

The AT Messenger...bringing technology to you

Delaware Assistive Technology Initiative (DATI), Volume 12, No. 4,
Fall 2004

\$1.7 Million AT Loan Program On the Horizon

Beth Mineo Mollica, DATI Director

In Delaware, most families have nowhere to turn to get help in paying for assistive technology (AT) such as home and vehicle modifications, computers, and hearing aids. They either pay for them out of personal funds, or simply do without.

Other states have countered this problem by creating AT loan programs, which have proven to be popular, economically-sound alternatives for people who need AT. These programs, which typically feature loan guarantees, low interest rates, and flexible repayment terms, enable those who might otherwise not qualify for a loan to borrow money for the purchase of needed equipment and modifications. AT loan programs nationwide have an astoundingly low default rate, demonstrating that people with disabilities need this service and take responsibility for loan repayment.

In Spring 2002, DATI assembled a group of stakeholders representing state agencies, consumer interests, and the private sector to explore the feasibility of establishing a loan program. Late last summer, the federal government made us an offer that was simply too promising to pass up: if we could raise financial support for the loan program here in Delaware, the federal funders would match that support at either a 3:1 ratio (for a general AT loan program) or a 9:1 ratio (for a telework loan program enabling people to get equipment they need in order to be able to work from home). With the Delaware Division of Vocational Rehabilitation serving as the lead agency, Delaware applied for federal funds to support the operation of both types of low-interest loan programs. In September of last year, Delaware was awarded almost \$1.4 million from these competitions, which we could only access if we were able to raise \$345,000 in matching funds from Delaware sources within a 12-month timeframe.

Owing to the efforts of many individuals, organizations, and the state legislature, we met our fundraising goal in July of this year. We are immensely grateful to the following donors that enabled us to meet the match requirements:

DEXSTA Federal Credit Union	\$50,000
Delaware Health and Social Services	20,000
Patterson Schwartz Foundation	1,000
State of Delaware (through legislative action)	275,000

We are also tremendously grateful to the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation for accepting the lead agency role. The federal guidelines required that a state agency make application for the funds, and without the Division's willingness to join this effort, we would have had to forfeit this opportunity to establish AT and Telework loan programs in Delaware.

So where do we go from here? The \$1.7 million "nest egg" supporting this effort is on deposit in a State of Delaware account. A Loan Program Advisory Board has been formed, and has met to review draft policies and procedures. The federal agencies providing oversight have approved the policies. We are finalizing negotiations with local banks that will function as our lending partners, and we hope to accept our first loan applications by late Fall 2004. A detailed overview of the program and its operation will appear in the next issue of The AT Messenger. Until then, check the DATI Website's "AT Funding" page—it will be updated regularly as the guidelines and application forms become available.

For more information, contact Beth Mineo Mollica, DATI Director, at (302) 651-6836.

Franklin Electronic Publishers Quells Students' Dictionary Fears

Eden Melmed, AT Specialist, New Castle County ATRC

Many students experience difficulty when looking up the meaning and spelling of a word in traditional dictionaries. For some, physically accessing the dictionary may be the problem. For others, it may be a question of "How do I look up a word if I can't spell it?"

Technology is now available to make using a dictionary easier.

Franklin Electronic Publishers, producer of handheld information devices, offers a wide range of electronic dictionaries and spelling aids. These devices are compact, lightweight and, best of all, being electronic gadgets, kids love to use them.

No matter the age or physical limitations of the user, **Franklin** has an electronic learning aid that will grab a student's attention. The many devices **Franklin** offers can range in price from as little as \$25 to as much as \$450, and can aid a student in successfully learning to work and read independently in and out of the classroom.

A variety of features are available in these products, but not every device offers every feature. In addition, why increase the complexity and cost of the product with features that are not needed?

When purchasing these electronic educational devices, some questions to ask include:

- How many words are included in the device's dictionary?
- Does the device include a thesaurus?
- Is the device speaking or non-speaking?
- Are other tools such as a calculator or an address book part of the device?
- Is the display screen easy to read?
- Is the keyboard large enough?

