

The AT Messenger...bringing technology to you

Delaware Assistive Technology Initiative (DATI), Volume 13, No. 4,
Fall 2005

DATI Receives Federal and State Endorsements

Beth Mineo Mollica, DATI Director

The past year had its share of anxious moments as we awaited the reauthorization of the Assistive Technology Act of 1998. To the relief of all, the AT Act was signed by the President last November. This new law strives to bring consistency to State AT Programs across the country by requiring all of them to offer four core services: equipment demonstration, equipment loan, alternative financing, and equipment exchange/ recycling. All programs are also required to promote public awareness, offer training and technical assistance, and collaborate with key stakeholders relative to education, employment, community living, and telecommunications. Many state programs have to significantly retool their structure and services to align with the mandates of the new law. Fortunately for Delaware, the DATI has all of the required services already in place, so we will not experience the delays and disruptions that typically accompany the launch of new activities.

The new law brought with it some new administrative requirements as well. The federal agency charged with oversight of the State AT Programs was changed from the National Institute on Disability and Rehabilitation Research (NIDRR) to the Rehabilitation Services Administration (RSA).

RSA manages many formula grant programs—which the State AT Program has now become—and has extended its requirement for the submission of State Plans to the State AT Programs. This meant that the DATI had to develop a three-year State Plan and submit it for federal approval prior to receiving funding. The new law was also very prescriptive about the composition of the Program's Advisory Board, requiring slots for representatives of five state agencies as well as continuing the tradition of a consumer-majority Board.

The DATI works so closely with numerous state agencies that slots

were created for eight agencies rather than the required five. Agency representatives were appointed by their respective agencies, and almost all appointees have a long history of interaction with the State AT Program. Participating agencies include the Department of Education, the Division of Developmental Disabilities Services, the Division of Aging and Adults with Physical Disabilities, the Division of Medicaid and Medical Assistance, the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation, the Workforce Investment Board, and the Division for the Visually Impaired. Nine additional members, comprising 53 percent of the Advisory Board, are individuals with disabilities who use AT or family members of individuals with disabilities who use AT. Consumer representatives are volunteers who were solicited through networks of disability organizations and councils throughout the state. Although several agency representatives have disabilities, the new law dictates that they are not counted toward the majority membership of people with disabilities and family members of people with disabilities. The DATI Advisory Board will be led by Chairperson Peter Mitchell and Vice-Chair Patty Cannon, who were elected to these positions by acclaim of the members.

Needless to say, this summer was very busy as we worked to meet both the letter and the spirit of the new law. The new Advisory Board was appointed in the spring and had its first meeting in August. The State Plan, which describes how the DATI will fulfill its federal mandate, was submitted in late August, and we recently received word that it was approved. As Governor Minner stated in her letter reaffirming the University of Delaware's designation as the lead agency for the State of Delaware's AT Program, "The DATI, which has provided leadership in the assistive technology arena in our state since 1991, will continue to improve access to assistive technology for all Delawareans who might benefit from it."

Improving AT access and use has been the DATI's focus for the past 14 years. We continue to refine our services and our information products to best meet the needs of the community, and the next issue of The AT Messenger will unveil some of these exciting enhancements. The recent endorsement of the DATI by both Governor Minner and the federal Rehabilitation Services Administration affirms our path toward the future, and we look forward to providing Delawareans with the high-quality services and

supports—including county-based Assistive Technology Resource Centers as well as statewide training, technical assistance, and outreach activities—that they have grown to expect from us over the past 14 years.

ATRCs Stock New Crick Software

Eden Melmed, AT Specialist, New Castle County ATRC

Crick Software promotes the inclusion of children of all abilities by creating flexible products that teachers can tailor to the needs of individual students. Most products have the option of switch access for users with a disability who are unable to use a mouse or keyboard. Many of **Crick Software's** educational computer programs have recently been added to the Assistive Technology Resource Center (ATRC) inventories in each county.

Clicker (\$199) combines a talking word processor with **Clicker Grids**, a point and click writing scaffold that provides students with banks of words, phrases, and pictures. It is designed for students of all ability levels and has a wide range of accessibility options for users who cannot use a mouse or keyboard.

