads of stuff. Handouts for workshops, tutorials on computer applications, and assistive technology evaluations are just three examples of this stuff. Teams collect all sorts of resources, too, loads and loads of resources. Documents, spreadsheets, multimedia presentations, and websites are just some of the thousands of different resources that will be collected. Assistive technology teams generate ideas, too, loads and loads of ideas. Ideas about new workshops to offer, tutorials to create, and ways to better serve educators and students are three examples from an array of ideas generated by the team. To make sense of all of these materials and ideas, the team should develop a shared online filing cabinet to warehouse all of these informative goodies.

There are a number of different options the team can consider when creating an online warehouse. The team could establish a shared hard drive over a computer network. Folders could be created to house and organize the information. Online course delivery services, such as Blackboard or Moodle, are other resources that could be tapped. A course could be set up where everyone on the team is an instructor and able to use the tools of the course to share materials and hold discussions. Furthermore, a wiki could be an alternate online tool used to share ideas as well as materials. Whichever tool is chosen, the team should make sure that the information stored within the system is secure and backed up. With each item that is added to this information warehouse, the importance of backing up the data and keeping it secure grows. In time, this area could become a river from which the entire team drinks, and an ocean where everyone swims, and a dock where everyone can securely moor their data. Securing and backing up the information eliminates the risk of the data being swallowed by the sea and lost forever to digital undertow.

No matter what you choose, remember to give it a wickedly awesome-sounding name—something catchy and flashy that summarizes its function. You know, something like "The Drive for Cool AT People" or the "ATomic Information Zone" or even the ever-popular "ATLas Hugged." If you don't come up with a cool-sounding name you'll end up with something boring like "AT Drive." We ask you, who's gonna want to use something with a name like "AT Drive" when you could have something edgy and memorable like, "The ATackle Box" or "Stargate ATlantis"?

Advisory Committees

Somehow in every school district, decisions are being made regarding technology. Depending on the nature of these decision-making processes, there may or may not be someone speaking up to ensure that students with special needs are being considered. Members of the assistive technology team can serve as advisors to counsel those responsible for making district-wide technology decisions. If a school district uses committees to make technology decisions, then members of the team should serve as representatives on these committees, to guide them to decisions that address the needs of the widest range of students. Because an assistive technology trainer spends much of the workweek in schools, as a committee member or advisor this trainer can bring perspectives to light

that might not otherwise be considered. For example, when a committee or administrator is making decisions about furniture to buy, the assistive technology trainer can suggest adjustable tables or shelves so that they are equally accessible to all. The presence of an assistive technology trainer on committees or in the role of advisor not only gives the practice of assistive technology a voice but also increases the recognition of the team as a whole. Networking with other educators from other departments allows the assistive technology team to learn about the challenges and accomplishments of others. Participation on committees provides an opportunity for every member of that committee to learn from one another.

Staff Development Workshops

One initiative worthy of consideration is developing an armada of staff development workshops. These workshops would provide educators with an opportunity to increase their knowledge about the assistive technology tools and strategies available to them, and to learn how to implement them in their classrooms. The assistive technology team can use staff development workshops to increase awareness of best-practice techniques used in special education. Furthermore, the assistive technology team can use the workshops as a conduit for advertising services to educators who were previously unaware of what the team has to offer. Even if only two or three educators attend a workshop, that is two or three more educators who now have additional tools in their work shed that will be used to reach multiple students.

When developing content for a staff development workshop, consider the goals and needs of the school, the special education department, and even the entire school district. If a school has established a goal of improving the reading abilities of every student as part of a school-wide initiative, then a workshop on available tools can be developed and strategies can be implemented to assist and enhance reading development. If "increasing the use of communication strategies" is currently a hot topic in the special education department, then consider offering a workshop on strategies to facilitate communication. If the school district has decided that positive behavior support is going to be a district-wide initiative, then offer a workshop on tools and strategies that support this initiative. Conducting staff development at a convenient time and location on topics

relevant to the educators' particular situation will help to ensure high levels of attendance. Providing hands-on workshops that offer tips that can be implemented immediately into a classroom can empower educators to use additional tools and strategies. Workshops can provide an educator with the needed spark that will ignite a bonfire that will burn for years to come.

assistive technology trainer tool kit

Holy broken device, Batman! How are we ever going to help this teacher and student? Just like Batman, an assistive technology trainer needs a utility belt to carry the many gadgets needed to be ready for any situation.