Elementary-Level Dictionaries

Elementary school students will be excited to use the **Children's Talking Dictionary and Spell Corrector** (MSRP \$49.95) to read some of their favorite books on their own. This device allows students to type a word that they are unsure of into the device's keyboard. The device then pronounces each letter of the word, pronounces the entire word, and writes the word in print and script. Students can also look up the word's definition and have it read aloud. The device includes a 40,000 word dictionary, a personal spelling word list, and five games with variable skill levels.



Children's Talking Dictionary and Spell Corrector

Another elementary-level dictionary is the **Homework Wiz®** (MSRP \$24.95). This device has features similar to those in the **Children's Talking Dictionary and Spell Corrector**, but it does not offer spoken output. Features include a 40,000 word dictionary, a spell corrector, games with variable skill levels, and a handwriting guide. It also teaches elementary Spanish and French phrases and includes an arithmetic tutor.

Advanced Dictionaries and Thesauruses

The **Speaking Language Master™ Special Edition** (MSRP \$450) is a speaking dictionary and thesaurus. This device is great for improving reading and pronunciation skills. It also helps students learn to work independently. The **Speaking Language Master** includes supports for those with a variety of disabilities. It can pronounce every key, function, and display when using the device; offers an oversized display for easy reading; comes with press-on locator dots for the keys; and features a large keyboard to make data

entry easier. This device contains 300,000 definitions, 500,000 synonyms, 11,000 antonyms, a grammar guide, and a phonetic spell correction for 110,000 words. To make the **Speaking Language Master** a multitasking device, Franklin included memory space for 26 personal messages with audio and visual playback and 10 word games to entertain students when they are taking a break from studying.



Speaking Language Master Special Edition

The **Speaking Merriam-Webster's Collegiate® Dictionary** (MSRP \$119.95) is another electronic dictionary/thesaurus option. It is a comprehensive college-level dictionary device with over 200,000 words, 500,000 synonyms, a comprehensive grammar guide, and an instant phonetic spell corrector. The device speaks the word's definition to the user and also has interactive word games. The dictionary and thesaurus can be expanded with additional content.

Spelling Correctors

Spelling correctors are a great, moderately priced academic tool for students of all ages. These devices can assist in such tasks as improving spelling skills, expanding a student's vocabulary, and figuring out the final clue in a crossword puzzle. **Franklin** offers several options for students interested in an electronic spelling assistant.

Franklin's Spelling Ace® and Thesaurus (MSRP \$29.99) works by having the student enter his/her best attempt at spelling a word and then the device will provide several options of the word the device thinks the user is trying to spell. The device has an 110,000 word phonetic spell corrector and contains 500,000 synonyms and

antonyms. This device is pocket size and also includes a calculator and a 100-person address book.

The **Speaking Spelling and Handwriting Ace™** (MSRP \$59.95) is for younger students. Some excellent features of this device are a keyboard that speaks letters as keys are pressed and a large display screen that allows the user to easily view the word as it is entered. This device pronounces and spells words and has 11 word games with variable skill levels.

For more information about these and other **Franklin Electronic Publishers** products, please visit their Website at www.franklin.com or contact your local ATRC.

Are Students with Disabilities Seeing the Changes?

In May, the National Council on Disabilities (NCD) published a report titled *Improving Educational Outcomes for Students with Disabilities*. This report discusses how attitudes and expectations for students with disabilities are changing as a result of the No Child Left Behind Act and the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). The report also explores to what extent evidence-based practices are being used to make policy decisions affecting students with disabilities.

To see this report in its entirety, please visit, <http://www.ncd.gov/newsroom/publications/2004/educationoutcomes.htm>.

Accessing AT Through the Special Education System

MaryBeth Musumeci, Staff Attorney, Disabilities Law Program

The range of assistive technology devices and services available today, from augmentative communication devices to FM systems and specialized computer software programs, presents an unprecedented wealth of opportunities for school-aged children with

disabilities to learn and participate with peers in integrated educational environments. However, the prospects of assistive technology are often overlooked or not fully considered in educational planning and programming for students with disabilities. This article will address the legal requirements for the consideration of assistive technology (AT) in the special education context under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) and Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act. Also discussed will be the interplay between the IDEA and the vocational rehabilitation system, and the IDEA and Medicaid as funding sources for AT.