Using the **Clicker** program, teachers can create customized on-screen keyboard grids with letters, words, phrases, or pictures. Students can then use these word banks to assist in their writing. When they click on a word or picture in the grid, the word is entered in the word processor. Users can also type text into the word processor using the keyboard. Text is read aloud by letter, word, or sentence as it is entered. The program also works with a touch screen or switch.



*Screen shot from
Clicker by Crick
Software*

Wordbar (\$149) is a toolbar that sits along the bottom of the computer screen to give instant point-and-click access to an unlimited number of words and phrases. Once clicked, the word or phrase is sent to the word processor, spreadsheet, or database that is currently being used.

Words can be organized into groups either alphabetically or under topic headings. **Wordbar** has built-in speech so users can hear words or phrases before they write.

Penfriend (\$149) is a talking word prediction tool that helps students who have spelling difficulties, dyslexia, or who are very slow keyboard users. **Penfriend** has a floating window that works alongside any word processor and most other software. **Penfriend** predicts the words that the user is most likely to type, using a variety of knowledge including English grammar, frequently used words, and a learned knowledge of the user's personal writing style. As the user starts typing, **Penfriend** displays a list of words beginning with the letters entered. The most likely words appear at the top of the list. A single click on the desired word enters the whole word into the word processor.

The **Find Out & Write About** series and **Planet Wobble** sets are multimedia **Clicker** activities. **Find Out & Write About** lets students research information independently and then write about it using **Clicker** grids. Each CD (\$49) contains an interactive talking book of non-fiction text, provided at two or three levels of difficulty, which students can read or listen to. Each page of the book contains a link to a **Clicker** writing grid that relates directly to that page, so students can write about the information they have just learned. CDs available include: *Animals of Cold Lands*, *Animals of Hot Lands*, *Dinosaurs*, *Explorers*, *Life Cycles*, and *The Ancient Egyptians*.

Planet Wobble is an exciting and innovative series of materials for early readers. Each set (\$59) has three stories and includes a CD as well as three printed books. These animated **Clicker** talking books and related on-screen activities are provided at three levels of difficulty. Some of the activities include matching, sentence construction, recognition of words, questions and comprehension, writing stories and making books.

For more information about these and other **Crick Software** products, contact your local ATRC or visit www.cricksoft.com/us.

The AT Bargain Basement

Marvin Williams, AT Specialist, Kent County ATRC

Hello, true believers, and welcome to the newest installment of the *AT Bargain Basement*. If you are a regular to the *Basement*, welcome back. If this is your first time, what took you so long?! All joking aside, this column is where I discuss different pieces of inexpensive assistive technology, or AT, that I have found for under \$100. Previously, I only listed items you could get locally, but I just can't pass up all of the bargains I find online. So, that being said, let's get to the bargains!

Since school is back in session, I thought I would share some of my favorite educational bargains. Many of you may be familiar with the **Franklin** family of electronic dictionaries and thesauruses. Well, they have some nicely priced products that might give a poor speller that extra edge. The **Speaking Homework Wiz** (\$49.95) and the **Speaking Interactive Children's Dictionary** (\$39.99) are both wonderful tools.



Speaking Interactive Children's Dictionary by Franklin

To use them, the student enters a word. The device then "checks" the word to see if it is spelled correctly. If the device finds the word is spelled incorrectly, it offers possible correct spellings. The student can then go through the word list and have the device say each word until the correct one is found. The device will also read the definition of the word to the student. Now, what about using these things in class? Won't all of that talking be a distraction? Not to worry! There is a jack on the side of the dictionary so students can plug in their

headphones and get help without disturbing others. All of the ATRCs have a **Speaking Homework Wiz**, but we do not have the **Interactive Children's Dictionary** for demonstration/loan.

Besides helping with spelling, the **Homework Wiz** has some word games, as well as handwriting assistance both with printing and script. The devices can be found easily online at www.amazon.com as well as on a number of other websites. If you are looking for a local sales outlet, try **Toys 'R' Us**.

