Critical Components of Quality Indicators for the Provision of Accessible Instructional Materials (AIM)

Background and Development

The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) contains important requirements regarding the timely provision of printed textbooks and related printed core materials in specialized formats (braille, large print, audio and digital text) to students with visual, physical, and other disabilities that prevent reading and using information in traditional printed instructional materials. While only students served under IDEA who also meet copyright criteria may use materials sourced through the National Instructional Materials Access Center (NIMAC), IDEA regulations make it clear that all students with disabilities who need accessible instructional materials (AIM) must be provided with them whether or not the NIMAC can be used as a source for the needed materials. IDEA specifically refers to printed materials that are written and published primarily for use in elementary and secondary schools and designated as required reading; however, educators should be aware students needing accessible formats of these materials will typically also require other instructional materials in accessible formats.

To assist with the implementation of these IDEA requirements, in 2008, leaders in the 15 AIM Consortium states described seven major elements of effective AIM systems in Quality Indicators for the Provision of Accessible Instructional Materials. In 2012, The National Center on Accessible Instructional Materials enhanced the utility of the AIM Consortium’s work by defining critical components of each quality indicator and including them in this document.

Purpose and Use

The purpose of the quality indicators and critical components is to assist state and local education agencies (SEAs and LEAs) with planning, implementing, and evaluating dynamic, coordinated systems for the timely provision of AIM. Given the variability of policies and practices across SEAs and LEAs, the Quality Indicators and critical elements are designed to provide states with consistent goals and to promote in-state discussion around multiple state-focused and locally-focused ways to achieve those goals.
When reviewing or using the information in this document, one must be aware of some basic assumptions that pertain to all AIM services. First, all services developed and delivered by SEAs or LEAs must meet all current federal and state laws and be aligned with state and district policies. Second, AIM efforts, at all stages, require the ongoing collaboration of educators at state, local, and school levels; families and caregivers; other service agencies; and individuals.

Third, the seven Quality Indicators for the Provision of AIM and their accompanying components are interdependent and no quality indicator is intended to stand on its own without the others.

Thoughtfully implementing and sustaining a coordinated system of AIM-related services aligned to the Quality Indicators for the Provision of AIM requires time and effort. The result, however, is expected to provide a high return on investment in terms of increased independence, participation, and achievement for students with disabilities that prevent the effective use of print instructional materials.

For assistance, please contact AIM Center staff via email: aim@cast.org.
**Quality Indicator 1**: The education agency supports the provision of appropriate, high-quality accessible instructional materials to all students with disabilities who require them.

**Intent**: The IDEA requires the provision of instructional materials in accessible formats to students with disabilities who need them. No SEA or LEA can deny instructional materials in accessible formats to students with disabilities who need them for any reason (e.g., type of disability, copyright eligibility, type of format needed, administrative concerns, fiscal concerns).

**Critical Components**: To effectively address this quality indicator, the following components should be present across a coordinated system for the provision of AIM.

- Clearly defined and widely communicated means for providing high-quality AIM in each specialized format:
  - Braille to students who require this format
  - Large print to students who require this format
  - Audio to students who require this format
  - Digital text to students who require this format

- Effective and widely communicated means for providing AIM to students who need them with appropriate protection and management of digital rights:
  - Students requiring AIM who are served under IDEA and meet copyright criteria (requirements for using files sourced through the NIMAC)
  - Students requiring AIM who are served under IDEA but do not meet copyright criteria
  - Other students requiring AIM who meet copyright criteria
  - Other students requiring AIM who do not meet copyright criteria

- Collaborations that are important to developing and sustaining a coordinated system of sources for AIM:
  - Internal collaborations (e.g., SEA and LEA administrators and staff in curriculum, textbook adoption and instructional materials procurement, instructional technology, assistive technology)
  - External collaborators (e.g., NIMAC, National Library Service, Talking Books Program, American Printing House for the Blind, Bookshare, Learning Ally, other accessible media producers, publishers, other free and commercial sources)
**Quality Indicator 2:** The education agency supports the provision of appropriate accessible instructional materials in a timely manner.