The Provision of AT Under the IDEA

Most parents of children with disabilities are well aware that an Individualized Education Program (IEP) is the basic document that sets up all of the special education and related services that will be provided to a qualifying child by a school district under the IDEA. The IEP is developed by a team of people including teachers, school district representatives, and persons with special knowledge and expertise in various areas. A parent of a child with a disability is a member of the child's IEP team and should attend and participate actively in IEP meetings. While the law requires that an IEP be reviewed, at a minimum, annually, a parent may request an IEP meeting at any time.

Evaluations Prior to an IEP

Prior to the drafting of a student's IEP, the IEP team must first consider the school district's evaluation of the child's disabilities and educational needs in various areas. After the initial evaluation establishes eligibility for special education services, a child must be re-evaluated every three years. However, a parent has the right to request an evaluation of a child at any time. An assessment of the child's assistive technology needs should be included as part of the evaluation process and should be performed by a professional with knowledge and skill in the area of AT. A person specially qualified to interpret the results of the evaluation should participate in the IEP team meeting as well. If a parent disagrees with the school district's evaluation, the parent has the right to obtain an independent evaluation for the IEP team's consideration.

Definition of AT Under the IDEA

As the IDEA has been amended over the years, Congress has reaffirmed its commitment to the consideration and provision of AT in the special education context. It is now mandatory for IEP teams to consider the AT needs of every child with a disability. Congress also has noted the "broad range" of AT devices and services available as an "important component" of enabling children with disabilities to benefit from educational services.¹ Consequently, AT is broadly defined in the IDEA. The IDEA defines an "assistive technology device" as "any item, piece of equipment, or product system, whether acquired commercially off the shelf, modified, or customized, that is used to increase, maintain, or improve functional capabilities of a child with a disability."² An "assistive technology service" is defined as "any service that directly assists a child with a disability in the selection, acquisition, or use of an assistive technology device...[including] the evaluation [of the child's needs]; purchasing, leasing, or otherwise providing for the acquisition of [AT] devices by such child; selecting, designing, fitting, customizing, adapting, applying, maintaining, repairing, or replacing of [AT] devices; coordinating and using other therapies, interventions, or services with [AT] devices...; [and] training [for the child, family, and other persons who provide services to or are otherwise substantially involved in the child's major life functions]."³

AT and Free Appropriate Public Education

One of the fundamental principles underlying the IDEA is that a "free appropriate public education" (FAPE) must be provided to all students with disabilities ages 3 through 21. As with any other component of an IEP, AT needs must be considered according to the individual needs of each child. A determination must then be made as to whether AT is required in order to provide the child with FAPE. It is imperative that any AT-related services be written down in the IEP in order to be enforceable. The terms about what the school district will provide should be as specific as possible. Consideration should be given to the school district's obligation to provide AT-related services,

¹ House Report No. 101-544, 1990 USCCAN 1730

² 20 U.S.C. § 1401 (1)

³ 20 U.S.C. § 1401 (2)

including any necessary training in the use of the device for the teacher, student, and parent.

AT and the Least Restrictive Environment

Another foundational element of the IDEA is its requirement that children with disabilities be educated in the "least restrictive environment" (LRE). Technological advances in AT have the potential to make the inclusion of children with disabilities in the regular education environment possible for more students than ever before. When the IDEA was amended in 1997, Congress endorsed the provision of "appropriate special education and related services and aids and supports in the regular classroom" to children with disabilities.⁴ Supplementary aides and services, such as AT, should be provided both in the classroom and in "other education-related settings," such as after-school extracurricular activities, to enable children with disabilities to be educated alongside their nondisabled peers "to the maximum extent appropriate."⁵ A student with a disability should be removed from the regular education classroom only if the student cannot receive FAPE with supplemental aids and services in that setting. Consequently, when the IEP team is determining a child's placement, adequate consideration should be given to the role of AT to enable a student to participate in a less restrictive educational environment.

