

## **Missouri Assistive Technology (MoAT) Programs & Services for Elementary and Secondary Education**

Missouri Assistive Technology (MoAT) offers an array of programs and services for Missourians of all ages and all disability categories. There are at least four key MoAT programs that support schools statewide in the evaluation and implementation of assistive technology across the curriculum. These programs are:

- Device Loan Program (ETC) – a free, short-term assistive device loan program
- Training and on-site consultation services
- Accessible Instructional Materials guidance and training
- Assistive Technology Reimbursement Grants

### **MoAT Device Loan Program – ETC**

MoAT's ETC device loan program gives schools the opportunity to borrow an unlimited number of assistive devices for use with students. The program allows school districts to make informed purchasing decisions when it comes to deciding which assistive technology devices will best address the needs of a student. The device inventory features more than 1,000 items divided among the primary areas of assistive technology (augmentative communication, computer adaptations, learning, vision, etc.). Each loan is for up to six weeks and devices are shipped to the district and back to MoAT free of charge. A complete program inventory can be found at [www.at.mo.gov/etc/catalog.htm](http://www.at.mo.gov/etc/catalog.htm).

ETC is one of numerous programs and activities MoAT provides in its role as the state AT program under the federal Assistive Technology Act. In prior years, MoAT also received annual state GR to support the device loan program, however with state budget challenges; MoAT has not received state GR since 2005. Keeping the loan inventory current with the latest, sometimes costly, technology is an annual challenge as is meeting an increasing demand. Districts can sometimes experience a wait of as long as two months for some high-demand devices.

Analysis of program data shows that since 2008, 40% of Missouri's districts have borrowed from the program. About 26% of the state's districts borrow on an annual basis. Despite frequent MoAT outreach efforts each year, we still find some schools that are unfamiliar with the program and its benefits in working with students. The map below shows ETC assistive technology loans by county in State FY12 through March 2012. A county map showing the level of loans in each county over the three-year period can be found on page 4, and attached is an Excel document showing the number of loans provided to each district over the three year period.

**Missouri Assistive Technology Device Loans** – In terms of the type of assistive technology (AT) most commonly borrowed from ETC, communication devices are the most often borrowed, followed by devices for Learning, Cognition and Developmental (e.g. a laptop with text to speech reading and hands free writing or word prediction, cause and effect, etc.), followed by computer access, vision devices, environmental controls, and hearing devices. Each of these categories, with the exception of hearing devices, includes a number of loans of iPad devices and applications.

While schools will borrow devices from the program, many do not simultaneously request device training. In some cases, particularly in urban districts, school staff may have adequate training or experience on particular types of devices. However, particularly in rural districts, it is less likely the school staff have the level of training for successful use and curriculum implementation. Currently, MoAT does not have funds to provide all needed training on items loaned to schools.

### Problem Statement:

- There is an on-going need to increase awareness among districts about the ETC program.
- There is a need to keep the device inventory current including the most in-demand devices to decrease the time districts must wait to borrow.
- For many devices, training is needed for successful implementation and use.

### Possible Approaches:

- Enhanced or expanded program outreach to school districts, particularly those who have not used the ETC program for several years.
- Seek funding to expand the program's inventory of in-demand devices.
- See Training and Consultations below.

### **MoAT Training and Consultations**

MoAT provides onsite fee-based consultation and device training. Thus far in FY12, MoAT has conducted 31 onsite school based AT trainings or specific student implementation consultations. About half of those consultations occurred in rural schools. Some of the most commonly provided consultations addressed areas such as training and help implementing communication devices into the curriculum; the use of the iPad; assistive devices to support education programs for students with Autism; and alternative text formats for reading for students with learning disabilities. Students have included all elementary and secondary age ranges including students of the age to begin transition services to higher education or employment opportunities.

Rural Missouri schools are at a disadvantage supporting assistive technology in the schools. While some larger metropolitan school districts may have staff with assistive technology background, rural schools typically do not. MoAT can be a significant resource to school districts that do not have assistive technology staff or specialists. As a member of the school team in a consultant role, MoAT can help the team determine what assistive devices can play a productive role in accessing the curriculum.