**Intent:** IDEA requires states to define "timely manner." In general, "timely manner" means that schools provide accessible instructional materials to students with disabilities who need them at the same time that non-disabled peers receive their instructional materials. Appropriate consideration should be given to factors that could delay that access. Agencies should have clearly defined policies and procedures to identify and address sources of delay.

**Critical Components:** To effectively address this quality indicator, the following components should be present when addressing timely manner.

- A state definition of timely manner
- A means for ensuring timely delivery:
  - Tracking timely delivery (e.g., delivery log, coordination with AMPs, exception tracking by educators, students and families)
  - Identifying delays to timely delivery (e.g., late selection of materials, failure to include NIMAS language in purchasing contracts, delayed preparation and delivery of files to the NIMAC, failure to purchase accessible materials that are available, late identification of students, delayed follow-up on IEP decisions, unavailability or lack of use of AT or other content delivery devices)
  - Correcting identified delays
- Collaborations that are important to the timely delivery of AIM:
  - Internal (e.g., SEA and LEA administrators and decision-makers including the NIMAC state coordinator, general and special educators jointly involved in textbook adoption and instructional materials selection and procurement, school and classroom level educators, families)
  - External (e.g., SEAs, LEAs and other providers of AIM)
Quality Indicator 3: The education agency develops and implements written guidelines to define the responsibilities and actions needed for effective and efficient provision of accessible instructional materials.

Intent: Written guidelines identify the roles of all responsible parties and the knowledge, skills, actions, alignment, and coordination required for delivery of accessible instructional materials in a timely manner. IDEA requires SEAs to work collaboratively with the state agency responsible for assistive technology programs.

Critical Components: To effectively address this quality indicator, the following components should be included in the development and dissemination of written guidelines:

- Relevant federal, state, and local policies (e.g., statutory and regulatory requirements including but not limited to timely provision, copyright protection and management of digital materials, definitions, interpretations)
- Overall AIM processes
  - Determination of need
  - Selection of formats
  - Acquisition of formats (see QI 1 and 2)
  - Determination of supports for use
  - Documentation of procedures for AIM acquisition/provision
  - Notation of where to go for help
- Delineation of duties and responsibilities at all levels of the organization
  - General education
  - Curriculum development
  - Materials procurement
  - District and campus administration
  - Instructional and information technology
  - Instructional and related services
- Special education
  - IEP team (educators and families)
  - District and campus administration
  - Assistive technology
  - Instructional and related services
• Multiple representations (e.g., print, digital, audio, electronic or embossed braille)

• Multiple distribution means (e.g., web site, policy manuals, hand-outs)

• Collaborations that are important to development and dissemination of guidelines:
  
  o Internal (e.g., administrators at all levels, leaders and providers of professional development and training, families)

  o External (e.g., AIM Center, resource centers, parent and family organizations)
**Quality Indicator 4:** The education agency supports learning opportunities and technical assistance to facilitate the identification of students with disabilities who need instructional materials in accessible formats, as well as the selection, acquisition, and use of appropriate accessible formats.

**Intent:** Learning opportunities are based on the needs of and are readily available to students, families, staff, pre-service educators, and other stakeholders. Training and technical assistance include topics pertinent to the identification of students with disabilities who need instructional materials in accessible formats as well as the selection, acquisition, and use of accessible instructional materials.