Our next bargain comes to us on the recommendation of our very own Beth Mineo Mollica, DATI Director. It is the **Laser Lock** (\$9.99) by **Kidpower Inc.** The premise is simple—it's a lock that uses a remote instead of a key or combination. This is a great little gadget for students who have difficulty remembering a combination or using key or combination locks. This is a nice little gizmo for the school locker.



Laser Lock by Kidpower, Inc.

Supposedly, the manufacturer, **Kidpower Inc.**, has gone out of business. However, you can still find the **Laser Lock** for sale on the Internet at www.hearthsong.com. Since the manufacturer is gone, supplies would indeed be limited, so act quickly!

If you don't want to fight the masses of *Bargain Basement* fans trying to get a **Laser Lock**, you may want to take a gander at another little gem. It is called the **Wordlock** (\$5.98) and is available from **Staples**. It works like a combination lock, only instead of using numbers, the combination can be determined using letters to make a word. You rotate the letter rings until you make the word that is the combination for the lock. Each lock can be set using a list of four- or five-letter words provided by the manufacturer. If that's not secure enough for you, you could come up with your own four- or five-letter combination out of the 10,000 possible.

That's gonna do it for this installment of the AT Bargain Basement. I'd like to thank all of you for joining me in my quest to find those low-cost AT gems hidden in plain sight around us. As always, if you find a bargain or a great deal, drop me a line and let me know about it. I will be sure to credit you with your find.

So until next time, remember, just because it's inexpensive doesn't mean it's cheap!

Universal Design for Learning Changes Curriculum

Laurie Wicks, Teacher, Silver Lake Elementary, Appoquinimink School District

Today's educators must face the challenge of instructing identical curriculum to all students with the expectation that the students all meet the same standards of the high stakes tests. Understanding what our charge is, we face the problem that the classroom is more diverse than ever before. This diversity takes many forms, including academic, cultural, emotional, and physical. Knowing who the children are and how their backgrounds affect their learning is just one piece of the puzzle in helping students succeed. What is more important is that each teacher needs to respond to the students' individual differences by using a variety of instructional strategies and tools to accommodate learning differences, allowing all students to succeed. Universal Design for Learning (UDL) is the framework that I now embrace in my instructional planning to meet the needs of the diverse learners in my classroom.

During the 2004/2005 school year, an opportunity to participate in an initiative promoting UDL in the State of Delaware came my way. Through participation in this professional development initiative, I learned the philosophy behind UDL, created a lesson based on the UDL approach, implemented the lesson, and reflected on both the success of the lesson and my experiences throughout the process. I worked with a team of educational professionals from the Delaware Department of Education, the DATI, and educators from around the state. The collaboration among team members was critical to my understanding of the elements of the UDL framework. Our

conversations focused on lesson goal setting, strategies in instruction, using a variety of materials including media to differentiate lessons, and creating assessments that evaluate student understanding accurately.

As I reflect on my experiences over the past year, I walk away with a variety of thoughts and struggle with which one is most important. First, I'd like to focus on the collaboration throughout the process. The team of professionals that was brought together for this experience has ranked second to none in my ten years of teaching. All of the individuals who participated were extremely knowledgeable in their subject matter, respected each other's thoughts and comments, and were supportive throughout the entire process. Our conversations were imperative to fully understanding the UDL framework, but also included many sidebars on educational trends and hot topics. I always walked away from meetings with a feeling that my contributions to conversations were taken seriously. I also gained insight and tips from others to take back and digest.



Laurie Wicks was honored by being named the Appoquinimink School District Teacher of the Year for 2006.

Equally important to the team collaboration was how this experience has made me a better educator. I now look at my overall instructional goals and what objectives I have specified for my lessons. I concentrate on the strategies and methods I am incorporating in that lesson to ensure I meet the needs of the diverse learners and a variety of ways to access them. My focus is on accommodating the individual differences within my classroom. Not only are the students instructed with multiple means of representation, I now engage them by tapping into their interests and allowing them to demonstrate what they have learned through multiple means of expression.

Finally, the insight gained through collaboration and the improvement in my lesson planning, execution, and student assessment has impacted my students in a positive way. Given a variety of approaches to acquiring new material, the diverse population in my classroom now has a greater opportunity to be successful at learning and expressing their knowledge. All students in my classroom are actively engaged because they now feel they are part of the learning process. UDL helps to ensure that “no child is left behind.”

