

# Accessible Instructional Materials

A Guide for Macomb County School Districts



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About this guide: This guide is the first in a three-part series of documents developed to help Macomb County educators understand and provide Accessible Instructional Materials for students with print disabilities. This document: Accessible Instructional Materials: AIM Introduction And Guide for Macomb County School Districts, serves as an introduction to AIM and an overview of the role of educators in evaluating, identifying, acquiring, implementing and documenting AIM.

**Accessible instructional materials (AIM)** are specialized formats of textbooks and other core curriculum materials that support students who cannot benefit from a standard set of learning materials. Providing accessible materials means that all students can have access to the information they need to learn. The purpose of AIM is to:

- Ensure **student success** by providing content in accessible formats that match students' needs.
- Enable student's to **independently access** instructional content.
- Ensure that students with disabilities receive and have an opportunity to learn from the **same content** as their grade-level peers.
- Increase students with disabilities **participation in the general education curriculum, the least restrictive environment.**

## What are Accessible Instructional Materials (AIM)?

AIM refers to materials converted to accessible, specialized formats such as audio, digital, Braille, and large print. Fully accessible means all text is digital and can be read with text-to-speech software; modified with regard to font size, and navigated by unit, chapter, section, page number, descriptive video, etc. Other examples of full accessibility include:

- Images accompanied by text and long descriptions when appropriate.
- Math equations provided as images with text descriptions.
- Sequence of content levels and headings appropriately formatted.
- Compatibility with assistive technology tools.

(MITS/AIM Guide for Decision Making Teams 2011)

## Who benefits from AIM?

Students with a "print disability" benefit from AIM. The definition of a print disability is generally considered a **functional definition**. These students, by definition, are unable to gain information from traditional print based educational materials. They are disadvantaged or excluded from learning opportunities when they are expected to learn from traditional text.

Students with a print disability may include students with blindness, visual impairments, specific learning disabilities or other physical conditions.

## Determining who benefits from AIM

It should be noted that not all students with a disability require or benefit from AIM in order to progress educationally. **Determining whether a student needs AIM is an IEP team decision.** Careful consideration of each student's needs, strengths and preferences must be conducted by the IEP team in order to determine a need. When a more formal process of assessment is required, IEP teams may choose to administer the Protocol for Accommodations in Reading (PAR). <http://donjohnston.com/par/#sthash.KB7JrAzF.dpbs>

## Why is AIM more important than ever?

Recently enacted federal laws suggest the following:

- Special education students are considered general education students first. Special education students spend more time in the general education classroom than ever before. AIM supports students' participation in the general curriculum, allowing them to be educated in the least restrictive environment (LRE).
- Students with disabilities are expected to participate in the same assessments as their non-disabled peers. Therefore, they must have access to the same materials in a format that they can use independently.
- Learning and performance standards established for students with disabilities must be the same as, or aligned with, standards established for non-disabled peers. The Common Core State Standards raise content expectations for all students and AIM is one tool to promote access to the content.

## What the law says about AIM.

Under IDEA (2004) and Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act, the law states that if a student needs textbooks and other core instructional materials in

specialized formats in order to receive free and appropriate public education (FAPE), school districts have an obligation to provide these materials and provide them **in a timely manner**. Timely manner is generally interpreted as “at the same time as other students receive their materials”. ([see Appendix B](#) for more on the law and AIM)

## **What role do educators play in the timely provision of AIM?**

### ***Local Education Agency Administration Team :***

The local education agency (LEA) has ultimate responsibility for providing accessible instructional materials to students with an IEP or 504 who require them in order to receive FAPE. School districts should establish written procedures to ensure that all students receive standard instructional materials and specialized formats concurrently. This plan should include:

- Clear definition of staff roles and responsibilities
- An inventory of what accessible materials are currently available.
- Guidelines for textbook adoption committees, including:
  - A process for considering the needs of all students, when making decisions about material purchases; including specialized formats.
  - A process for evaluating digital content prior to purchase. The review should include an assessment of material’s accessibility features and compatibility with assistive technologies prior to purchase. (As publishers convert to digital content, this becomes increasingly important.)
  - Specific contract language embedded in all new textbook purchase orders that obligates publishers to supply an accessible digital file of the textbook to the national repository, the NIMAC.
  - A note that the materials purchasing committee should include someone familiar with the issues related to AIM and special needs students.
- Guidelines for material acquisition
  - Determine how AIM will be obtained and distributed.
- Guidelines for managing materials

- Designate a material storage and management process.
- Monitor material distribution, use, and return.
- Plan for training staff, students and families regarding AIM acquisition and implementation.
- Description of the district’s technology infrastructure as it relates to supporting AIM including:
  - Access to general technology including internet, computers, headphones etc.
  - Access to necessary assistive technology.
- A plan for allocating the resources necessary to effectively implement AIM. The plan should include specific technology resources, staff time and delegation of key duties related to AIM.