**Critical Components:** To effectively address this quality indicator, the following critical components should be included in learning opportunities and technical assistance:

- Targeted topics that provide all involved individuals with the awareness, knowledge, and skills needed to fulfill their responsibilities (e.g., legal issues, policies and procedures, copyright and management of digital materials, decision-making, student identification, structure and utility of formats, technology systems and updates, acquisition sources, implementation practices)

- Intended audiences include, but are not limited to
  - Administrators
  - Educators
  - Students and families
  - SEA and LEA personnel
  - Other stakeholders

- Multiple means and formats used for delivery that
  - Are appropriate to the topics
  - Consider needs and preferences of the variability of learners
  - Vary in intensity and duration as appropriate to the topic and audience

- Collaborations that are important to capacity building on all aspects of AIM:
  - Internal (e.g., SEA and LEA training personnel technical assistance providers and assistive technology providers)
  - External (e.g., AIM Center, NIMAC, accessible media producers, instructional resource centers, communities of practice, consulting workshop providers, publishers)
Quality Indicator 5: The education agency develops and implements a systematic process to monitor and evaluate the equitable, timely provision of appropriate, high-quality accessible instructional materials.

Intent: Data are collected that measure the degree to which accessible instructional materials are 1) provided to students with all types of disabilities in an equitable manner, 2) provided at the same time as print formats and 3) of quality sufficient to support appropriate instruction and achievement.

Critical Components: To effectively address this quality indicator, the following components should be present in a systematic process to evaluate all aspects of the system:

- Strategies for collecting data on all aspects of the system that include, but are not limited to
  - Timely identification of students
  - Students served
  - Disability categories served
  - Formats provided
  - Sources used
    - Timely delivery
    - Quality of materials (e.g., accuracy of coding and content, usability)
      - Compliance with copyright in the management and use of digital materials
- Timelines for collection and periodic analysis of data
- Collaborations that are important to a system for monitoring and evaluating all aspects of AIM:
  - Internal (e.g., SEA and LEA administrators, SEA and LEA staff supporting information management systems, technology, educators, families)
  - External (e.g., NIMAC, accessible media producers, publishers, other providers of materials, content management system developers)
Quality Indicator 6: The education agency uses data to guide changes that support continuous improvement in the selection, acquisition, and use of accessible instructional materials.

Intent: Data are systematically analyzed to gauge effectiveness of current practice and are used to inform actions needed to improve future practice.

Critical Components: To effectively address this quality indicator, the following components should be present when analyzing and using data:

- A specific plan for analyzing and using the data, including, but not limited to
  - Purpose for which the data will be used
  - Audiences with whom the data will be shared
  - Strategies for both quantitative and qualitative analysis
  - Strategies that protect individual student identities
  - Timeline for periodic review of data
  - Timeline for implementation of data driven decisions
- Participation in analysis of data by various stakeholders (e.g., educators, families)
- Multiple means for dissemination to targeted audiences
- Strategies for cross-referencing data on timely delivery of high-quality accessible formats with data on student independence, participation, and achievement
- Strategies for cross-referencing AIM data with student information management systems to determine equity in the provision of AIM
- Collaborations that are important to using data to inform changes in AIM provision:
  - Internal (e.g., SEA and LEA leaders, educators, practitioners, families)
  - External (e.g., national organizations, family organizations, advocacy groups, SEAs, LEAs)
Quality Indicator 7: The education agency allocates resources sufficient to ensure the delivery and sustainability of quality services to students with disabilities who need accessible instructional materials.

Intent: Sufficient fiscal, human, and infrastructure resources are committed to ensure that student needs are appropriately addressed (e.g., identification, delivery of services, professional development).

Critical Components: To effectively address this quality indicator, the following components should be included in allocating resources:

- Multiple resource types are provided, including, but not limited to
  - Fiscal (e.g., funds are allocated for equitable provision of AIM to all students who require them)
  - Human (e.g., staff at multiple levels with knowledge to assist with the selection, acquisition, and integration of AIM into instruction)
  - Infrastructure (e.g., coordinated provision systems, instructional technology, assistive technology, training)

- Resources are used to address the needs of all stakeholders, including, but not limited to
  - All students being served
  - Families
  - Educators

- Collaborations that leverage resources for the benefit of all stakeholders:
  - Internal (e.g., SEA and LEA staff, special education and general education staff, instructional and assistive technology staff)
  - External (e.g., federal and state funded projects, grants)

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