Accessing AT Through Section 504

Some children with disabilities may not qualify for special education and related services under the IDEA, but instead may qualify for AT-related services as an accommodation under Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973. Section 504 prohibits discrimination against persons with disabilities by any entity that receives federal funding. In addition, the protections of Section 504 also extend to all children with IEPs. Under Section 504, a school district is required to make accommodations in order to ensure that the programs and services it provides are accessible to students with disabilities. A "504 Plan" is the basic document that sets the specific

⁴ 20 U.S.C. § 1400 (c) (5) (D)

⁵ 20 U.S.C. § 1401 (29)

accommodations that a school district will provide to a qualifying child, which can include AT devices and services.

AT in the Transition From the Special Education System to Vocational Rehabilitation

Another important consideration is the role AT will play as a child with a disability transitions out of the special education system. The IDEA requires that transition planning for a student with a disability begin as part of the regular IEP process at age 14. By age 16, the IEP must include a full-blown transition services plan. Both the IDEA and the Rehabilitation Act (which governs state vocational rehabilitation agencies) envision the state division of vocational rehabilitation (VR) as a key player in this process. The VR agency should attend and participate in the student's IEP meetings and develop its own service plan for eligible students to help them achieve their employment goals. AT needs are among the various services that should be considered in this process. There is an important distinction between the school district and the VR agency's provision of AT to a student. Typically, when a school district provides an AT device to a student, the district owns the device. However, when the VR agency provides an AT device through its service plan, the individual client will retain ownership of the device.

IDEA vs. Medicaid—Who Pays?

Access to AT devices can become more complicated if the student is also entitled to Medicaid health insurance benefits. In general, the Medicaid program is the payor of last resort. However, in the special education context, the IDEA is clear that the Medicaid program's obligation precedes the school district's obligation to pay for a medically necessary device or service included in a child's IEP. Medicaid laws and regulations also provide that payment for medically necessary services by the Medicaid program is not precluded because the service is included in the child's IEP. This principle applies to all services which are both necessary to ensure a FAPE to children with disabilities under the IDEA and medically necessary under Medicaid, explicitly including AT devices and services. However, the school district cannot require a parent to apply for Medicaid benefits in order to receive special education and related

services. Parents also cannot be required to pay any out-of-pocket costs such as deductibles or co-pays if the school district wishes to access AT through a student's public health insurance benefits.

Perhaps the most important and most overlooked part of the law regarding the provision of medically and educationally necessary AT is the IDEA's mandate that, should a payment dispute arise between the Medicaid agency and the educational agency, the school district must pay for the services and then seek reimbursement from the Medicaid program. The IDEA also requires that the school district and the Medicaid agency institute an interagency agreement to coordinate services and make services available during a dispute. The law clearly intends to ensure that students with disabilities do not have to wait for interagency payment disputes to be resolved in order to access AT. However, in practice, students with disabilities are often caught in the middle of these disputes. Sometimes students are forced to wait out an often protracted Medicaid appeals process in order to finally be able to exercise their right to necessary AT devices and services. While the dispute is being resolved, school districts are often reluctant to advocate with the Medicaid program on behalf of the student and fail to live up to their obligation to provide the AT to the student in the interim while the dispute is resolved.

Additional Resources

For a comprehensive treatment of fundamental special education law principles as they relate to assistive technology, you may wish to consult the National Assistive Technology Advocacy Project's publication, *The Public School's Special Education System as an Assistive Technology Funding Source: The Cutting Edge* (2d ed., April, 2003), available at <http://www.nls.org/specedat.htm>.

Individuals who encounter difficulty accessing AT devices or services through an IEP and/or the Medicaid program may contact the Disabilities Law Program (DLP) for specific legal advice.