***Curriculum Purchasing Committees:***

Curriculum purchasing committees have a unique opportunity to help students with a print disability get access to the content they need while helping their district save time and money. When districts take advantage of their buying power and insist that publishers provide AIM along with traditional purchases, their teachers spend less time adapting materials and have more time available to teach.

In order to support AIM, curriculum purchasing committees should:

- Include someone familiar with AIM and special needs students.
- Make accessibility a priority in decisions regarding textbook purchases.
- Give preference to publishers who sell accessible materials.
- Request sample materials prior to purchase to determine the degree of accessibility. Not all digital materials are accessible.
- Obligate publishers to submit NIMAS source files to the National Instructional Materials Access Center (NIMAC) by including specific contract language in the purchase agreement ([see Appendix A](#))  
Districts are obligated by law to embed language in contracts obligating publishers to provide a NIMAS file to the NIMAC.

- Secure rights from the publisher to produce AIM for students when other options for acquisition do not exist.

### ***IEP Team:***

Consideration of AIM requires broad perspectives and expertise. Students, parents/guardians, educators, therapists, assistive technology specialists, (the IEP Team) are essential participants in the decision making process. It's important to have all IEPT members included when making AIM decisions, particularly when a student has complex visual, learning or motor concerns.

The Individual Educational Plan (IEP) team is responsible for making the following decisions: (See document: ***AIM for the IEP Team*** for more comprehensive IEP team roles and responsibilities.)

- Determining if a student **requires** materials in specialized formats in order to receive free and appropriate education in the least restrictive environment.
- Determining the specialized format or **the type of AIM** needed.
- **Planning for AIM acquisition** including determining which material source(s) a student may access.
- **Planning for acquisition** of the necessary **assistive technology**.
- **Planning for AIM implementation** including specific information regarding training for staff, students and parents.
- **Planning for AIM data collection** including specific information regarding how to track AIM effectiveness and make adjustments as necessary.

### ***Classroom Teacher***

Classroom teachers plays an important role in ensuring that AIM are delivered in a timely manner. They are responsible for the providing material titles and ISB numbers to special education service providers to ensure accessible materials are available to students with print disabilities when other students receive their materials. This will require staff to collaborate and plan ahead. Classroom teachers also provide valuable feedback to the IEP team regarding the need for and the successful implementation of AIM.

### ***AT Representatives***

Assistive technology representatives help the IEP team select and acquire the appropriate technology needed for students to use their AIM. They also serve as a resource for districts regarding the provision of AIM and AIM implementation.

### ***Special Education Service Provider***

The special education service provider coordinates AIM implementation, including: identifying and coordinating training needs, coordinating data collection and IEP documentation and overseeing the day-to-day implementation of AIM.

## **How do we acquire AIM?**

### **High quality AIM are acquired in diverse ways, including:**

- direct purchase from publishers
- membership with accessible media producers or special repositories of instructional materials (e.g., Bookshare, Learning Ally, National Library Service)
- downloads of open-source and copyright-free materials from the internet
- manual conversion of instructional materials by instructional staff.

How the specialized format of a material is acquired depends on factors related to the student's eligibility and need. (See document: ***AIM for the IEP Team*** for more comprehensive information regarding AIM acquisition)

## **How do we effectively implement the use of AIM for individual students?**

The IEP team should develop a detailed action plan with shared responsibility for AIM implementation. Teams should keep in mind that



students may be unfamiliar with text and require explicit instruction on how to navigate and learn from text-based materials.

The implementation plan should include:

- Detailed information regarding when, where and how the student will access and use AIM throughout the instructional day.
- An instructional plan that includes explicit reading strategy instruction to help students effectively gain information from text.
- Details regarding AT tool acquisition and training for staff, student and parents.
- Specific information related to monitoring and documenting AIM effectiveness (data collection).
- A follow up date set to revisit, evaluate and improve the AIM implementation plan.

Developing an understanding of the role of educators in evaluating, identifying, acquiring, implementing and documenting AIM, is the first step toward creating a district-wide process for providing students with accessible instructional materials. Districts are encouraged to use this document to begin the conversation among stakeholders as they come together to develop and plan for AIM implementation.

