



Expert says:

- **Students should be able to use their own personalized AT with assessments**
- **Making students learn new tool set for test may pose additional barriers**
- **Look for new developments in cloud-based solutions, wearable technology**

Q&A: Students who use assistive technology face new challenges

Computer-based assessments aligned with the Common Core State Standards include embedded accessibility features and tools such as the ability to magnify text or have test items read aloud.

That might seem like a benefit for students with disabilities who already use [assistive technology](#) in the classroom.

However, making students learn a new tool set for these tests rather than allowing them to use their own AT device or software can create additional challenges, says David Dikter, CEO of the Assistive Technology Industry Association.

Computer-based assessments need to be compatible with students' AT devices and software so students are able to use what they're already familiar with, he said.

"Right now, none of these state assessments do that," according to Dikter.

Special Ed Connection® recently spoke with Dikter about this and other assistive technology issues during [ATIA's](#) annual conference in Orlando, Fla. His answers below have been edited for length and clarity.

Q: *What new challenges might computer-based assessments create for students who use AT?*

A: State standardized testing and Common Core tests such as PARCC, Smarter Balanced, and others need to ensure that a student's assistive technology can work with the test. Right now, those state tests are not accessible to people with disabilities. The consortia would argue that a lot of [them are]. They've built in pieces of assistive technology into their tests. I argue that they create an additional burden on students who use assistive technology because they require them to change the technology they use. Students have to use a low-level tool that the testing company built in rather than the robust and personalized AT that those students use every day. Now teachers have to teach students to use a test tool.

There's only one screen reader supported on these tests. Some people don't use that screen reader. So in order to take the test, students have to learn how to use a specific screen reader that they don't use on a regular basis. I don't think the testing organizations fully understand the ramifications of that.

Q: *What other emerging issues will AT leaders be watching this year?*

A: We're just embarking on issues around data collection and privacy within AT. In the field of education, teachers have been trying to find and use free technology, software, and apps forever. Back in the day, we called it "shareware."

If we talk about privacy, most of that "free stuff" should be off the table. In education, the minute you don't know where that data is being collected and there's no policy around data collection, that technology should be off the table. I think student privacy issues will continue to be a big item of interest.

Q: *What surprising new developments have you seen in AT this year?*

A: I continue to see some really cool stuff being done with apps. I'm seeing a handful of wearable technologies, as well. For instance, there are new vision-related products coming out such as wearable glasses designed for people with vision impairments. Another big area involves cloud-based solutions. These are access solutions that an individual can use on any device, anywhere.

Aside from new developments in assistive technology, there are still a lot of people who don't know enough about the basics. The technology is constantly evolving. For instance, 15 years ago, eye-gaze technology just wasn't possible and today it is. But, even the old stuff such as switches, sensors, and head tracking are new to many people.

Q: *Why do AT product developers go out of business?*

A: I think right now there are lots of really great products that pop up. But sometimes, for instance, if it's an app, it's really hard to make a long-term business out of an app if people only want to pay \$29 for it. Take an app that's designed for specific individuals and it only has the potential for 10,000 people around the world to buy it. What if you only reach 100 of those people? You can't build a company with only 100 customers buying a \$29 app.

People often question, why is some assistive technology so expensive? To develop a robust augmentative communication device or to develop a braille display or a magnification product, it takes the same engineering time, energy, effort, and skill level that it takes to develop any high-tech product, yet you're not going to sell hundreds of thousands of this product. If we want to continue to develop it and we think it's really good for people with disabilities, the price needs to sustain it.

See also:

- [Review criteria for determining use of read-aloud accommodation](#) (June 13, 2014)
- Case file: [Teen's refusal of test accommodations requires district to reconvene IEP team](#) (Sept. 11, 2013)
- [SmartStart: Specific Types of Testing Accommodations](#)

For more stories and guidance on this topic, see the [Common Core Roundup](#).

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