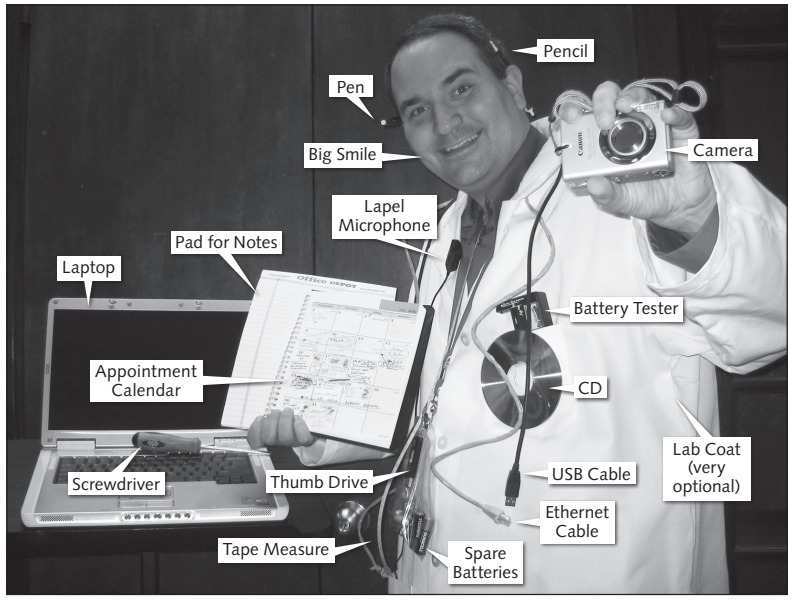

Figure 7.2 The essential assistive technology trainer tool kit

Now, the likelihood that the Joker will appear while you're out doing a visit at a school is pretty slim, so maybe you can skip the belt, but you should keep the following items with you or in your Batmobile (by which we mean your car). If you don't have these items, well, your birthday is less than a year away.

Time to hit up Commissioner Gordon (by which we mean your administrator) for some goodies:

- Screwdriver—oh heck, a whole set of screwdrivers
- Tape measure—you'd be surprised how often you need to measure a desk, door, keyboard, or room
- Calendar/planner—for scheduling hundreds of appointments
- Pad of paper—for taking notes and drawing pictures; this is a low-tech tool that allows you to do both
- Pens and pencils—well, if you're gonna have paper in your tool kit, you need to have something to write with
- Batteries, lots and lots of batteries—you always seem to need the size that you don't have
- Battery tester—time and money saver
- Battery charger—rechargeable batteries are awesome
- USB cable—portable word processors, computers, and printers all use this cable to transfer information, so it is always good to have a spare
- Ethernet cable—not every place is wireless, so this cable can help you plug into the Internet wherever you can find a spare jack
- Blank CDs—burn, baby, burn
- Digital camera—it doesn't have to be fancy; cheap will work, but you want your own because you'll be taking lots of pictures for lots of reasons
- USB thumb drive (maybe two or three)—an easier way to transfer and keep files; also useful for backing up files
- Laptop—you need one because of the amount of time you're going to spend out in the field; the greater distance you have to travel, the more imperative it is for you to use a laptop
- *The Practical (and Fun) Guide to Assistive Technology in Public Schools*—because this book is your best friend, you're going to want to keep it with

you at all times. We know the authors. They're pretty nice people (well, one of them is anyway). If you meet them someday, they might even sign the book for you. There is no better way to "Oooh" and "Aaah" your friends than by showing them that you have a signed copy of a book about assistive technology!

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Clones and Conferences: Learn, Baby, Learn

Many school districts have staff development days built into their calendars. During those days, educators participate in workshops designed to improve productivity, communication, and classroom strategies. These staff development days offer an opportunity for the assistive technology team to provide valuable information to educators. But if the team members are conducting workshops, they are prevented from attending presentations that would be valuable for their own professional development. The answer—cloning! Making duplicates of yourself is the only way to be in more that one place at a time. Just imagine: an assistive technology trainer could be presenting great tools and strategies in one room while simultaneously attending a presentation on pertinent information in the room next door.