Taking the Annual DSTP with Accommodations

Eliza Hirst, Staff Attorney, Disabilities Law Program

In addition to the natural butterflies students face when they head back to school each fall, the annual Delaware Student Testing Program (DSTP) creates anxiety. The DSTP is daunting for many students, either because of the content or the angst provoked by taking a test that measures student ability against state and national standards.

However, the DSTP can be particularly intimidating for many students with unique needs. At this point, the state only allows 2 percent of students with disabilities to be exempt from the DSTP. While schools allow special education students to take the DSTP with various accommodations, poor test performance may now lead to some devastating educational results for students with disabilities.

The No Child Left Behind Act

The No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) holds states accountable to the federal government to track Adequate Yearly Progress of student performance by using standardized testing data. Because the goal of the NCLB is to insure that all children receive an adequate education, state measurement tests must include students with disabilities. According to the Southern Disability Law Center, prior to the implementation of the NCLB, poor test takers and students with various disabilities were excluded from tests so that performance results would appear higher. With the implementation of the NCLB, at least 95 percent of students must now be measured by state tests. The 95 percent minimum requires students with accommodations for

their disabilities and those who might otherwise be absent to take the state test. The remaining students who do not take the test are those who either take the Delaware Alternative Portfolio Assessment (DAPA) or have an emergency reason for their absence. Astoundingly, 47 of 181 Delaware schools failed to make Adequate Yearly Progress for the 2004-2005 school year based on DSTP results. However, the Act does not require all students to take the state test under the same conditions. Rather, the NCLB, along with IDEA and Section 504, allows for students with disabilities to take the state test with reasonable adaptations and accommodations.

Determining Accommodations

Any student with a disability who receives special education services is eligible to receive various accommodations and modifications to take the DSTP. The task of determining what accommodations or modifications are necessary falls on the Individual Education Program/Section 504 team. When the special education team meets to develop an Individual Education Program (IEP) or a Section 504 Plan, they must fill out a "Students with Disabilities Form" and document the type of accommodations the student will need during test-taking. Generally, the IEP/504 team will offer the same types of accommodations to help a student in the classroom as are provided on the DSTP. However, DSTP accommodations may be more intricate than the accommodations provided in the classroom setting because of the high stakes, length, and complexity of the DSTP.

The Four Types of Testing Measurements under the DSTP

A student may take the DSTP under four different conditions, depending on the student's disabilities. First, a student with disabilities always has the option of taking the DSTP under standard testing conditions, even when he or she is entitled to accommodations. Second, a student may take the DSTP with specific accommodations recorded in his or her IEP/504 Plan that permit aggregation of test scores with all other test-takers. The Department of Education has determined that certain accommodations do not alter the construct of the test so that they can be compared with results from tests taken under standard conditions. Such accommodations include Braille, enhanced lighting, an assistive listening device, and screen reading software called Kurzweil. Tests may also be aggregated where the student receives accommodations

that include preferential seating, audio recorder, videotape, adaptive/special furniture, calculator, supportive software, and auditory feedback.

The third type of testing provides accommodations for a student with disabilities on the DSTP, but the results are not aggregated with other student tests. The reason is that certain accommodations fundamentally alter the DSTP, making it distinct from the test under standard conditions. Before accommodations under nonaggregable conditions are available to a student, the IEP/504 team must undertake a three-step analysis. Each IEP/504 team must assess whether the student has an identified disability that affects reading. Next, the team determines if the student has a physical, sensory, or visual impairment that requires the use of this accommodation. Finally, the team considers whether the student has an IEP goal to address deficits in decoding. Alternatively, the team may decide that the student requires unique accommodations, which ultimately must be approved by the Department of Education DSTP Task Force. Such accommodations include reading aloud written passages, using certain computer programs, or employing other, more involved, accommodations.

