

# The AIMing for Achievement Series:

## What Educators and Families Need to Know about Accessible Instructional Materials

### Part Two: Navigating the Decision-Making Process

By Joy Smiley Zabala and Diana Carl

Part Two of the AIMing for Achievement Series focuses on the decision-making process related to accessible instructional materials (AIM) and looks closely at how each of the steps requires good thinking of the individualized education program (IEP) team or other decision-making team. First, the team determines whether or not the student may need AIM; next, if needed, they select which formats are appropriate and determine the sources from which to acquire the formats. Finally, the team will think about the supports and services that will be necessary for the student to use the formats effectively for participation and achievement.

Included in Part Two is an introduction to the AIM Navigator, an online tool, developed by the AIM Consortium and made available on the National Center for Accessible Instructional Materials (AIM Center) Web site at <http://aim.cast.org/navigator>. The Navigator is a process facilitator that contains in-depth information and scaffolded supports to guide decision-making at every step of the process.

#### THE DECISION-MAKING PROCESS

Those of us who have worked in assistive technology for a long time have found that the most efficient and effective way to consider the needs for assistive technology is through a decision-making process. And really, the same holds true for AIM.

Basically, there are four steps that teams must take in order to ensure that students who need materials in these formats have them when needed for educational participation and achievement. Those steps include:

1. Establish need for instructional materials in specialized formats

2. Select specialized format(s) needed by the student for educational participation and achievement

3. Commence SEA and/or LEA-defined steps to acquire needed formats in a timely manner

4. Determine supports needed for effective use for educational participation and achievement.

#### DETERMINATION OF NEED

In this step, the team thinks about whether the student can read and gain information from the standard print-based instructional materials used across the curriculum by all students; needs the materials in a specialized format; or needs modified content or alternative materials.

#### WHY WOULD A STUDENT NEED A SPECIALIZED FORMAT?

If the student is able to understand the content presented in textbooks and other related core instructional materials that are used by other students across the curriculum, but is unable to read or use them, the student will need another way to get the information contained in the print materials. In this case, the student may need specialized formats of the curricular materials.

#### WHAT ARE THE SPECIALIZED FORMATS?

Specialized formats are Braille, large print, audio and digital text. Detailed information about the specialized formats was provided in Part One of the AIMing for Achievement Series.



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**What already existing information can be used to help the team decide among the three options? What data can teams use to help them make this decision?**

Some of the specific types of information that can be used to help the team make a decision about the need for specialized formats includes, but is not limited to:

- Reading level, including formal and informal reading diagnostic information
- Indications in Individualized Education Program (IEP) or 504 Plan
- Academic achievement scores and grades
- Curriculum based assessments
- State-wide and district-wide assessment participation and proficiency
- Sensory abilities
- Physical abilities
- Cognitive abilities

**What methods can be used to gather the additional information that will help the team decide among the three options?**

- Trials with materials in specialized formats
- Formal measures conducted by a psychologist, a reading specialist, an audiologist, a vision teacher, a physical therapist, an occupational therapist, etc.
- Learning Media Assessments conducted by vision specialists
- Outside evaluations or reports from a doctor or other medical professional

**What is the difference between specialized formats and alternative materials?**

A specialized format of a print-based material includes exactly the same information as the printed material. The specialized format does not change the content, only the way in which the content is presented to the student. The specialized format neither adds nor changes any information. An alternative material may address the same goals, but the content of the material is modified or changed in some way – usually made less complex – so that it can be understood by the student.

**SELECTION OF FORMATS**

After the team determines that the student needs specialized formats, they select which formats are needed. The selection process includes a) listing what print materials are used across the curriculum, b) considering the instructional context in which they are used, c) selecting which formats the student needs, and d) determining which materials are needed in the different formats.

**a) List the print instructional materials used across the curriculum.**

The team gathers information about the print instructional materials used across the

curriculum in which the student will participate.