Unfortunately, human cloning has not been perfected—at least, not to our knowledge. This means we must find our professional development elsewhere. To put it simply (and to stop cloning around), the assistive technology trainers should have an external mechanism in place for learning about new practices, products, and theories in the world of education. Attending local, regional, state, national, and international conferences is an essential way to gather such knowledge. By participating in external meetings and conferences, trainers will become acquainted with new tools as well as successful implementation strategies for those tools. When traveling to a conference, be sure to bring a few clones with you so that you don't miss any exhibits, any sessions, or any opportunities to meet new educators. When planning the initiatives for the team, funding for attendance at conferences should be a high-priority item. The wealth of knowledge that you and your clones bring back to share with the rest of the team could create a cyclone of ideas with widespread implications for future planning.

feed your brain

When zombies scrape their way out of their crypts and walk the earth they are looking for some nourishment. Oh, sure, they'll settle for any meat they can get—but if George Romero taught us anything, it is that zombies crave brains. Why is that? Is it that brains taste better than other parts of the body? No, probably not. It's probably because zombies think that if they swallow a brain, they will also absorb the knowledge packed within it. Zombie logic is simple. Eat brain, get smarter.

If you were a starving zombie working in assistive technology your natural inclination would be to eat the brains of those who know a thing or two about assistive technology. And where would a zombie think to find people with knowledge of assistive technology? Why, a college or university, of course. Unfortunately for you, only a few universities offer degrees in assistive technology so you'll need to take the initiative to seek out the knowledge in other ways. Luckily information pertaining to assistive technology is virtually everywhere you look. There is a wealth of information available if you look in the right places:

- Websites—such as Special Education Technology BC (www.setbc.org)
- Podcasts—such as the *A.T.TIPScast* (www.attipscast.wordpress.com)
- Online videos—such as the ones at Teacher Tube (www.teachertube.com)
- Webinars—such as the ones you can find at the Center for Implementing Technology in Education (www.cited.org)
- Groups in virtual environments—such as Second Life (www.secondlife.com)
- Social networking groups—such as the ones on Facebook (www.facebook.com) or Twitter (www.twitter.com)
- Conferences—such as the one hosted by the Assistive Technology Industry Association
- Listservs—such as the one hosted by the Quality Indicators for Assistive Technology Services Consortium

- Professional journals—such as the *Journal for Special Education Technology*
- Magazines—such as *Closing the Gap Solutions*
- Books—such as this one!

Assistive technology folks are also very generous with their knowledge, resources, and brains. With minimal effort you'll be able to find some excellent and helpful resources free of charge. Embrace your inner zombie and feast on the knowledge of others.

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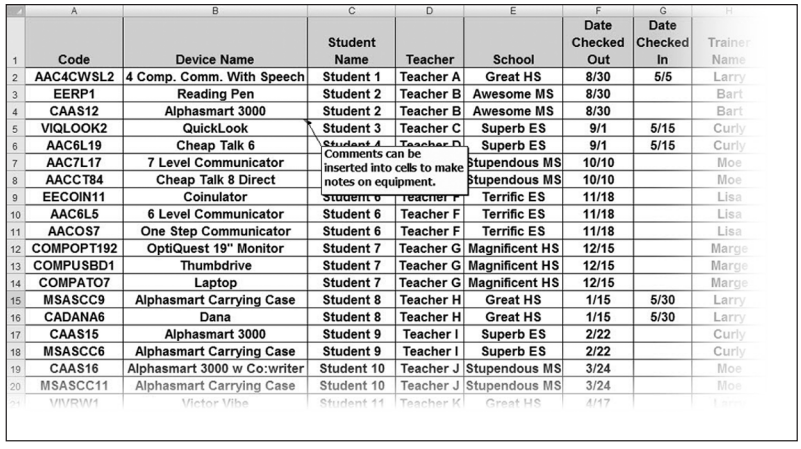
Know the Code: Inventory Tracking

Every item purchased or created by the school district via the assistive technology team should be labeled with a unique identifier so that it can be tracked in an inventory system. Then items can be recorded as "checked out" when distributed by assistive technology trainers to educators for implementation with a student or with a group of students. When a device is no longer needed, the educator returns the item to the assistive technology trainer, who in turn documents its return to the general inventory, allowing other trainers to perpetuate the process.