The DLP may be reached at:

New Castle County, (302) 575-0690

Kent County, (302) 674-8500

Sussex County, (302) 856-0038

Inclusion Conference Scheduled for November

The 11th Annual Inclusion Conference, titled *Better Together*, will be held on Tuesday, November 9, 2004 at the Sheraton Dover Hotel. The conference will begin at 8:00 a.m. with a continental breakfast followed by the keynote address, *Strength Focus*, by Michael Kneale, a nationally known speaker on the importance of developing and valuing people. Workshop sessions for this year's conference will focus on *Themes of Exceptional Leadership, Technology and Brain-Based Learning, Building Community and Friendships in Inclusive Classrooms, and P.I.E. Social-Emotional Development* (Module 1, Birth to Kindergarten). The conference will conclude at 3:15 p.m.

Registration materials and additional information are available at <http://www.state.de.us/ddc/tempfile/incbroch04.pdf>. A \$25 per person fee, which includes the continental breakfast and lunch, will be charged to participants. This year's conference offers a "3 for the price of 2" registration discount when a general education and special education teacher bring along an administrator. A 50 percent discount will be given to all full-time students.

If you would like more information, please contact the Developmental Disabilities Council at (302) 739-7193 or mmills@state.de.us.

You Are Your Child's Best Advocate: A Foster Parent's Story

School's back in session. Many parents look forward to the start of the school year. For some parents, particularly those of us who are parents of children with special education needs, the start of the school year brings a lot of stress. It often means trying to figure out a complicated education system, learning how to work within that

system, and, ultimately, helping your child get the best education possible. It's made more daunting by the importance of the work. Your child's future could be hanging in the balance.

Where to Start

My introduction to the special education system has probably been a little different compared to that of most parents. I became a foster parent of a special needs child about a year and a half ago. I participated in his education process more or less on the periphery. I was involved in the support of his educational goals as defined by the school, but had no direct say in what those goals were. In the foster care system, only natural parents, legal guardians, or court sanctioned educational surrogates are allowed to approve any educational plan or sign any document.

In order to better advocate on behalf of my foster child, I started going through the process of becoming his educational surrogate. Now that I am there, looking back on what that took and comparing it with what I think still needs to be done, I realize that now is when the real advocacy work begins.

When I started to organize my thoughts about the process of advocating for my foster son, the first thing I realized was that I had some emotional baggage I needed to handle. I had recognized a number of academic issues with him, but always operated under the assumption that if he were provided with a stable, safe, and loving environment, he would eventually catch up and start performing at his grade level. It was very hard for me to face the fact that I needed to change my basic assumptions, which is not to say that I am lowering my expectations. I have realized that I need to keep my emotional reactions in check in order to be his most effective advocate. This has been hard for me to do. I can imagine that keeping emotions in check may be a significant challenge for many parents. But, it is important to try and see things as objectively as possible in order to make more effective and intelligent choices.

The second thing I realized was that I needed to get as much academic information about my foster son as possible. That included his Individualized Education Program (IEP), psycho-educational

evaluations, report cards, and test results—anything that could help me understand his strengths and weaknesses, and that might give me some clues as to the best approach to take on his behalf. Try not to feel overwhelmed by the information you compile.

There are a number of resources available to help sort through the information you collect. The Parent Information Center of Delaware (PIC) is available to help parents understand and work with the education system. They have offices in Wilmington and Georgetown. Help is available either by phone or in person. You can reach PIC at (888) 547-4412.

Another great resource is the book *Wrightslaw: From Emotions to Advocacy—The Special Education Survival Guide* by Pam and Pete Wright. There is a lot of information contained in this book. It has been a great help to me in laying the groundwork and helping me to understand the process and plan for my foster son's education. The authors also host a Website, www.fetaweb.com, which features additional information.

Evaluations, IEPs and Testing

The documents involved in monitoring special education students can be intimidating. My stack is big and getting bigger. In it, I have results of a number of tests, a psycho-educational evaluation, and several IEPs. None of it has been easy to decipher. Keep in mind that much of the information being compiled by schools is not designed to be easy for parents to read or understand. It has been designed to help the schools meet legal and reporting obligations. Read the information and make notes about anything that you do not understand. Meet with the school and try to get your questions answered. If a meeting does not work, don't be afraid to ask for help. It can be a very frustrating experience. Attempt to learn more about how the school works with special education students. The more you know, the more effective an advocate you will be.