**b) Consider the instructional context**

In the next step, the team considers the student's skills, needs and preferences, the environments in which the student will be working and the tasks for which specialized formats will be needed. Thinking about the student, environments and tasks helps the team understand how materials are used so that the team can make a good decision about which of the combination of specialized formats – braille, large print, audio and digital – will work for the student.

**c) Select the formats needed**

Next, the team determines which specialized format(s) will be most useful to the student. They select the format(s) needed by this student based on matching the student's needs and the instructional context needs with the features that can be manipulated in the specialized format(s). More than one may be needed and can be selected.

**d) Match formats to materials**

The team uses the information gathered to select which print instructional materials are needed in which format.

**ACQUISITION OF ACCESSIBLE INSTRUCTIONAL MATERIALS**

There are five common sources for acquiring AIM:

- The National Instructional Materials Access Center (NIMAC)
- Accessible Media Producers (AMPs)
- Publishers
- Other Sources
- Do-It-Yourself

The following is a summary of each source, the type of materials they provide and a description of who is eligible to receive materials from them. In-depth information about the legal context was provided in Part One of the AIMing for Achievement Series.

**THE NATIONAL INSTRUCTIONAL MATERIALS ACCESS CENTER (NIMAC)**

The National Instructional Materials Access Center (NIMAC) is the national repository of files developed according to the National Instructional Materials Accessibility Standard (NIMAS). In order to receive specialized formats created from NIMAS source files from the NIMAC, a student must:

- have an Individualized Education Program (IEP). This means that the child has undergone an evaluation and is or will be receiving special education services under IDEA.
- be certified by a competent authority as having a "print disability" as defined by copyright statute.

Procedures for acquiring NIMAS files differ from state to state. If you have questions about the process where you live, you can ask the school district contact or the primary NIMAS/NIMAC contact in your state. State contact information is available at [http://aim.cast.org/learn/policy/state/nimas\\_nimac\\_contacts](http://aim.cast.org/learn/policy/state/nimas_nimac_contacts).

**ACCESSIBLE MEDIA PRODUCERS (AMPS)**

Accessible Media Producers (AMPs) are organizations that produce accessible materials in specialized formats, such as Braille, large print, audio or digital text. To receive materials from AMPs' general collections, students must have a qualifying print disability. To receive specialized formats of print instructional materials created from NIMAC files, the student must also be served under IDEA.

**Bookshare** (<http://www.bookshare.org/>)

Bookshare creates and provides files that can be used for students who need materials in digital text or Braille format. They also provide software that can be used to read those files.

**Recording for the Blind and Dyslexic (RFB&D)** (<http://www.rfbd.org/>)

RFB&D creates and provides audio books with human narration and synthetic electronic speech. Specially adapted players or software may be required to play the audio books.

**American Printing House for the Blind (APH)** (<http://www.aph.org/>)

American Printing House for the Blind (APH) creates and provides materials in Braille, large print and electronic formats for individuals who are blind or have visual impairments

**PUBLISHERS**

There are several instances in which publishers can be of assistance with the provision of accessible materials. Upon request, a publisher may be willing to provide a digital file or grant permission for a state or local education agency to copy or scan materials that are not available from another source. Typically, when publishers provide these files, it is with the understanding that use of materials created from the file will be limited to students certified as having a print disability. This is especially helpful when a student with a disability has a service plan (e.g., 504) but is not served under IDEA, or when the material is no longer sold and for which no NIMAS source file has been created. These materials are called "legacy materials."

Some publishers also provide digital versions of instructional materials along with the printed books. This can be very useful if the materials that are provided contain the same information as the printed book rather

than supplementary material. It is important to be aware that just because a material is in a digital format does not necessarily mean that the material is accessible to all students (e.g., text cannot be read aloud, highlighted or otherwise changed).

One of the most promising developments is that publishers are beginning to provide some accessible versions of instructional materials for purchase, typically in digital formats that can be read by a variety of digital readers. An excellent example can be seen in the HTML Books available from Pearson Publishing (<http://www.pearsonschool.com/htmlbooks>).