When choosing an inventory system, it's important to find one that is user-friendly and reliable. An inventory system that crashes frequently and loses data or a system that is cumbersome and awkward for people to navigate will cause more problems than it solves. The same principle that applies when selecting a tool for a student applies when selecting an inventory mechanism for the team: simplicity of use increases the likelihood of successful use. With that in mind, choose a system that everyone on the team feels comfy enough to snuggle up on the couch with, and implement it wholeheartedly.

The system could be something as simple as maintaining an Excel spreadsheet that is housed in a shared location (Fig. 7.3). Each trainer records the name of the device, the code on the device, the date it was checked out, to whom it was checked out, and, upon return, the date it is checked back in. If everyone on

the team is comfortable using a database program such as FileMaker Pro or Microsoft Access, or an online spreadsheet such as in Google Docs, then a more sophisticated system can be implemented. If someone on the team or in the school district can develop a web-based database with fancy, spinning, three-dimensional visuals of each device accompanied with a sexy robotic voice that tells you how good you look when you're about to check out a device—well, then, all the better. Whether you are using an antiquated system from the Stone Age or a cybernetic tool from the future, the choice of tool doesn't really matter as long as it is reliable and easy for everyone to use.



	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H
1	Code	Device Name	Student Name	Teacher	School	Date Checked Out	Date Checked In	Trainer Name
2	AAC4CWSL2	4 Comp. Comm. With Speech	Student 1	Teacher A	Great HS	8/30	5/5	Larry
3	EERP1	Reading Pen	Student 2	Teacher B	Awesome MS	8/30		Bart
4	CAAS12	Alphasmart 3000	Student 2	Teacher B	Awesome MS	8/30		Bart
5	VIQLOOK2	QuickLook	Student 3	Teacher C	Superb ES	9/1	5/15	Curly
6	AAC6L19	Cheap Talk 6	Student 4	Teacher D	Superb ES	9/1	5/15	Curly
7	AAC7L17	7 Level Communicator	Student 5	Teacher E	Stupendous MS	10/10		Moe
8	AACCT84	Cheap Talk 8 Direct	Student 5	Teacher E	Stupendous MS	10/10		Moe
9	EECOIN11	Coinulator	Student 6	Teacher F	Terrific ES	11/18		Lisa
10	AAC6L5	6 Level Communicator	Student 6	Teacher F	Terrific ES	11/18		Lisa
11	AACOS7	One Step Communicator	Student 6	Teacher F	Terrific ES	11/18		Lisa
12	COMPOPT192	OptiQuest 19" Monitor	Student 7	Teacher G	Magnificent HS	12/15		Marge
13	COMPUSBD1	Thumbdrive	Student 7	Teacher G	Magnificent HS	12/15		Marge
14	COMPATO7	Laptop	Student 7	Teacher G	Magnificent HS	12/15		Marge
15	MSASCC9	Alphasmart Carrying Case	Student 8	Teacher H	Great HS	1/15	5/30	Larry
16	CADANA6	Dana	Student 8	Teacher H	Great HS	1/15	5/30	Larry
17	CAAS15	Alphasmart 3000	Student 9	Teacher I	Superb ES	2/22		Curly
18	MSASCC6	Alphasmart Carrying Case	Student 9	Teacher I	Superb ES	2/22		Curly
19	CAAS16	Alphasmart 3000 w Co:writer	Student 10	Teacher J	Stupendous MS	3/24		Moe
20	MSASCC11	Alphasmart Carrying Case	Student 10	Teacher J	Stupendous MS	3/24		Moe
21	VIVRW1	Victor Vibe	Student 11	Teacher K	Great HS	4/17		Larry

Figure 7.3 Sample equipment inventory tracking system

When choosing an inventory tracking system, consider one that's capable of aggregating important data that will provide answers to questions the team might have in the future. As the team grows and develops, it may be important to determine financial and inventory trends (Fig. 7.4). Much like determining whether a student has made progress by collecting data on the student's goals, the assistive technology team can determine its own progress by analyzing data that has been collected over a period of time. It is important to realize, however, that the primary function of the inventory system should be to maintain the current status of equipment and not for data analysis. If an inventory system has the ability to collect and sort data, those features should be considered a bonus within the system. Ease of use and reliability should never be sacrificed for data compilation.

