

Standards for Electronic and Information Technology

Judie Lee, IPAT Director

The U.S. Access Board, an independent Federal agency devoted to accessibility for people with disabilities, issued new standards for electronic and information technology effective as of June 21, 2001. These are commonly referred to as the "508 Standards". Section 508 is a part of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 which requires that electronic and information technology developed, procured, maintained, or used by the Federal government be accessible to people with disabilities. Section 508 applies to Federal departments and agencies. It does not regulate the private sector and does not apply directly to recipients of Federal funds.

The 508 standards provide criteria specific to various types of technologies, including: software applications and operating systems; web-based information or applications; telecommunication products; video and multimedia products; self-contained, closed products (information kiosks, calculators, and fax machines); and desktop and portable computers. Additional information on Section 508 is available at www.section508.gov

People are asking how these standards apply to the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act, or Individuals With Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). These are general anti-discrimination laws that require program and architectural accessibility, which could include the provision of accessible information technology as a reasonable accommodation or as an auxiliary aid or service necessary for equal access. These access decisions are made for individuals on a case-by-case basis, whereas, Section 508 information technology access decisions are made by determining if products adhere to the Access Board standards.

A diverse committee, consisting of representatives from industry and disability organizations, completed a humongous task and provided all of us criteria to determine whether or not a technology product or system is accessible. Policy makers and legal experts will continue to sort out what enforcement mechanism is relevant or appropriate to insure compliance. In the meantime, let us celebrate the accomplishments of the Access Board and the fact that there are criteria to assist those responsible for purchasing technology.

As the electronic age revolutionizes the way we access government, business, and the service industries, it is important that millions of people with disabilities are not left out. There are many ways to provide the access people need, but awareness of-why it is needed and how to do it-lags far behind. We all have a responsibility to aid information technology personnel with their understanding of how a disability impacts access to information, so the intent of the "508 standards" are realized by all.

What is an Accessible Playground?

Many families know frustration when their child with disabilities cannot join the fun at local parks and school grounds because play equipment is not accessible. The U.S. Access board recently addressed that dilemma when it released federal accessibility guidelines for newly built or altered play areas covered under the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA).

The guidelines require play areas designed for children over age two and found at schools, parks, child care facilities, and other facilities subject to the ADA to offer a variety of accessible options in addition to their regular play equipment.

The guidelines clarify several issues, such as the number of play equipment pieces that must be accessible, the amount of space that must be allowed for wheelchairs, and the methods of accessibility that may be used. For example ~ ramps, transfer systems, or platform lifts may be used to access elevated equipment such as 'jungle gyms'. The guidelines also affect surface materials. They must be soft enough to prevent injuries, but firm enough for a wheelchair to maneuver.

Additional information about the guidelines may be found at the Architectural and Transportation Barriers Compliance Board website at www.access-board.gov. Copies of the guidelines (publication S-39) can be ordered through the boards publication line at (800) 872-2253 (Voice) or (800) 993-2822 (TTY).

Special note: There is a non-profit organization dedicated to helping communities create universally accessible playgrounds for children called Boundless Playgrounds. For more information check out their website: www.boundlessplaygrounds.org.

Telephone Relay Services Expand

Across the nation and In North Dakota, individuals wishing to telephone people with speech disabilities, or those with speech disabilities wishing to call others have a new telephone service available called speech to speech (STS) relay. This service allows a person with a speech disability

to access a specially trained operator (called a communications assistant, or CA) who makes the call and repeats, or relays the words that the caller is saying to the called party. The called party responds directly to the caller and does not go through the CA.

The Federal Communications Commission (FCC) anticipates that STS relay will be especially valuable to people with conditions affecting loudness or clarity of speech. This new extension to the telephone relay service is critical; given the importance that telecommunication plays in a person's ability to contact emergency help, day-to-day services and family members. According to the U.S. Census Bureau, 2.5 million Americans have a functional limitation in having their speech understood.

To access the STS relay service in North Dakota, just call the toll-free STS number: 1-877-366-3709 and a CA will serve you.

Corrections

A website and telephone number provided in our April issue of the AT KEY were incorrect, sorry. Please make note of the correct website address for the North Dakota Senior Info-Line: www.ndseniorinfo.com and the telephone number for the North Dakota Association for the Disabled (NDAD) 800-532-6323. Visit NDAD's website at <http://www.ndad.org>

Consumer Connection

Spotlight on IPAT's Consumer Advisory Committee (CAC) & Their Reflections on CAC Participation . . .

As a parent attempting to raise two children in today's world I find myself more than overwhelmed at times, without considering the additional impact of dealing with one child's special needs.

Many days I find myself feeling shattered. However, through my activities with the IPAT CAC I can pick up the pieces and find that my family's needs and problems fit into a special place in a larger puzzle.

