Students arrive in classrooms with a variety of skills, interests, and needs. For many learners, the typical curriculum—including instructional methods, classroom materials, and assessments of knowledge—may contain barriers to educational participation and achievement. Students who are unable to access print materials face particular challenges. Accessible instructional materials reduce barriers and provide rich supports for learning. By using accessible instructional materials, educators enable all learners to gain knowledge, skills and enthusiasm for learning.

Did you know?
“The majority of students are able to use books as tools for learning, albeit at various levels of skill and comfort. Some students can read a print-based book fluently. Others need more time. But for still other students, printed text is a barrier in and of itself. Due to physical, sensory, cognitive, or learning differences, print-based materials are not usable and cannot support their learning” (Curry & Maine AIM CoP, 2008). These students have a print disability.

• A print disability is “a condition related to blindness, visual impairment, specific learning disability or other physical condition in which the student needs an alternative or specialized format (i.e., Braille, large print, audio, digital text) in order to access and gain information from conventional printed materials” (Maine AIM CoP, What is a Print Disability?).

• Accessible instructional materials are specialized formats of curricular content, which are selected based on an individual student’s needs. The core material is not altered; it is converted from print into the mode that is accessible for the student.

Which students might require Accessible Instructional Materials?
According to the National Center on Accessible Instructional Materials, AIM are “for students with sensory, physical, cognitive, or learning differences and their teachers…” This might include:

• A student who has difficulty holding his head steady for a period of time.
• A student with cerebral palsy or juvenile arthritis who cannot hold a book or manipulate paper.
• A child with a cognitive impairment that makes recognizing or decoding text difficult.
• A student who is an English language learner.
• A child with a complex medical condition whose ability to concentrate is diminished or who tires very easily (National Center, All About AIM).
What is the basis for providing students with accessible materials?
The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) 2004 requires state and local educational agencies to make sure that textbooks and related core instructional materials are provided to students with print disabilities in a timely manner (IDEA Section 300.172). In Maine, “timely manner” is defined as at the same time as their peers without a print disability (Maine AIM, Laws). School leaders, teachers and parents must know the specific types of accessible materials their students need, how to acquire them, and how these materials can be used. This ensures that students with print disabilities have equal access to the educational curriculum.

Who is responsible for making decisions about accessible instructional materials?

- IEP teams have the responsibilities of selection, acquisition and use of accessible instructional materials for students receiving specialized services under IDEA.
- The school Section 504 Compliance officer is responsible for documenting this determination for students with 504 plans.

Where may I learn more?
The Maine Department of Education’s Maine CITE Program is the statewide organization designed to help make assistive and universally designed technology more available to Maine children, adults and seniors who need them. For more information about Maine CITE, please visit their website: http://www.mainecite.org/.

What are examples of alternate formats?
- Audiotapes, CDs, MP3 files, software programs, or other auditory enhancement
- Talking books, calculators, clocks and watches
- Braille code
- Large print – typically 18-point font size or larger
- Digital text – via visual, tactile, or auditory display on a computer or other assistive device
- Electronic formats such as disk, email, electronic databases/bulletin boards

The National Center on Accessible Instructional Materials is a resource to state and district-level educators, parents and others interested in learning about AIM. For more information about the National Center on Accessible Instructional Materials, please visit their website: http://aim.cast.org.

References
