

The AIMing for Achievement Series: What Educators and Families Need to Know about Accessible Instructional Materials



JOY SMILEY ZABALA, Ed.D, ATP, is Director of Technical Assistance, CAST and the National Center on Accessible Instructional Materials. She can be reached at jzabala@cast.org



DIANA CARL, M.A., LSSP, is an Independent Consultant and Special Projects Coordinator for the AIM Center. She can be reached at diana.carl@comcast.net

Part Three: AIM Support at Your Fingertips

introduction to the robust, resource-rich AIM Navigator, a process facilitator for decision-making teams. Part Three focuses on the National Center on Accessible Instructional Materials (AIM Center) Web site and the products that are available to support all with interests and responsibilities related to the provision and use of accessible instructional materials.

The AIM Center is located at CAST and funded by the U.S. Department of Education's Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP). The purpose of the AIM Center is to provide information, technical assistance and leadership that supports the implementation of the National Instructional Materials Accessibility Standard (NIMAS) and the development of systems that support timely provision of accessible instructional materials to students who need them for educational participation and achievement.

The AIM Center Web site is located at <http://aim.cast.org>. The site serves as a resource to state- and district-level educators, parents, publishers, conversion houses, accessible media producers and others interested in learning more about and implementing AIM and NIMAS.

Visitors to the AIM Center homepage can find information, such as what's happening in your state, the NIMAS primary contact for your state, upcoming Webinars and learning opportunities, a link to NIMAS-related resources located at ed.gov. The homepage also provides access to the three major sections on the site: Learn, Experience and Collaborate.

The Learn section provides background information on the National Instructional Materials Accessibility Standard and accessible instructional materials (NIMAS/AIM) and is where the knowledge development information can be found. Some of the topics explored include AIM, accessible media, practice, policy, research, post secondary education and AIM for families.

If students have difficulty reading or using standard print materials, they may require specialized formats of textbooks and related core print instructional materials. The complexities, challenges and opportunities related to the provision of accessible instructional materials (AIM) are explored in the AIMing for Achievement Series: What Educators and Families Need to Know about Accessible Instructional Materials. Part One of the series provided a general introduction to AIM and some highlights of the legal context. Part Two laid the foundation of a process for how state education agencies (SEAs) and local education agencies (LEAs) can make decisions regarding need, selection, acquisition and use of AIM and also included an

The Experience section includes information, tools and resources for training, decision-making and file conversion. Many of the products highlighted in this article are located in the Experience section under Teaching and Training Resources and Decision-Making Tools and Resources. The featured products were developed by the 15 states that were involved in the AIM Consortium, along with CAST, and these tools are now accessible on the AIM Center Web site. Information about upcoming and archived Webinars and presentations is also available in Teaching and Training Resources.

The Collaboration section is where everyone has the opportunity to not only gain information, but also use social media tools to be a part of building information through collaborative discussion with others. In this section, there are places to sign up for the AIM Connector, an e-Newsletter, join a listserv or participate in forums. The forums provide opportunities to take part in rich discussions around a variety of issues related to NIMAS/AIM.

We encourage you to further explore all the areas of the AIM Center Web site and to let us know if there are other things that we should include that would be helpful.

TOOLS AT YOUR FINGERTIPS AVAILABLE ON THE AIM CENTER WEB SITE

In order to support effective decision-making in all phases of need, selection, acquisition and use, the AIM Center Web site (<http://aim.cast.org>) provides numerous training and teaching products that are Web-based and free to all. The only exception is the DVD, which is available for a nominal charge for duplication, shipping and handling.

• THE AIM NAVIGATOR

The AIM Navigator, which was discussed in Part Two, is a free Web-based tool that facilitates the process of decision-making around accessible instructional materials for an individual student by IEP or other decision-making teams. The four major decision points in the process 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 by providing guiding questions, resources and links to other tools created by the AIM Consortium. The AIM Navigator is available at <http://aim.cast.org/experience/training/navigator>.

• AIMING FOR ACHIEVEMENT DVD

The AIMing for Achievement DVD includes content of national impact on a variety of topics, including legal issues, a student-centered decision-making process, an overview of specialized formats, a review of multiple sources from which to acquire specialized formats, and an overview of which students can receive materials from each source, as well as detailed discussions about technology and other supports for using accessible instructional materials. The DVD content is designed to be useful across multiple environments with differing models of service provision rather than highlighting a single model. The DVD contains interviews and illustrative scenarios that increase awareness and knowledge that support timely provision of AIM to students who need them for educational participation and achievement. An informational video about the AIMing for Achievement DVD can be viewed on the AIM Center Web site at <http://aim.cast.org/experience/training/AIMAchvDVD>. This location also provides information about obtaining copies of the DVD at a nominal cost when it becomes available.

