National Center on
Accessible Educational Materials

Self-Study Guide for the AEM Quality Indicators with Critical Components for K-12

By the National AEM Center at CAST

Published: November 2021

IDEAs that Work
Office of Special
Education Programs

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Purpose

The National Center on Accessible Educational Materials for Learning (National AEM Center) at CAST is a technical assistance (TA) center funded by the U.S. Department of Education, Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP). The purpose of the Center is to improve educational and employment opportunities for individuals with disabilities through TA activities that increase both the availability and the use of accessible materials and technologies. The Center's stakeholders serve and advocate for individuals with disabilities and their families across the continuum of educational settings: early learning, K–12, and postsecondary academic and career training programs.

The AEM Center's TA is guided by the [Quality Indicators for the Provision of AEM and Accessible Technologies](). The seven Quality Indicators describe the essential elements of a system that ensures the consistent and reliable provision of high-quality and timely accessible materials and technologies for all learners who need them, including those with disabilities. While intended to be implemented by a coordinated team of representatives from within a system (i.e., state, district, higher ed institution, or workforce agency), each individual representative needs an operational understanding of the Quality Indicators. It is through a collective understanding of individual roles and responsibilities that systems change occurs. The purpose of this guide is to facilitate an individual's self-study of the AEM Quality Indicators.

Use

This guide is for any individual seeking to develop knowledge and practical skills related to the Quality Indicators with Critical Components for K-12. The target audience includes administrators, educators, and service providers at the state and local levels, as well as families of students with disabilities. As a result of completing the suggested activities in this guide, you should be prepared to use some relevant best practices for providing accessible materials and technologies in your setting. This guide is also designed to prepare individuals to be active and meaningful contributors to a team that is working toward systems change at the state and/or local levels.

Begin by downloading the [Quality Indicators with Critical Components for K-12](). Carefully review each Quality Indicator and its Critical Components, being certain to follow hyperlinks for additional information. It is recommended that you complete a full review of all seven Quality Indicators before completing the activities presented in this guide.

The time commitment for completing this self-study is determined by the user. You may choose to methodically complete all activities or select from those listed. Some are brief reads, listens, or views for one sitting, while others involve more self-action; the latter is particularly true of the activities for Quality Indicators 5 and 6, which are related to data collection and use. You may consider completing shorter activities under each Quality Indicator first, and then return to complete the more involved activities on a second pass.

Create your own space for recording what you learn during your self-study. Google Docs, Word, OneNote, or other program can be used to create separate sections for each Quality Indicator. A workbook created with Excel or Google Sheets is another option. Regardless of the format you choose, challenge yourself to make it accessible from the start by following the AEM Center's guidance on [Creating Accessible Documents](#).

If you need assistance, please contact us by email at aem@cast.org.

Independent Actions for Making Meaning of the Quality Indicators

For each of the [seven Quality Indicators](#), a set of practical actions that an individual can take is provided. These are designed to help you build vocabulary, understand concepts, make human connections, collect relevant materials, and apply practices to your context. See the [Use](#) section for guidance on these actions.

Quality Indicator 1

Increase your awareness of [what accessible means](#), including the difference between AT and AEM.

Review the POUR model as a guide for understanding accessibility principles and guidelines in [vetting for accessibility](#) and [creating accessible materials](#).

Familiarize yourself with [sources of accessible formats](#).

Identify and create a list of some of the people, agencies, or organizations in your state and/or school district who have the roles listed in Critical Component 1.1. Reach out to them and ask: Do they have information and resources for improving the accessibility of educational materials and technologies for students with disabilities? If so, let them know that you'd like to benefit from these resources. If not, explain why accessibility is so important for the independence, participation, and progress of all learners in your

state or district. Express your interest in improving the accessibility of materials and technologies provided to students and inform them about the AEM Center's resources.

Quality Indicator 2

Read the AEM Center policy brief, [The Right of Students Who Need AEM to Receive These Materials in a Timely Manner.](#)

Reach out to your [State AEM Contact](#) and ask about your state's definition of timely manner.

Review the AEM Center's [best practices for communicating accessibility requirements](#) in the procurement process.

Learn about organizational memberships available from [Bookshare](#) and [Learning Ally](#).