## OTHER SOURCES

There are numerous free and commercial sources for accessible materials. Although these sources do not typically include textbooks, they may be good sources of supplementary materials, some of which are required school reading. Items that are available free of charge are typically those whose copyright has expired and are in the public domain.

## ELECTRONIC BOOK SOURCES

The following is a selection of sources that provide electronic or audio books; some texts are available for free and other books must be purchased.

- LibriVox: [www.librivox.org](http://www.librivox.org)
- Net Library: <http://www.netlibrary.com/>
- Project Gutenberg: <http://www.gutenberg.org>
- Audible.com: <http://www.audible.com/>
- Online bookstores: <http://www.amazon.com/>, <http://www.barnesandnoble.com/>, and others
- OverDrive: <http://www.overdrive.com/>
- Audio Editions: <http://www.audioeditions.com/>
- Blackstone Audiobooks: <http://www.blackstoneaudio.com/>

## “OPEN SOURCE” INSTRUCTIONAL MATERIALS

Open source materials can be acquired, customized and used with any student free of charge (or for a very small fee), depending upon the source. The IEP team will need to verify that an open source material is accessible. These materials are typically not textbooks, although CK-12 (<http://about.ck12.org/>) looks promising.

**National Library Service for the Blind and Physically Handicapped (NLS)** (<http://www.loc.gov/nls/>)

This network of libraries across the nation lends audio, Braille and large print books and materials to persons with a qualifying print disability.

## DO-IT-YOURSELF

Although specialized formats are increasingly available through accessible media producers and commercial sources, the “do-it-yourself” method of scanning, copying and creating materials remains a way to meet the needs of some students for certain materials. For example, teacher-made materials will almost always need to be created in this manner.

When an accessible version of a published, copyrighted material is created in this way, copyright law must still be respected. The safest approach is to ask permission from the publisher before teachers or parents scan and create their own AIM.

## WHAT SUPPORTS ARE NEEDED?

The IEP team should determine whether any of the following supports are needed for your child to effectively use the selected AIM:

- technology,
- training,
- instructional strategies,
- support services, and
- accommodations and/or modifications.

The following is a broad summary of supports that may be needed for a student to effectively use AIM.

## TECHNOLOGY

After selecting the specialized formats needed and determining how to acquire them, the team will need to decide what types of technology or tools are needed for the student to use the accessible formats for participation and achievement. The information about the student, the environments and the tasks that were identified when selecting formats can be helpful when selecting the technology needed to use the formats. The identified student needs can be matched to the features of the various technology tools that might be used to deliver the specialized formats.

## TRAINING

Different levels of training will be needed, depending on the complexity of the technology or tool selected to access the specialized formats. For example, use of a large print book would not require much training. However, if the student is using text-to-speech software or a screen reader to access digital text, more advanced skills may need to be taught. Teachers, other school staff and families may also need training in order to support the child at school and in the home.

Students may also need additional types of training, such as when to use a particular format or tool for a specific learning task or how to ask for needed supports when they are not readily available.

## INSTRUCTIONAL STRATEGIES

Educators may need to use various instructional strategies to support students using specialized formats and supporting technologies. When a student first begins using these tools, instruction should include multiple opportunities for the student to understand the purpose, benefits and outcomes of using the tools. It is helpful to start by providing opportunities for the student to use the tools to successfully complete familiar learning tasks (possibly in a single environment). Gradually building on early successes and increasing the functional complexity of the tools will enable the student to learn use the tools for independent mastery of learning goals in a variety of environments. The child’s IEP team should work together to ensure that teachers and staff are coordinating to assist the student in using the accessible materials and monitor the change in literacy skills and access.

## SUPPORT SERVICES

The student’s IEP should describe any support services needed for effective use of various specialized formats and who is responsible for providing them. Different support services may be needed for different formats. For example, a student using Braille may require specialized instruction from a qualified teacher of the visually impaired, and a student with a physical disability may need the support of an occupational or physical therapist. Additional supports, such as case management, classroom organization and arrangement, equipment management and maintenance, and file acquisition, may be needed.