Financial Trends	Inventory Trends
How much was spent on devices?	How many devices were broken?
How much was spent on certain types of devices?	How many devices of a certain type were broken?
How much was spent to support each school in the district?	How many devices were lost?
How much was spent per student?	How many devices were checked out per quarter?
How much was spent per disability?	How many devices were checked out based on individual evaluations?
How much was spent per assistive technology trainer?	How many devices were checked out based on classroom evaluations?

Figure 7.4 Examples of potential questions pertaining to financial and inventory trends

molly's tattoo parlor

"Yeah Windy, nice tat, dude!" said Vod, the single hit voice output device, to the touch window strolling out of Molly's Tattoo Parlor.

"Thanks, Vod. Doesn't it look sweet? Right here on my side. I'm pretty happy with it," agreed Windy as he surveyed the long line of devices waiting to enter.

"Yo! Check it!" hollered the portable word processor. "What's it say there, Windy? Whatchya get? Let's see it!"

"I can see it," declared the portable magnifier. "It says C-A-T-W-0-3. Looking good, my man!"

"Yo, Windy? You think they'll be able to get this goop off my face?" asked Vod as he shuffled

Voice Output Device

Touch Window

forward in line. "Someone slapped a sticker on me once. Then, when it got ripped off, all this gunk was left behind. They've just gotta get it off, ya know?"

"You won't believe the stuff they have in there, Vod. Molly will clean you up so good you'll think you've got a dynamic screen on you. Trust me. I know. I just went through it and I feel just like I did when I got pulled out of my box," said Windy with a reassuring nod.

"What about me?" shook the vibrating switch in a hopeful tone. "Did you see anything in there that can help me?"

"What's wrong with you, Vib? You look fine to me. What are you even doing in this line? You don't need a tattoo," said the enormous XY table standing behind Vib.

"Oh, no?" said Vib, as he leaned all the way over to expose his base. "Take a look at this!"

"What? I can't see anything! What are you trying to show us?" said the XY table, sliding his tray back and forth in a shrugging motion.

"Yeah, Vib," agreed the portable magnifier. "I can't see anything—and if there were something to see, I'd be able to see it!"

"That's just it," explained Vib with a slight tremor in his voice. "There used to be a code on my rump in black marker. But I've been used so much it…, it…, it just wore away. What if I get lost? No one will know who I belong to. I could get thrown

Portable Word Processor


Portable Magnifier


Vibrating Switch


XY Table

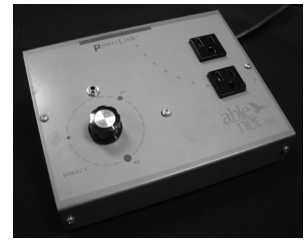
away. Shoved in a closet. I don't want that to happen to me! Not to me!"

"Calm down, dude. Don't wig out," Windy said with a brief pat on the side. "That's not going to happen. Molly's gonna fix you right up with a tattoo just like mine. You'll be all set. Just chill out and relax, man."

"Yeah … yeah … yeah. I will," nodded Vib, still trembling slightly.

"Hey, Windy. Did it hurt when she gave you the tat?" asked the XY table.

"Nah, not a bit. Then again, I'm pretty used to getting poked and prodded all day, so for someone like you who just sits around hour after hour, my pretty lady, it might sting a bit," Windy chuckled.



Environmental Control Unit

Jelly Bean Switch

"Ha ha, very funny," chortled the XY table., "But if I were a girl I'd be called an XX table, now wouldn't I, smarty pants? Geesh. I was just asking if it hurt. Looks like sweet Molly gave you a bad attitude along with that tattoo. Sometimes you can be such a pane."

"Knock it off, you two," interrupted the environmental control unit in an authoritative voice. "It's JB's turn to go in. Good luck, JB!"

"Thanks! This is so exciting! I feel electric!" said the jelly bean switch as the parlor door swung shut behind him.

■ ■ ■ ■ ■

There are many different methods you can use to place codes on equipment. Placing a sticker on a device is one way to quickly label every device in inventory; however, over time stickers can be torn off, curl, or collect filth that is impossible to remove. Writing an inventory code on devices with permanent magic marker results in an identification system that is neither permanent nor magical. With everyday wear and tear, the ink will begin to wear off, making

the codes difficult to read. There is only one sure way to prevent the code from disappearing from a device and that is to give it a permanent tattoo. Etching the code right into the device using an engraver will provide a permanent solution that will endure for the life of the device (Fig. 7.5). Of course, be careful to assess the device for tolerance to vibration before engraving. You might want to think twice before using the tattoo parlor if you have some delicate circuitry.