• THE AIM EXPLORER

The AIM Explorer is a free downloadable simulation tool that combines grade-leveled digital text with access features common to most text readers and other supported reading software. Educators, families and students can use the AIM Explorer to try out a variety of settings for magnification, colors of text and background, text-to-speech (synthetic and human), text highlighting and layout options. Each of these features is presented in a logical sequence, and working through the simulation can help educators, families and struggling readers decide ways in which these supports can be configured to help with access to and understanding of text. The AIM Explorer collects information as users progress through the system and creates a summary report that includes all collected information. The summary report can be printed or saved to a local computer. Information on how to download the AIM Explorer is available at <http://aim.cast.org/experience/training/explorer>.

• USER'S GUIDE TO FEDERALLY FUNDED ACCESSIBLE MEDIA PRODUCERS

The User's Guide to Federally Funded Accessible Media Producers provides detailed and "at-a-glance" formats of in-depth information about the three federally-funded accessible media producers – Bookshare, Recording for the Blind and

Dyslexic and the American Printing House for the Blind. The User's Guide includes a detailed list of Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs) completed by each of the featured accessible media producers and a side-by-side summary chart that includes the information. The AIM User's Guide is available at http://aim.cast.org/learn/practice/acquisitiondistribution/amp_survey.

• AIM PRODUCT TUTORIALS

The AIM Product Tutorials include 101 captioned videos that provide detailed, practical instruction for classroom and home use of 10 AIM-related assistive technology products. The 10 products featured in the AIM Product Tutorials are those identified by the AIM Consortium state leaders as the most commonly used products across their states. The AIM Product Tutorials also contain a printable AIM Products Features Chart that includes the 10 products and links to the manufacturers of each product so that users of the tutorials know where to find information about updates and new releases of the products. Each of the captioned videos included in the AIM Product Tutorials are accompanied by a complete transcript. The list of products, videos, transcripts and Summary Chart of Features included in the AIM Product Tutorials are available at <http://aim.cast.org/experience/training/tutorials>.

• AIM Implementation Guide and Video

The guide, Text-to-Speech (TtS) and Accessible Instructional Materials (AIM): An Implementation Guide for Use of TtS and AIM in Secondary Classrooms, contains materials that provide state and local education agencies with the supports and strategies needed in order to design and implement programs in which accessible instructional materials and text-to-speech technology are routinely used by secondary students with print disabilities. This project includes two major products: a comprehensive guide that can be downloaded and printed on demand and a dynamic video that demonstrates the efficacy of using AIM and TtS to achieve successful outcomes by students with print disabilities. The content of the guide includes tools for planning, implementing and evaluating the outcomes of AIM-infused programs. Both, the print-on-demand guide and the streamed video, are available to at http://aim.cast.org/experience/training/aim_implementation_guide.

• AIM ONLINE COURSES

Two graduate-level courses have been made available to colleges, universities and professional development groups who are interested in offering comprehensive courses on AIM-related issues. AIM 101:

Accessible Instructional Materials provides basic foundational knowledge about the provision of AIM; and AIM 102: Preparing AIM for Students with Print Impairments provides an understanding of various types of instructional materials used in classrooms and tools, strategies and training necessary to prepare students with print disabilities to effectively use these materials. The courses were developed to be delivered asynchronously via Moodle, a robust online course management system. The advantage of the Moodle system is that the entire course – lessons, activities, assignments, discussion groups, etc. - can be compressed and exported for use by others. These courses are expected to be facilitated by a sponsoring group and are not intended to be used by an individual for independent study. Information about the courses and a link to further information can be located on the Web at <http://aim.cast.org/experience/training/courses/>.

IT'S HARD, BUT OPPORTUNITIES ARE JUST A FINGERTIP AWAY!

SEAs and LEAs are finding that there are multiple complexities involved in developing and implementing comprehensive systems for the timely provision of NIMAS/ AIM that are responsive to student needs and provided in accordance with IDEA requirements, the Library of Congress regulations and the 1996 Chafee Amendment to the U.S. Copyright Act. Although NIMAS/ AIM was included in legislation in 2004, it is apparent that implementation varies widely across the country and that not all students who need AIM receive them in a timely manner. In order to support effective provision of services, OSEP has funded several AIM-related projects, including the AIM Center and the federally funded AMPs, to improve implementation. SEAs and LEAs have the unique opportunity at this point in time to take advantage of the supports and services offered and move forward with the continuing development of NIMAS/ AIM-related systems. Improved systems would be expected to ensure that students have and can use the AIM they need for educational participation and achievement, thus improving outcomes for children and youth with disabilities. ■