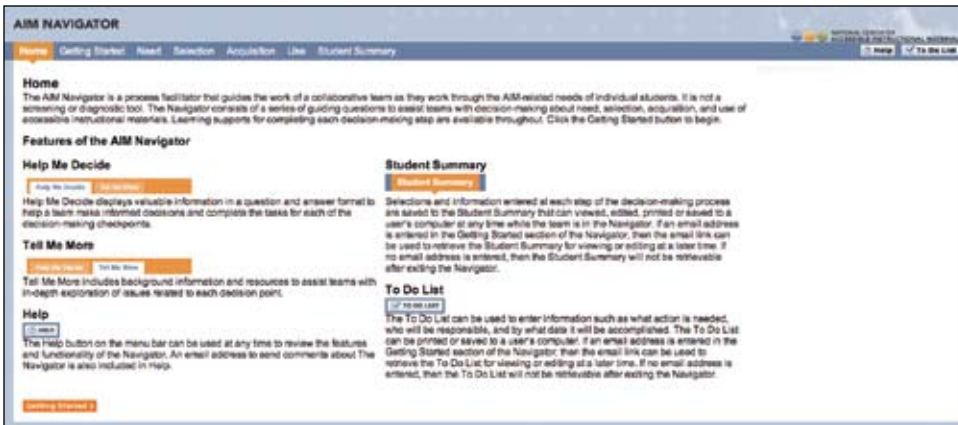
## ACCOMMODATIONS AND/OR MODIFICATIONS

The use of AIM may require accommodations and/or modifications to the student’s educational program. For example, a student may need preferential seating or additional time to complete tasks due to the time required to use a specialize format. Frequent breaks may be needed to avoid fatigue. Some students may need to provide responses orally rather than in writing. The team should consider which accommodations and/or modifications are needed when developing the IEP.

## THE AIM NAVIGATOR: FACILITATING THE DECISION-MAKING PROCESS

The AIM Navigator is a free Web-based tool that facilitates the process of decision-making around AIM for an individual student by IEP or other decision-making teams. The four major decision points in the process





The AIM Navigator is available on the AIM Center Web site at <http://aim.cast.org/experience/training/navigator>.

include determination of need, selection of format(s), acquisition of formats and selection of supports for use.

The AIM Navigator provides extensive support for decision-making at each point through a series of guiding questions, resources and links to other tools created by the AIM Consortium. The guiding questions are provided at two levels —“Help Me Decide” which includes a brief list of questions and answers related to the decision point and “Tell Me More” which includes a comprehensive list of questions, answers and resources for both

the specific decision point and for all decision points within AIM Navigator.

The AIM Navigator collects all decisions made by the team and all supporting information entered by the team and uses that information to create a summary report that can be printed or saved to a local computer. The AIM Navigator also includes an optional running To-Do list that the team can use as they go through the AIM Navigator to create a list of actions that need to be taken and determine who will be responsible for each action. The To-Do list can also be printed or saved to a local computer. All other tools created by

the AIM Consortium are linked within the AIM Navigator at the specific decision-point to which they apply. The AIM Navigator is available on the AIM Center Web site at <http://aim.cast.org/experience/training/navigator>.

## COMING SOON! PART THREE: JUST IN TIME AIM SUPPORT AT YOUR FINGERTIPS!

Part Three of the Aiming for Achievement Series will provide a detailed guided tour of the Web site of the National Center on Accessible Instructional Materials at <http://aim.cast.org>. The AIM Center provides knowledge development, technical assistance and leadership to SEAs and LEAs, as well as to educators, families and others involved in the massive collaborative effort involved in getting high quality accessible materials into the hands of students who need them. The suite of tools produced by the AIM Consortium is among the large and growing resources available free of charge to all states and interested parties on the AIM Center Web site.

In the meantime, visit the AIM Center Web site at <http://aim.cast.org> and check out how to get involved and stay connected by exploring the upcoming and archived webinars and the available collaboration opportunities. ■

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