

TLC - 21 Ipad for Inclusion

Ipad Plus: A Recommendation for the Changing Role of SERT in the Ipad Era

Benefits of ipads for use by students with IEPs:

- Receptive Language Needs - accessibility features allow for free and more independent access to traditional text sources (sentences/paragraphs)
- Expressive Language Needs - enhanced voice-recognition software/apps result in lower student frustration when utilizing voice to text (more accurate and consistent than previous technological options available in the AMDSB)
- Collaboration - increased ability for students with IEPs to collaborate with their peers regardless of their physical location (alternate space)
- Greater accessibility to text resources for students
- Increased independence and ownership of learning by the student
- Increased ability for oral assessment and conferencing with other students or staff
- Staff supported organization applications (virtual notebooks)

Limitations of ipads for use by students with IEPs:

- Do not facilitate the following accommodations driven by student need:
 - extra time
 - rephrasing
 - question clarification
 - prompting
 - refocusing
 - quiet space or alternate space
- Lack of applications/software that effectively and correctly interpret non-traditional text (diagrams, charts, equations etc)

- Missed implied messages when reading text - the monotone nature of the electronic voice does not provide for inflection or tone which provide inherent clues about content
- Student confidence can be impacted by being required to remain in the “regular classroom” while using the ipad to meet accommodations - this may make plainly obvious to peers the nature of students’ learning needs and further differentiate (separate) them from their peers
- Some students with IEPs also present with mental health challenges that run the gamut from anxiety disorders to depression. Ipads are not equipped to identify the early indicators of increased anxiety nor can this tool accommodate for these needs.
- Students with executive functioning needs may find the ipad to be a further distraction to their learning, rather than a device that facilitates it.

Recommendation for Ongoing SERT Role - the “Ipad Plus” Model

The benefits of allowing IEP students unfettered access to ipads to support their learning are clear and well defined. It means that SERTs are freed from the mundane task of creating digital copies of text to be used on other technological devices and platforms. However, the role of the SERT has not been replaced by the ipad. There are several functions and accommodations that NEED to continue to be provided by a human educator. These include (but may not be limited to):

- providing extra time
- rephrasing
- question clarification
- prompting
- refocusing
- providing a quiet space

In addition to providing these basic accommodations, SERTs are better able to identify emerging mental health issues that may be affecting a student's academic performance (eg: test anxiety) and implement a variety of strategies to offset these; instituting frequent breaks or allowing the student to talk through issues in a one-on-one, private, supportive environment. In order to allow for the optimum support for all IEP students it is the recommendation of this PLC that students with IEPs be allowed to access alternative, SERT supported spaces on an as-needed basis (as determined by student, classroom teacher, SERT and parents, and in reference to the legal requirements of their IEP). The ipad becomes the preferred "tool in the toolbox" but not the only support available to the student. Much research exists identifying the role that supportive relationships in safe spaces affords all students, especially those that struggle in education.

In addition, schools should facilitate the creation of on-going partnerships among the Technology Coaches and SERTs. This will allow for accommodation, modification and appropriate instructional and assessment design, coupled with the hardware, software and training required to support the staff and students affected.