Every parent of a special education student is at a different point in the process. You may have had an evaluation done and an IEP already set up. You may just be discovering that your child has some academic needs that must be addressed. I am still working on

interpreting the IEP and psycho-educational evaluation and figuring out my best approach. I am considering having an outside evaluation done. One significant revelation that I have had is that there are a number of things to consider if you are planning to have your child evaluated outside of the school system. I did not realize the importance of figuring out what type of evaluation should be done. You should select an evaluator based on your child's specific needs or issues. Do not select an evaluator based on general reputation alone. Talk to other parents, and educational or medical service providers to get a sense of “who is doing what well” in Delaware. At this point, we have not had a second evaluation done, but plan to have it done within the next month.

Everyone's advocacy experience will be different. There are so many variables including your child's specific needs, the school system you are working with, your knowledge of special education law, and many other factors that play into this experience. Here are a few things that I have learned that apply to most advocacy experiences:

- 1) Education is empowerment. It is important to educate yourself about the system.
- 2) Emotional outbursts will make dealing with schools more difficult—it is important to keep emotions in check.
- 3) Planning and organization will help you formulate and execute a successful education strategy for your child.
- 4) Regular communication with the school is important—you will need to become a very involved parent.
- 5) Patience and persistence will pay off in the long run.

This article was written and submitted by a foster parent based on his experiences. In order to protect the privacy of the child, the author's name has not been included with the article.

Sussex ATRC Settles Into New Home

As many individuals in Sussex County know, the county's Assistive Technology Resource Center (ATRC) has been in the process of relocating for the past several months. In the beginning of August, the Sussex ATRC finally settled into its new home at the Cheer Community Center in Georgetown.



As in New Castle and Kent Counties, the Sussex ATRC is barrier-free, open to the public, and contains examples of all types of AT. Dan Fendler, the Assistive Technology Specialist; Sandy Walls, the site's administrative support person; and Sonja Rathel, the DATI project coordinator are available to assist visitors Monday through Friday 8:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. Services offered at the site include personal equipment demonstrations and assistance in helping to identify technology options for a given need. Most of the equipment at the site is available for a two-week loan period, enabling users to "try before they buy." Drop-in visitors are always welcome, but to ensure personalized attention to your needs, it is recommended that you call in advance to make an appointment. There is no charge for the services offered by DATI's ATRCs.

The Sussex County ATRC contact information is as follows:

Cheer Community Center

20520 Sand Hill Rd.

Georgetown, DE 19947

(302) 856-7946, (302) 856-6714 (voice or TDD) (302) 856-6990 (fax)

Delaware Schools Take Home Top Honors

The Mid-Atlantic Consortium on Accessible Information Technology in Education has announced its First Annual Web Accessibility Contest winners and several Delaware schools took home top honors.

Schools in Delaware, Maryland, Pennsylvania, Virginia, Washington D.C., and West Virginia competed to create accessible Websites that would be useful and usable by all visitors including those with a disability.

In the student-designed category, Delcastle Technical High School tied for third place. In the non-student-developed category, Newark High School took first place while Christiana High School and Glasgow High School tied for second place. All winners will be receiving their prizes later this fall.

The Consortium has also announced its Second Annual Web Accessibility Contest for the 2004-2005 school year. The contest will begin on October 4, 2004 and all entries must be submitted by February 15, 2005 for consideration. Winners will be announced in April 2005.

All K-12 schools in the Mid-Atlantic region are invited to submit their Website to the competition. Again this year, judges will evaluate the sites based on the World Wide Web Consortium (W3C) Priority 1 Checkpoints and Section 508 Standards. The home page of each site, as well as three links, created by the Web team (not external sites) will be judged.

For additional contest information and judging criteria, please visit the Consortium's Website at http://www.adainfo.org/accessible/it/web_accessibility.asp.

The AT Bargain Basement

Marvin Williams, AT Specialist, Kent County ATRC

Hello friends, and welcome to the fall edition of the AT Bargain Basement. This is the column where I, your hard working AT Specialist, try to bring you those AT gems that are under \$100 in price and, usually, are available at local stores. Since we are getting used to being back in school, I decided to focus this column on education-specific AT.