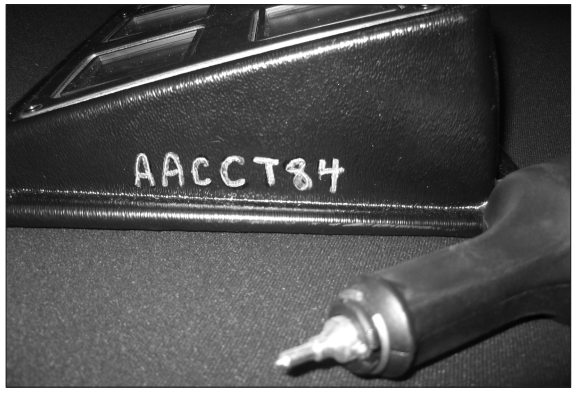


Figure 7.5 Code etched on device using engraver

License Detector: Software Tracking

Physical devices and hardware make up only one portion of the inventory maintained by the assistive technology team. The other major component is software. When software is purchased, what is really being purchased is a license to use that software. Every software publisher maintains rules and stipulations in their licensing structure, and it is the responsibility of the assistive technology team to ensure that these licensing restrictions are observed by the school district. Whether using a separate tracking system or incorporating software tracking into the hardware inventory process, the team should keep track of the number of licenses owned and how many are in use for every software title. One team member, possibly the team leader, could be responsible for maintaining this licensing information. This person would also be responsible for ordering more licenses as necessary.

Contact Lenses: Keep Track of Your Hard Work

It is crucial to have some collection method for recording consultations, evaluations, and trainings conducted by the assistive technology team. Tracking every contact every team member has with a student or educator will provide a way of analyzing how many people have been influenced by assistive technology. When attempting to promote the expansion of the team (or promote the very idea of creating a team), you can be ready with data about how many educators and students benefited from the services provided by the assistive technology team.

A caseload tracking system, just like an inventory system, must be both user-friendly and reliable. It is also essential that it be accessible to every trainer on a daily basis. The system might be something as simple as a color-coded Excel spreadsheet (Fig. 7.6) or as sophisticated as a web-based interface with back-end database with multitiered user roles. Assistive technology trainers should be able to enter basic data about a student as well as information about what transpired during the contact. If a teacher stops an assistive technology trainer in the hall and inquires about a student, the system should have a place to note this. The system should be able to document evaluations and differentiate them from consultations. Dates of every contact should be collected and catalogued within the system. Furthermore, the system should have a way of differentiating contacts the team has recently served from contacts that have not received services in a long time. Any system can be used as long as data can be sorted and extracted in an efficient manner.

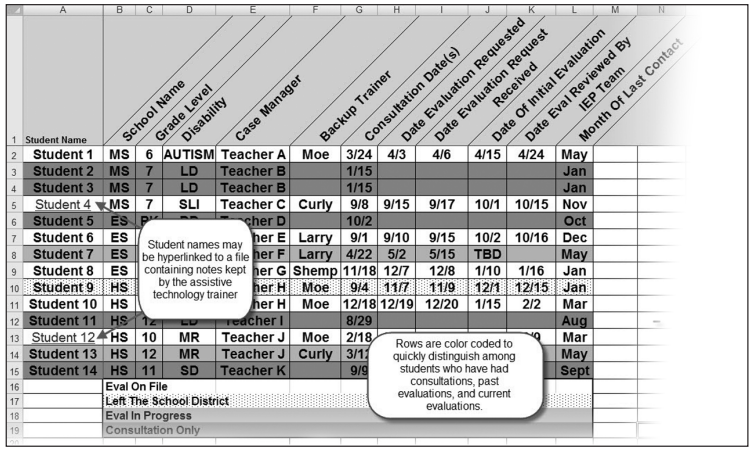


Figure 7.6 Sample caseload tracking system

Go Big or Go Home

We're not advocating fudging numbers. We're not saying you should lie if ever asked for some numbers from administrators. No, no, no. Never, never, never. We'd never advocate something like that. What we *do* advocate is keeping track of *every* contact the assistive technology team members have with teachers and students. Archives of all e-mails relevant to a service provided by the team to an educator or student should be maintained, and yearly personal calendars should be housed in a safe location in case dates of past events need to be retrieved. Every conversation and question, no matter how small or seemingly insignificant, should be tracked. You never know how one comment to a teacher might turn into a windfall of ideas or how one off-the-cuff suggestion to a teaching assistant might result in a flurry of activity. Therefore, every contact should be treated as significant and should be counted. In this way, when someone does come poking around for data, the assistive technology team will be confident that the numbers they have are as high as they can possibly be while reflecting the true nature of the job.