## Appendix A

### Basic NIMAS Purchase Order / Contract Language

By agreeing to deliver the materials marked with "NIMAS" on this contract or purchase order, the publisher agrees to prepare and submit, on or before \_\_\_/\_\_\_/\_\_\_\_\_ a NIMAS fileset to the NIMAC that complies with the terms and procedures set forth by the NIMAC. Should the vendor be a distributor of the materials and not the publisher, the distributor agrees to immediately notify the publisher of its obligation to submit NIMAS filesets of the purchased products to the NIMAC. The files will be used for the production of alternate formats as permitted under the law for students with print disabilities. Note that the delivery of print versions should not be delayed in cases where the NIMAS fileset has yet to be completed, validated and/or cataloged by the NIMAC.

- For additional information about NIMAS, please refer to <http://nimas.cast.org>.
- For additional information about the NIMAC, refer to <http://nimac.us>.

You may also consider including the following in your contract language to ensure every student has access to digital materials:

Preference will be given to publishers that are able to provide instructional materials in both print and digital formats. Digital formats should include all images (e.g. drawings, photographs, icons, charts, graphs, etc.). The publisher will notify the State or Local Education District if and when the instructional materials that are included in a purchase order are available for purchase in any of the following digital formats. Digital formats should include all images (e.g. drawings, photographs, icons, charts, graphs, etc.). Additional supports are encouraged.

## Appendix B

### The Law and AIM

Section CFR 300.172 of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act of 2004 (IDEA 2004) requires state and local education agencies to ensure the provision of accessible instructional materials in a timely manner to students with print disabilities who require the.

Sec. 300.172 Access to instructional materials.

(a) General. The State must--

(1) Adopt the National Instructional Materials Accessibility Standard (NIMAS), published as appendix C to part 300, for the purposes of providing instructional materials to blind persons or other persons with print disabilities, in a timely manner after publication of the NIMAS in the Federal Register on July 19, 2006 (71 FR 41084); and

(2) Establish a State definition of "timely manner" for purposes of paragraphs (b)(2) and (b)(3) of this section if the State is not coordinating with the National Instructional Materials Access Center (NIMAC) or (b)(3) and (c)(2) of this section if the State is coordinating with the NIMAC.

(b) Rights and responsibilities of SEA.

(1) Nothing in this section shall be construed to require any SEA to coordinate with the NIMAC.

(2) If an SEA chooses not to coordinate with the NIMAC, the SEA must provide an assurance to the Secretary that it will provide instructional materials to blind persons or other persons with print disabilities in a timely manner.

(3) Nothing in this section relieves an SEA of its responsibility to ensure that children with disabilities who need instructional materials in accessible formats, but are not included under the definition of blind or other persons with print disabilities in Sec. 300.172(e)(1)(i) or who need materials that cannot be produced from NIMAS files, receive those instructional materials in a timely manner.

(4) In order to meet its responsibility under paragraphs (b)(2), (b)(3), and (c) of this section to ensure that children with disabilities who need instructional materials in accessible formats are provided those materials in a timely manner, the SEA must ensure that all public agencies take all reasonable steps to provide instructional materials in accessible formats to children with disabilities who need those

instructional materials at the same time as other children receive instructional materials. Part 300 / B / 300.172 / b / 4

(c) Preparation and delivery of files. If an SEA chooses to coordinate with the NIMAC, as of December 3, 2006, the SEA must--

(1) As part of any print instructional materials adoption process, procurement contract, or other practice or instrument used for purchase of print instructional materials, must enter into a written contract with the publisher of the print instructional materials to--

(i) Require the publisher to prepare and, on or before delivery of the print instructional materials, provide to NIMAC electronic files containing the contents of the print instructional materials using the NIMAS; or

(ii) Purchase instructional materials from the publisher that are produced in, or may be rendered in, specialized formats.

(2) Provide instructional materials to blind persons or other persons with print disabilities in a timely manner.

(d) Assistive technology. In carrying out this section, the SEA, to the maximum extent possible, must work collaboratively with the State agency responsible for assistive technology programs.

(e) Definitions.

(1) In this section and Sec. 300.210--

(i) Blind persons or other persons with print disabilities means children served under this part who may qualify to receive books and other publications produced in specialized formats in accordance with the Act entitled "An Act to provide books for adult blind," approved March 3, 1931, 2 U.S.C 135a;

(ii) National Instructional Materials Access Center or NIMAC means the center established pursuant to section 674(e) of the Act;

(iii) National Instructional Materials Accessibility Standard or NIMAS has the meaning given the term in section 674(e)(3)(B) of the Act;

(iv) Specialized formats has the meaning given the term in section 674(e)(3)(D) of the Act. (2) The definitions in paragraph (e)(1) of this section apply to each State and LEA, whether or not the State or LEA chooses to coordinate with the NIMAC. (Approved by the Office of Management and Budget under control number 1820-0030)