Educational AT does not always have to be an **AlphaSmart** or a **Dana** keyboard, although those are helpful pieces of AT. It doesn't have to be a **Kurzweil** text reader, but that is a nice software package to have as well. Often, we forget that low-tech pieces of AT can be very useful in the classroom and at home. So, I am going to focus on some of those inexpensive pieces that fall into this category.

My first item is the old fashioned highlighter pen. Highlighters come in more colors than the ever popular yellow. You can get highlighters in green, blue, pink, and purple. Other colors are available, but it may take some searching. **Staples**® has a six-pack of assorted colors of their own brand of highlighters for \$1.95.

If highlighters are not your thing or if you are afraid that a student with a highlighter is just going to paint the pages of his/her books yellow or green, highlighter tape may be the way to go. Highlighter tape is colored tape that can be put over text to provide a color highlighting effect. Unlike regular transparent tape, highlighter tape is made to be lifted from the book and reapplied several times. The tape cannot be reapplied indefinitely, but it can be used several times. Highlighter tape comes in several colors and in varying widths. It is available from the **Teaching Resource Center** (www.trcabc.com) in assorted colors for prices ranging from \$1.75 to \$1.95 per roll. The tape is also available in a four-pack of sheets (7-3/4" x 9-3/4") for \$6.50. The sheet-sized tape is great for highlighting large amounts of text or entire pages in books.

However, if you need to highlight or change the color of an entire worksheet or photo copy, you may want to use a colored sheet

sleeve. These are very helpful for individuals for whom a colored background is an issue. For some individuals with dyslexia, color filters can mean the difference between being able to read a document and not being able to read one. A colored sheet sleeve is an inexpensive way to add color to a document without having to reprint it on colored paper. The sleeves are also reusable, which is great because they can be used on multiple documents at a time. The colored sheet sleeves are available at **Wal-Mart®** and at office supply stores such as **Staples**, **OfficeMax**, and **Office Depot**.

Educational software is another great at-home and in-the-classroom learning tool. Although ordering software online and through a catalog provides the widest options for software, many great titles can be purchased locally. A number of educationally relevant software titles are available at **CompUSA**, **Wal-Mart**, **Toys "R" Us**, **Best Buy**, **Circuit City**, and, yes, even **Staples**. Selections including the popular **Living Books®** reading series by **Riverdeep**, **Broderbund's Adventure Workshop™** series, and the **JumpStart™** series by **Knowledge Adventure®** are all available at several of the previously mentioned stores for around \$20-\$40 per title. If a school is purchasing some of this software, it is a good idea to check with the software publisher first to see if they have an educational discount available for purchasing multiple copies of the same software. This may be a way to get the students the software they need without breaking the budget.



JumpStart Advanced 1st Grade 2003 by Knowledge Adventure

One educational AT device that is a very well-kept secret is the **LeapFrog®**. The **LeapFrog** has evolved consistently through the years into a nice elementary educational tool. The **LeapPad®**, **Leapster™**, and **iQuest®** provide inexpensive options for

educational tools that can provide special help within a mainstream consumer product. The **LeapPad** is designed for kindergarten and elementary school users, the **Leapster** is for elementary and middle school users, and the **iQuest** is for middle and junior high school users. The big plus to the **LeapPad** hardware is that it has a lot of pre-made activities. Software is available to help students with everything from phonics to algebra in a fun and easily approachable format. The base units range in price from \$12.99 to \$99.99 and are available at **Wal-Mart**, **Target**, and **Toys "R" Us**, among other places. The activities range in price from \$14.99 to \$39.99 and are available at the above-mentioned locations.



iQuest by LeapFrog Enterprises, Inc.

That does it for this installment of the AT Bargain Basement. Hopefully, some of the products mentioned here will help you or someone you know. If some of the items discussed here appeal to you, you should make it a point to come to the Inclusion Conference in November and see Judi Sweeney, creator of the **LoTTIE Kit** and founder of **Onion Mountain Technology**. The Kit is a collection of low- and mid-tech AT equipment designed for parents and educators to use with students who have special needs. The Kit includes items that were chosen to help students in reading, writing, math, and organizational skills and will assist educators in trying out low-tech, inexpensive AT items before purchasing expensive, high-tech devices.

