

Creating a School Culture that Supports UDL and Assistive Technology

1. Culture of AAC use throughout the School Building:

- An **IEP-mandated Device** should be used across all disciplines and throughout the school day (including mealtimes, recess, related service sessions, gym, field trips, etc.). **HOWEVER, this does NOT mean having it PROGRAMMED for instructional activities.** It means having the **“VOICE” ALWAYS AVAILABLE** for the student, allowing him/her to interact efficiently during **ALL OPPORTUNITIES** of language/communication exchange.
- Focus of device use should differ between large group instruction vs. small group or 1:1 instruction. For example:
 - **Large class instruction** - teacher presents lesson to class, so the goal should be functional communication (e.g. yes/no, GiveMe20, etc.); answers should be quick and many opportunities should be provided.
 - **Small group instruction** – focus of communication through the device should be on comprehension, language literacy, and/or social skills.
- For students who are demonstrating weaknesses in communication skills and overall language development (whether or not they are non-verbal or just have limited verbal output), the focus during **LARGE GROUP INSTRUCTIONAL PERIODS** must be on **Receptive Skills** (i.e. is the child understanding the information presented). *The required output quantity using alternative devices can be small and succinct.* **Therefore, single-word utterances to evaluate the comprehension are acceptable (e.g. GiveMe20).** A classroom instructional period is NOT the time to elicit increased or lengthy utterances by combining symbols/words to phrases unless the user is advanced and efficient at this, NOR is this the time to give each student a chance to answer the same question or repeat the same comment. **The focus must be on a fast “check in” for comprehension by the teacher and through brief, quick commenting by the student.** Disrupting the flow and presentation of information is challenging. However, REPEATING, REPHRASING, and using ALTERNATIVE PRESENTATIONS INFORMATION is encouraged.

- After Instruction, there should be time for reinforcement and practice. This would typically be in **SMALLER GROUPS** where **language expansion is encouraged**, and where **more comprehensive answers** and **repeated responses** can be practiced.
- **Related Service Providers** have an opportunity to target navigation, access, vocabulary, social skills, behavioral language, and independent communication skills. Occupational Therapists, Physical Therapists, Counselors, and Speech Providers should all be **incorporating use of IEP-driven AAC devices** in their sessions.
- **Classroom Staff** including classroom teachers, cluster teachers, paraprofessionals, nurses, and 1:1 paraprofessionals should all feel comfortable supporting AAC device use in and outside of the classroom. Staff should be provided with the opportunity to **attend trainings** provided by the District. It is **IMPORTANT** that the **ROLES of ALL COMMUNICATION PARTNERS are UNDERSTOOD**. If it is too difficult to have staff released for these trainings, then presentation to school staff should be done at the school level.
- **THE MOST IMPORTANT THING TO IMPRESS UPON ALL STAFF** is that:
 - (a) **All students must be spoken to in a way that they can offer a quick response**, and
 - (b) **All students are spoken to as anyone else would be.**

This is how communication and motivation are fostered.

The GiveMe20 is a group of single-word utterances that can be used in most circumstances if the communication partners (i.e. every person in the building) can structure their words so that at least one of the GiveMe20 words is an option. **THE EASIEST THING TO DO IS TO STRUCTURE ALL COMMUNICATION IN THE FORM OF A “YES/NO” QUESTION... ALL STUDENTS WILL THEN BE ABLE TO RESPOND (see “Dialogs”)**. While some reduced rate and reduced quantity of speech may be required, the adults should speak freely to students even though they may not readily answer back.

- **SmartBoard Technology** should be used, if available, to reinforce communication, as well as to enhance the presentation of information (i.e. **UNIVERSAL DESIGN for LEARNING (UDL): the design of instructional materials and methods that makes learning goals achievable by students with wide differences in their abilities**).

- **Appropriate Programmatic Equipment** should be available and **used in the classrooms** (i.e. incorporated into every lesson in the classroom). Using the **GiveMe20**, a small amount of **devices passed around** to check in on comprehension can be very effective.
- **The Entire School Culture** should be **aware of UDL practices** and how these practices affect the way the information is presented to students. There needs to be a clear understanding of the differences between **Personal (IEP-driven) Assistive Technologies** VERSUS technologies that would be used when implementing **UDL practices**. ([LINK](#))
- Administrators should be aware of the **Programs Recommended by Technology Solutions** to facilitate communication. There are materials that are **free on the web**, demonstrations on **Vimeo**, as well as things to purchase or acquire through **IndTech Points**.
 - Give Me 20
 - Lyrical Language
 - Lunchbox
 - WWW.vimeo.com/d75
 - Common Space kit
 - Literacy Kit
 - Daily Plan it
 - Getting Ready to Learn
 - Behavior plans for increasing communication for challenging students (TBC)
 - Ideas for access (TBC)
- **A little about HANDWRITING...**

Students should all be encouraged to learn to handwrite. However, there are a significant number of cases where stifling the writing process and not allowing keyboarding to become the main interaction with the writing process will impeded written language skills and literacy. **If at the age 9 years, a student is still significantly struggling with physical handwriting, a move towards keyboarding must be considered.** Becoming good at typing will benefit all the students in today's world. Computer labs need to incorporate the teaching of touch-typing again...

2. PREPARATION for ASSISTIVE TECHNOLOGY EVALUATIONS:

When evaluators arrive at the school site, the following procedures are expected.

- A meeting place should be designated.
- Parents/Guardians should be informed prior to and invited to evaluation (e.g. through the Parental Consent Letter). This information MUST be sent from the school site to the parent/guardian once the evaluation date is scheduled.
- Staff member(s) must be present during the evaluation.
- A classroom observation will take place at the start or at the end of the evaluation. This is particularly important to observe the student in a familiar environment, assess the classroom expectations for language, and to evaluate the need for further education or support for staff and the student.
- All information about New Evaluations and Re-Evaluations as well as integration and repair of IEP-mandated devices can be found on the DOE Website under ASSISTIVE TECHNOLOGY (<http://schools.nyc.gov/Offices/District75/Departments/Technology/AssistiveAdaptive/default.htm>).