The CAC team is a group of people from numerous walks of life and disability arenas and our experiences and hardships and strengths all fit together to solve so many puzzles for so many!

Stacie Metelmann

Being a member of the IPAT CAC has been helpful to me by keeping me informed about the assistive technology (AT) services and devices available in ND. The IPAT equipment loan library has allowed me to borrow and try AT devices before I try raising the funds to buy what a cost effective approach to finding what I need! IPAT and CAC members are just a phone call away if I need help or advice and the website is always available.

Bob Puyear

IPAT:

- It seemed so BIG
- I felt so small
- Now, it is great
- To be part of it ALL.

Serving as a CAC member is an interesting, stimulating, and sometimes mind-boggling learning experience for me. It has made me more aware of the needs of other people who are disabled. It is a joy to know that often a very small adjustment to a piece of equipment can bring comfort to someone and make their lives a little better.

It gives me satisfaction and a sense of purpose to belong to this group. I've lost the fear of Technology as I learn more and more about assistive technology and the real meaning of the term.

It is a good feeling to be part of the whole puzzle. We are not so small after all, when we can make a difference in the lives of people around us. I am thankful for the opportunity to serve as a CAC member

Mabel Dever

Funding News

ALTERNATIVE AT FUNDING SOURCES-Part II Service Clubs and Fraternal Organizations

Local civic clubs and fraternal organizations such as Sertoma, Lions, Optimist, Kiwanis, Rotary, Elks, Masons, Shriners, and the Knights of Columbus, often contribute to the purchase of assistive technology by setting aside or raising money to help people with disabilities obtain the equipment they need. These non-profit organizations often have specific mission statements that direct their activities and may target only certain types of disabilities or age groups.

Because chapter activities of individual groups vary, individuals who wish to pursue this potential funding avenue will also find it beneficial to contact the group's national headquarters. Information to obtain includes: chapter locations, goals of specific chapters, "pet" projects, eligibility, and application processes.

ND AT Financial Loan Program

IPAT and the North Dakota Association for the Disabled (NDAD) have established North Dakota's Assistive Technology Financial Loan Program. This program, currently being reorganized and improved, makes personal loans for the purchase of AT devices needed to increase an individual's independence and level of participation.

Any North Dakota resident who has, or is a family member of someone who has, a physical or mental impairment that substantially limits one or more major life activities is eligible to apply for a loan through this program. There are no minimum or maximum income eligibility requirements; however, applicants must demonstrate their ability to repay the loan. For further information call NDAD at 1-800-532-632.

Social Security

The Social Security Administration provides limited monthly income supplements, but does not pay for assistive technology devices and services directly. However, there are several programs and strategies that will allow one to subtract the cost of AT from earned and unearned income, thus reducing its adverse effect on Social Security Benefits. In some cases, when one receives income in addition to their Social Security Benefits, he or she can experience a decrease or loss in those benefits. For further information about these social security programs and strategies, contact Jeannie Krull, Regional Coordinator, and Policy/Funding Analyst for IPAT at 1-800-265-4728 or 1-701-239-7228.

EQUIPMENT SPOTLIGHT

CO: WRITER 4000 Software

The latest version of the popular Co: Writer word prediction program has a new writing tool, which includes FlexSpell™ and the Total Vocabulary System™ or TVS. Emerging writers can use FlexSpell™ to write the words they want, even if they can only spell them phonetically. The TVS lets teachers provide concise vocabulary that lets students write on any topic with less effort.

Co: Writer 4000 works with any word processing program, can be used with the Discover: Switch, has adjustable background and text colors,

predicts usage including verbs that agree with the subject, and/or can be used as voice output communication software.

This software is available for loan from the IPAT Equipment Loan Library. It is obtainable for purchase through Don Johnston, 1-800-999-4660, www.donjohnston.com. Single user price for this Mac/Win CD is \$325.00.

MARK YOUR CALENDAR

June 11 - 12, 2001 Pre-Conference
June 13 - 14, 2110 Conference
Teaching and Technology (TNT!)

Showcases the best in teaching and the latest in technology
Bismarck/Mandan, ND
1-800-852-5685

July 14 - 15, 2001

Escape to the Lake
Adaptive water skiing event - no charge
Lake Nelson, near Center, ND
1-800-532-NDAD (-6323)

August 6 - 9, 2001

Teaching ALL Students - Universal Design for Learning
CAST Summer Institute
(978) 531-8555

August 23, 2001

Accessibility in the Digital Age: Electronic & Information Standards &
Website Development
8 AM - 5 PM
Seven Seas - Mandan, ND
Sharon: 1-800-472-2911

September 25 - 28, 001

AT- Leadership Training Institute (AT- LTI)
Limited number accepted, application required
Medora, ND
Connie: 1-800-265-IPAT (-2748)
or 1-800-366-6881 (TTY)