Judi Sweeney has a great knowledge of low-cost and low-tech AT as well as how to implement it in the academic setting. I had the privilege of seeing her at Closing the Gap in 2003, and her presentation was wonderful. Check out her November presentation titled *Technology and Brain-Based Learning* if you can. As usual, if you have any questions, comments, or AT bargains you have come across, call, fax, e-mail, or write with your contribution. And remember, just because it is inexpensive doesn't mean it is cheap.

DATI Equipment Loan Policy

DATI has a wide variety of equipment at the Assistive Technology Resource Centers for the primary purpose of demonstration and short-term loan. The policy for the loan of the equipment is as follows:

The standard loan period is two weeks, defined as the day borrowed (e.g., Monday the 10th) to the same day two weeks later (e.g., Monday the 24th). Loans may be extended providing there are no names on the waiting list and/or that an extension will not interfere with an existing reservation. The maximum loan period is four weeks.

A maximum of four devices may be borrowed during any single loan period. However, combinations of devices may be treated as a single device if the components are interdependent—either operationally, or because one component is required for the user to access another. Equipment loans across state lines are not permitted. Equipment must also remain in Delaware throughout the loan period.

To Contact DATI's Central Site office or the ATRC closest to you, call 1-800-870-DATI

Press

#1 for English or

#2 for Spanish,

then press

#3 for the Central Site office

#4 for the New Castle County ATRC

#5 for the Kent County ATRC

#6 for the Sussex County ATRC

TDD callers: Do not press #1 or #2 and your call will be answered on a TDD line at the Central Site office.

DATI Resource Centers Throughout the State...

Delaware Assistive Technology Initiative

Center for Applied Science & Engineering

University of Delaware/Alfred I. duPont Hospital for Children

PO Box 269

Wilmington, DE 19899-0269

1-800-870-DATI

New Castle County ATRC

Easter Seals of Delaware and Maryland's Eastern Shore

61 Corporate Circle, Corporate Commons

New Castle, DE 19720-2405

(302) 328-ATRC; (302) 328-2905 (TDD)

Kent County ATRC

Easter Seals of Delaware and Maryland's Eastern Shore

100 Enterprise Place, Suite One

Dover, DE 19904-8200

(302) 739-6885; (302) 739-6886 (TDD)

Sussex County ATRC

Easter Seals of Delaware and Maryland's Eastern Shore

Cheer Community Center

20520 Sand Hill Rd.

Georgetown, DE 19947

(302) 856-7946; (302) 856-6714 (voice or TDD)

The AT Messenger is published quarterly by the Delaware Assistive Technology Initiative (DATI). Dissemination of this newsletter to other members, association newsletters, and electronic mailing lists is encouraged. Information contained in this publication may be reprinted without permission, although attribution to the author and DATI is required.

Delaware Assistive Technology Initiative

Center for Applied Science & Engineering

University of Delaware/Alfred I. duPont Hospital for Children

P.O. Box 269, 1600 Rockland Road

Wilmington, DE 19899-0269

Phone: (800) 870-DATI or (302) 651-6790

TDD: (302) 651-6794; FAX: (302) 651-6793

E-mail: dati@asel.udel.edu; www.dati.org

Beth Mineo Mollica, Director

Sonja Rathel, Project Coordinator

Kia Bergman, Information and Outreach Coordinator

Carmen Taylor-Acevedo, Staff Assistant

Dan Fendler, ATRC Coordinator

DATI is funded by the National Institute on Disability and Rehabilitation Research of the U.S. Department of Education, Grant #H224A10005 to the University of Delaware. This publication does not necessarily reflect the position or policy of NIDRR/ED, and no official endorsement of the materials should be inferred. The University of Delaware is an equal opportunity employer and prohibits discrimination on the basis of race, color, creed, age, national origin, marital status or disability in conformity with applicable laws.