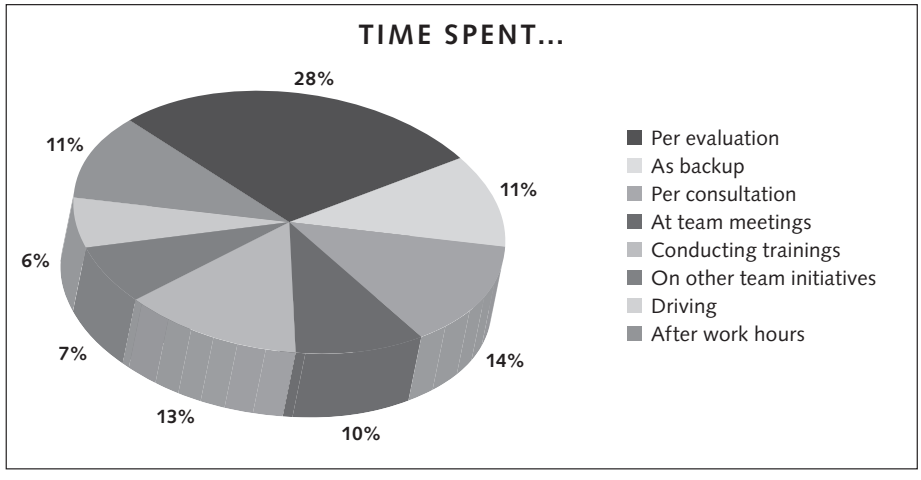


Figure 7.7 Sample pie graph showing the "time spent" breakdown for a trainer

The data collected can be used to make better decisions. If the data hasn't been collected, the team runs the risk of making choices based on intuition alone. Unless you're a cop on a television show, no one is going to listen to your gut feelings. Allocate 10 minutes at the end of each day to collect and compile the

necessary data that can be analyzed later at the discretion of the team (Fig 7.7). This data could be important to building a case for the creation of an assistive technology team, promoting the growth of your team, or simply keeping the team members you have when budget cuts loom (Fig 7.8).

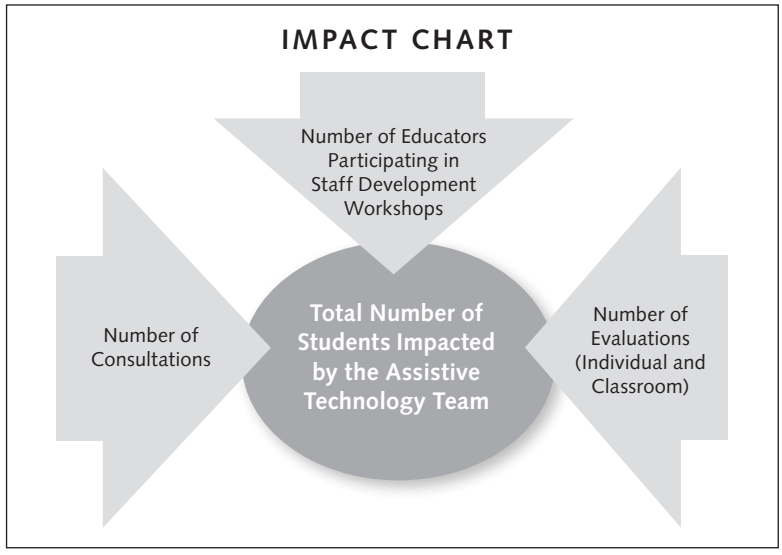


Figure 7.8 Data is necessary to evidence impact on students

Your Wish Is Granted: Funding Sources

You have to keep your eyes wide open. You can't even blink. If you blink or look away for just a split second, the tricky leprechaun will disappear forever. But now that you've caught that clever little troublemaker in your unwavering gaze, he has to lead you to his treasure. A common misconception is that leprechauns keep their gold at the end of the rainbow. This is hogwash. The "treasure at the end of the rainbow" story is nothing but leprechaun propaganda spread to lead the general public away from the real hiding spot: the special education department of a public school.