Finally, if the IEP/504 team determines the student is unable to participate in the DSTP, based on the student's disabilities, the student is required to complete the DAPA. The DAPA is only aggregated with other DAPA scores. To reach the conclusion that a student is better suited for the DAPA, the team must review the evidence of significant cognitive disabilities, the required intensity of instruction, and the extent of modified education instruction. Finally, the team must conclude that the exclusion is not based on a categorical label, educational placement, disruptive behavior, or expectation of performance.

What Becomes of Students with Disabilities Who Fail the DSTP?

The idea behind the DSTP is to measure a student's educational level against other students in his or her grade level along with the state standard of proficiency. Regrettably, a student who receives special education services is evaluated under the same criteria used to measure the performance of students in mainstream educational settings without accommodations. The DSTP breaks down

performance into five levels. If a student receives below a Level II, he or she is now required to undergo intensive instruction, including summer school and grade retention, in order to boost test scores. It is no surprise then that, even with appropriate accommodations, some students with disabilities perform poorly on the DSTP.

Like regular education students, special education students must attend summer school if they score below a Level II on the DSTP, unless the IEP/504 team overrides this requirement. At the end of the summer, the student must take a summer version of the DSTP. If the student scores less than a Level III on the summer version of the test, he or she will likely be retained in the same grade. A student's IEP/504 team may only promote the student if there is a valid reason, but they must first hold an IEP/504 meeting.

Progress from summer school might be futile at best, since a student with a special education plan will not necessarily receive instruction from a qualified special education teacher. According to Martha Brooks from the Department of Education, the summer school teacher must only be qualified to teach generally and have knowledge of the individual student's IEP. In addition, a student will be retained in the same grade until s/he demonstrates a proficient level of performance on the DSTP, unless the IEP/504 team, the school, and the Department of Education determine advancement is appropriate.

Even more alarming, the state now restricts high schools from awarding a high school diploma to a student who fails to succeed on the DSTP. Instead, the school is limited to awarding a "certificate of performance" to a student who continually performs poorly on the DSTP. The certificate of performance is different from a standard high school diploma because the certificate simply recognizes that the student completed the requirements in his or her IEP, but is unable to attain proficiency on the DSTP and other state requirements.

Ultimately, the greatest disappointment regarding the DSTP is that many more students with disabilities will have no chance to obtain a high school diploma.

Remaining Vigilant

Parents, teachers and educators must stay vigilant in assisting students with disabilities because it is not always apparent what types

of accommodations students need to succeed on the DSTP. Although the DSTP is still undergoing many changes to comply with the No Child Left Behind Act, the format may be adjusted to accommodate the needs of students with disabilities. Each year, members of a student's special education team should coalesce to determine if more or different accommodations will improve the student's likelihood of passing the DSTP. Otherwise, the danger with the DSTP for students with disabilities is not just the possible lack of promotion to the next grade, or even a denial of a high school diploma. The true threat of poor performance on the DSTP is the unremitting blow to the self-esteem of students who may already be struggling to keep up with their peers.

LIFE and Inclusion Conference Dates Announced

Several upcoming events for Winter and Spring 2006 have been announced. For more information about these and other events in the Delaware area, please visit www.dati.org/events/index.php.

The 8th Annual LIFE (Liberty and Independence For Everyone) Conference will be held on Thursday, January 26, 2006 from 8:00 a.m.-3:45 p.m. at the Dover Sheraton Hotel. Twelve workshops will be offered throughout the day focusing on legislation, independence (through AT), family, and education.

This year's keynote speaker is Steven Eidelman, First Robert Edelsohn Chair in Disabilities Studies at the University of Delaware and former Executive Director of The Arc. Workshop session topics will include Universal Design for Learning—Text Access Provisions under IDEA, Emergency Preparedness—Local and National Approaches, and Universal Design in Residential Housing and Accessibility in Rental Housing. Registration fees are \$40 for professionals and \$20 for consumers, parents of a child with a disability, or full-time students. The fee includes the continental breakfast and lunch. If you would like more information on the LIFE Conference, please contact Advances In Management, Inc. at (302) 645-1490 or DDC at (302) 739-7192.