Quality Indicator 3

Read the [June 2010 Joint Dear Colleague Letter](#) from the U.S. Department of Justice and U.S. Department Education, which clarified that access to digital materials and technologies is a civil right for students with disabilities. In May 2011, a set of associated [FAQs](#) was published to further clarify the law.

Read the AEM Center guide, [AEM in the IEP](#). Locate your state's IEP form and guidance. Is the consideration of AEM/AIM or accessible formats included?

Use the [AEM Navigator](#) to understand the decision-making process for providing accessible formats to students who need them.

Learn about the [National Instructional Materials Accessibility Standard (NIMAS)](#), a provision of IDEA 2004. After gaining an understanding of NIMAS, visit the website of the [National Instructional Materials Access Center (NIMAC)](#). Find the name of your [NIMAC State Coordinator](#).

Locate your state or district procurement policy and procedures:

> Do these documents include guidance and language for [communicating digital accessibility requirements](#)?
>
> Are specific references to NIMAS/NIMAC included? Visit [NIMAS in Purchase Orders and Contracts](#) for sample language.

Quality Indicator 4

Reflect on your own role related to ensuring that all students receive accessible materials and technologies in a timely manner. What information would help you increase your knowledge and skills? What are the questions you need answered?

Make a list of your state or district's current professional development priorities. How might accessibility of materials and technologies be included without adding it on as a separate initiative?

Review the [AEM Center's list of recorded webinars](#) and customize a learning series for improving AEM-related knowledge and skills.

Consider completing the AEM Center's free [Online Learning Series on Accessible Materials & Technologies](#).

Learn how to jumpstart district leadership by watching the recording of the CITES workshop: [Implementing Leadership Practices in Inclusive Technology Systems](#).

Quality Indicator 5

Create and maintain a database of the digital materials and technologies students use on a daily basis (state, district, school, or your own classroom). This can include devices, websites, apps, ebooks, software programs, etc. For each, find and link to any available accessibility information, such as [an accessibility statement from the developer](#) or [Accessibility Conformance Report (ACR)](#). Include in your database any built-in accessibility features of each tool, as well as examples of how students are using these features. Observe and ask students about how easy or difficult it is for them to use the materials and technologies they're provided and include these notes in the database.

Create and maintain a database for tracking both the timeliness and the quality of materials provided to students who need [accessible formats](#) (state, district, school, or your own classroom). Include the sources of those formats (e.g., Bookshare, Learning Ally, your state's IMC/IRC, local conversion, etc.). Observe and ask students how easy or difficult it is for them to use the accessible formats they're provided and include these notes in the database.

Invite students and families to provide feedback on the usability of materials and technologies through a variety of means, such as video recordings, accessible forms, or during parent-teacher conferences.

Quality Indicator 6

Share data on the accessibility of digital materials and technologies provided to students with decision makers, such as those in positions related to procurement, curriculum, and EdTech, IT, or InfoTech. Contact developers with specific concerns. Findings from these communications can be used to improve procurement policies and practices. Suggest that this process of data collection and use be institutionalized.

Share data on the timeliness and quality of accessible formats provided to students with the relevant personnel, service providers, and producers. The cause of any identified delays and sources of low-quality materials should be corrected. Suggest that this process of data collection and use be institutionalized.

Respond to usability feedback from students and families by suggesting alternative ways of using the materials and technologies or offering adaptations.

Read the following IDEA Data Center resource to understand disproportionality in special education services and how to address related factors: [Examining Representation: Over, Under, or Both?](#)

Quality Indicator 7

Create a list of the investments you believe would contribute to the building of a system for providing high-quality and timely accessible materials and technologies for all learners - at the state, district, school, or classroom level. These can be related to personnel needs, training and continuing education, release time, data management software, technology updates, etc. Share this list with a decision maker in your setting to begin the conversation about needed resources for providing high-quality and timely accessible materials and technologies for all learners.

Moving Beyond Independent Actions

If and when you're ready to collaborate with others in your state and/or district to work toward systems change for learners who need accessible materials and technologies, consider using the [AEM Pilot](#). This free online tool will help your team conduct a baseline self-assessment of your system against the Quality Indicators, set goals accordingly, and monitor your progress over time.