The majority of funding for assistive technology devices should come from the special education department. The budget for the special education department should include appropriations for assistive technology services and devices.

extra! extra! read all about it!

Caseload analysis may be necessary to justify future positions, to validate position retention, to substantiate funding allocation, or even to advocate for the very creation of a team. Administrators making these decisions may associate assistive technology with other related services and therefore ask only about the number of evaluations completed by the team. If this occurs, don't provide the number of evaluations in isolation, but rather as part of a volley of information pertaining to every contact made by the assistive technology team. The number of evaluations could be a small percentage in relation to the number of consultations completed.


The Daily G

Sunday, March 5, 2008

AT: More Than Evaluations

Assistive Technology Teams have become the best bang for school districts' bucks. By providing educators with strategies and tools, classrooms are rapidly becoming havens for the Universal Design for Learning. Students facing educational obstacles are using tools currently available in their classrooms to learn in new ways.

Such is the case in our local Super Duper School District where every school has achieved Adequate Yearly Progress for five consecutive years proving they are, indeed, leaving no child behind.

Collaborative efforts of educators, administrators, and of course, our stellar Assistive Technology Team are to thank for these great strides.

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In this way, positions are funded through this department, devices are funded through this department, and, depending on resources available, innovative initiatives are funded through this department. And lucky for you, the wily man in green doesn't keep all his gold in one pot. All of the following are examples of where money can come from to help support the team:

Companies. Many businesses (local, national, and even international) are eager to partner with or sponsor public school initiatives. Larger companies even have programs in place through which money or technology can be acquired.

Universities. Partnerships with universities can be established to develop cohort programs that provide tuition reductions for groups of individuals who enroll in the program. Some universities may even provide equipment to school districts if student teachers are working within that school district. Universities may also provide equipment to a classroom or school district as part of a research study.

Organizations. Nonprofit organizations may have funding available that can be supplied to specific advocacy projects in public schools. Additionally, parent organizations can be invited to sponsor initiatives supporting students.

States. The department of education for the state may provide additional money to school districts for any number of reasons, such as increasing equity throughout the school districts in the state.

Individual families. Donations of equipment from families can also be a useful way of acquiring devices. For instance, if families upgrades their computers, they might choose to donate their old computers to the school district.

Grants. Companies, universities, states, or private organizations may provide money or equipment based on application and approval of a grant.

The special education department and the assistive technology team should understand that the funds appropriated in the budget for assistive technology should be sufficient to provide for the potential needs of the student population. The special education department and the assistive technology team should not rely on grants to provide the money necessary to support the needs of the student population. Grants can't always be counted on. They may fluctuate greatly over time, and like our friend the leprechaun, those funds could disappear in the blink of an eye. Money acquired from grants should be used for funding special initiatives and not relied upon to fund entire assistive technology teams. Examples of special initiatives could include the provision of interactive symbol-generating software in autism classrooms, implementation of a portable word processing cart within classrooms for students with emotional disturbance, or the integration of a personal desktop assistant (PDA) program for special educators to help with data collection. If your assistive technology team is awarded a grant, then it's not only pretty good, but also, it's pretty lucky (just like the Irish!).

ask and you shall receive

There is an old joke about a priest who prays to God every day asking to win the lottery. The priest explains all of the good things he could do with the money: bring warmth to the cold, food to the hungry, and remedies to the sick. The priest promises that he will use the money to spread hope and good tidings throughout the parish. As the months roll on with no lottery win, the priest gets more and more frustrated. Finally, the priest begs God to tell him why he hasn't won the lottery when God knows full well all the good the money can bring. Just then, a divine light shines down from a skylight window and a booming voice echoes through the halls of the church, "Buy a ticket!"

The simplest way to raise money is to simply ask for it. Raffles, bake sales, and car washes are all great fundraising ideas, but they take some planning and effort to pull off effectively. Asking for money directly is much simpler and, sometimes, even more effective. In the end, the worst that can happen is that the person or entity you are asking for money will say "no." The same goes for grants. Not all grant applications are big hairy monsters too huge to tame. In some cases the grant application is just a quick fill-in-the-blank form asking what you want and why you want it.