The 12th Annual Inclusion Conference will be held at John M. Clayton Hall on the University of Delaware campus on Thursday, May 11,

2006. This year's keynote speaker is Ronald M. Hager, who will discuss IDEA and the new regulations. Mr. Hager is a staff attorney with Neighborhood Legal Services, Inc. in Buffalo, NY and specializes in disability law, particularly special education.

Workshop topics at the Inclusion Conference will include P.I.E.: Social Emotional Teaching Strategies, Universal Design for Learning, Collaborative Teaming and Teaching Approach to Middle School, and Impact of New Regulations in Delaware.

Registration fees for the Inclusion Conference are \$25 per person and \$12.50 per full-time student and include a Continental breakfast and lunch. For more information on the Inclusion Conference, please contact the DATI at (800) 870-DATI, (302) 651-6794 (TDD), dati@asel.udel.edu.

Annual Accessible Web Design Contest Begins

The Mid-Atlantic Consortium on Accessible Information Technology in Education has announced its 2005-2006 Accessible Web Design Contest.

K-12 schools in Delaware, Maryland, Pennsylvania, Virginia, Washington D.C., and West Virginia are invited to submit their website to the competition. Judges will evaluate the sites based on the World Wide Web Consortium (W3C) Priority 1 Checkpoints and Section 508 Standards.

Websites entered are categorized into four areas and will be judged against other entrants from the same category. The four categories are:

1. Elementary school student designed websites
2. Middle school student designed websites
3. High school student designed websites
4. Non-student designed sites (i.e., school or district websites)

All contest entries are due on December 16, 2005 and winners will be announced in March 2006. The most accessible and creative website in each category will be awarded a digital camera. The most accessible site of all the entries will receive a grand prize of a digital

video camera.

For additional contest information, judging criteria, and entry submission please visit the Consortium's website at <http://www.adainfo.org/accessible/it/events.asp>.

The New Castle County ATRC has moved!

The New Castle County ATRC is now located in Room 203 of the Administration & Research Building at the Alfred I. duPont Hospital for Children. This spacious location offers two rooms full of AT for demonstration and loan. Eden, our AT Specialist, is available to help you identify device options weekdays from 8:30 a.m.-4:30 p.m.

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DATI Equipment Loan Policy

DATI has a wide variety of equipment at the Assistive Technology Resource Centers for the primary purpose of demonstration and short-term loan. The policy for the loan of the equipment is as follows: The standard loan period is two weeks, defined as the day borrowed (e.g., Monday the 10th) to the same day two weeks later (e.g., Monday the 24th). Loans may be extended providing there are no names on the waiting list and/or that an extension will not interfere with an existing reservation. The maximum loan period is four weeks. A maximum of four devices may be borrowed during any single loan period. However, combinations of devices may be treated as a single device if the components are interdependent—either operationally, or because one component is required for the user to access another. Equipment loans across state lines are not permitted. Equipment must also remain in Delaware throughout the loan period.

To Contact DATI's Central Site office or the ATRC closest to you, call 1-800-870-DATI

Press

#1 for English or

#2 for Spanish,

then press

#3 for the Central Site office

#4 for the New Castle County ATRC

#5 for the Kent County ATRC

#6 for the Sussex County ATRC

TDD callers: Do not press #1 or #2 and your call will be answered on a TDD line at the Central Site office.

DATI Resource Centers Throughout the State...

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(302) 739-6885;

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Sussex County ATRC

Cheer Community Center

20520 Sand Hill Rd.

Georgetown, DE 19947

(302) 856-7946;

(302) 856-6714 (voice or TDD)

The AT Messenger is published quarterly by the Delaware Assistive Technology Initiative (DATI). Dissemination of this newsletter to other people, association newsletters, and electronic mailing lists is encouraged. Information contained in this publication may be reprinted without permission, although attribution to the author and DATI is required.

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DATI is funded by the Rehabilitation Services Administration (RSA) of the U.S. Department of Education, Grant #H224A050008 to the University of Delaware. This publication does not necessarily reflect the position or policy of RSA/ED, and no official endorsement of the materials should be inferred. The University of Delaware is an equal opportunity employer and prohibits discrimination on the basis of race, color, creed, age, national origin, marital status or disability in conformity with applicable laws.