

# LEARNING IDEAS

## Understanding Accessible Educational Materials (AEM) and Their Use: Tips for K-12 Educators

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 educational materials (AEM) and related assistive technology (AT) reduce barriers and provide rich supports for learning. By using AEM and related AT, educators enable all learners to gain knowledge, skills and enthusiasm for learning.

### Did you know?

"For some students, printed educational materials can be a barrier to participation and achievement in the general education curriculum. Accessible instructional materials (AIM) and Accessible Educational Materials (AEM) are print- and technology-based educational materials, including printed and electronic textbooks and related core materials that are designed or converted in a way that makes them usable across the widest range of student variability regardless of format [print, digital, graphical, audio, video]" (Maine AEM Program, 2018). 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 AEM CoP, What is a Print Disability?).

**Accessible educational 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 Educational Materials and related assistive technology (AT)?

According to the National Center on Accessible Educational Materials (AEM), "the key consideration for AEM and related AT is the student's functional ability to use and learn from the standard print materials used across the curriculum." For example, a student may benefit from AEM and related AT if they:

- can not see text on a page;
- are unable to hold a book or turn a page;
- can not sit upright and stay alert for sufficient periods of time;
- can not read for the length of time required without becoming tired;
- can not identify letters or numbers; or
- can not read fluently.



## What is the basis for providing students with accessible educational materials and related assistive technology (AT)?

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 AEM, 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 educational materials and related assistive technology (AT)?

- IEP teams have the responsibilities of selection, acquisition and use of accessible educational materials and related assistive technology 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 do I get accessible educational materials?

The student's needs will determine how and where the accessible educational materials are acquired, including direct purchase from publishers or accessible media producers, from special repositories of instructional materials (e.g., Maine's Instructional Materials Center, Bookshare, or Learning Ally), through downloads of open source and copyright-free materials from the Internet, and through manual conversion of materials by teachers.

## Where may I learn more?

The Maine AEM Program is the statewide organization designed to provide technical assistance and training to Maine educators and families. It also provides training and technical assistance regarding the identification of students with print disabilities, and the selection, acquisition and use of accessible instructional and educational materials and related assistive technologies. More information about [Maine AEM Program](https://maine-aim.org/about-aim/) can be found at <https://maine-aim.org/about-aim/>

The [National Center on Accessible Educational Materials](http://aem.cast.org/) ( <http://aem.cast.org/> ) provides resources and technical assistance for educators, parents, students, publishers, conversion houses, accessible media producers, and others interested in learning more about AEM and implementing AEM and the National Instructional Materials Accessibility Standard (NIMAS).

The National Dissemination Center for Children with Disabilities offers [a learning module that includes a presentation about the National Instructional Materials Accessibility Standard \(NIMAS\)](http://www.parentcenterhub.org/partb-module8/): <http://www.parentcenterhub.org/partb-module8/>

[Bookshare](https://www.bookshare.org/cms/about) is an e-book library that makes books available to people with print disabilities without publisher permission under a copyright exemption – the Chafee Amendment. Read more about Bookshare at <https://www.bookshare.org/cms/about>

[Learning Ally](http://www.learningally.org/) is a national nonprofit dedicated to helping students with print disabilities, including blindness, visual impairment and dyslexia, overcome barriers to learning by advancing the use of accessible and effective educational solutions. Read more about Learning Ally online at <http://www.learningally.org/>



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