In terms of training and consultation needs, the iPad is a tool that is changing access for some students. Given the large number of apps available on the market, the iPad can be used to support communication for non-verbal students; behavior support; reading; writing; access for students with low vision; and general educational instruction. Because these devices and apps have so much potential for some students, there has been a significant increase in demand for training and implementation. Staying current with day-to-day changes and improvements is beyond the scope of most schools. MoAT is able to assist schools in targeting the most effective use of the iPad. We offer both phone training and fee-based onsite training. Over half of the onsite consultations that occurred this year involved some discussion of the iPad.

MOAT typically must charge a fee for most onsite consultations. Fees are typically \$50 an hour for onsite and \$25 an hour drive time. The drive time fee is waived for the first 120 miles. Some rural schools have indicated their inability to pay for onsite consultations.

### Problem Statement

Many schools, but rural schools in particular, have a need for assistive device training and implementation into the curriculum. They lack the staff with AT experience.

### Possible Approaches

Seek grant funds to underwrite school consultations in assistive technology decision making and curriculum based implementation to rural schools.

### **Accessible Instructional Materials (AIM)**

MOAT continues to be the statewide resource on accessible instructional materials (AIM). In addition to being the NIMAC Coordinator to release alternative text to schools, we are actively involved in educating schools in using text in alternative formats. Many schools are aware that students who are blind or have low vision can get textbooks in alternative format such as Braille or large print. However, not all schools realize the importance of AIM accommodation for students with learning disabilities. Research shows, the successful implementation of AIM for students with learning disabilities improves curriculum comprehension, helps keeps student on par with their non-disabled peers and helps increase their chances of transitioning to post-secondary education or employment."

Among approaches to AIM, the iPad has become one important tool in providing AIM for students. Besides having a built in reader there are several apps that can be used for creating audible text. In addition, any book in a PDF format can be instantly enlarged with a finger swipe of the screen. In addition, there are other modes of delivering AIM that are constantly changing.

#### Problem Statement

Schools lack the knowledge in creating AIM for students with learning disabilities. Ongoing training and help implementing is still needed to support schools in developing programs for students.

#### Possible Approaches

MoAT will continue to train school staff and help implement AIM throughout the state to the degree possible.

#### **Assistive Technology Reimbursement for School (ATR)**

MoAT began the Assistive Technology Reimbursement (ATR) program for schools in 2002. DESE has generally made \$300,000 available annually for the program. Schools that complete a successful application may be reimbursed up to \$5000 for AT implemented within a student's IEP. Generally, over 100 grants are awarded each year until funds are exhausted. MoAT provides assistance and recommendations when needed about AT selection in an initial application.

The program requires supporting IEP documentation that justifies the need for the equipment. During FY12, MoAT awarded 138 individual grants to 59 school districts. As funds are limited, the grant cycle typically begins in September and funds are exhausted by February. Typically, about \$75,000 in requests cannot be funded once exhausted. As can be seen from the map below, rural schools tend to be underserved.

Low-vision devices represent the largest device category followed by learning (including AIM), and speech (communication) devices. Each of these categories can include the iPad. Thirty-one (31) of the 138 grants involved iPads. Applications for devices related to hearing and physical disabilities were also approved. Hearing devices included both personal and sound field amplification. Devices for physical disabilities included individuals needing computer access due to a physical disability.

The ATR program has two options in providing needed AT. The first is reimbursement to the school for the AT purchase. The second option, available for the last two years, is that the school borrows the AT from MoAT on a long term basis. Under this option, MoAT owns the equipment and when the student no longer needs it the district returns it to MoAT to be used with other students. This option gives MoAT greater opportunity for tracking the AT to document that it is still in use by and working well for improving the student's functional abilities in the schools. Not all equipment is eligible for long term loan, particularly if it an item that is customized for a specific student (iPads do not qualify for long term loan as they require site based customization and app installation).

#### Problem Statement

The demand for ATR grants applied for each year exceeds the allotted funding. While MoAT annually receives about \$75,000 more in applications than is available, we believe that the ATR demand could be considerably greater since schools don't typically apply once they become aware that program funds have been exhausted for the year.

#### Possible Approach:

We believe that, particularly with an effective enhanced outreach to rural schools, we could anticipate receiving an additional \$200,000 in ATR applications (95-100 additional applications).

One approach might be to target a segment of any additional ATR funding to rural districts.