



JOY ZABALA, EDITOR

JUNE 2008

## President's Message

Tara Jeffs, President

### TAM is 25 Years Young!

Wow, this is an exciting time for TAM and to be a TAM member. Many of us have seen and been a part of 1 to 25 years of technology development and implementation for individuals with disabilities. Just this past week, I was trying to explain to a colleague what it was like to be in this field. It is a field rich with diverse challenges and learning tasks. There are unparalleled opportunities to advocate and assist others (and ourselves) in reaching their potential. Every day brings new occasions for problem-solving and collaboration. You know exactly what I mean just by looking in your email inbox. How many times have you received a message from another TAM member sharing ideas and information about technology and media that we can use in our classrooms or learning environments? TAM reflects the field of assistive technology. Over 900 members strong and growing!

Our membership chairperson, Diane Painter, has set a goal of reaching 1000 members by 2009 but she needs your help—recruit a friend to join our powerful international network of individuals who share part of their day working

and learning about assistive technology, technology and media.

### Membership Has Its Rewards

As TAM members you have wonderful rewards and benefits. These include:

**A stellar journal:** Journal of Special Education Technology (JSET). JSET has always had amazing editors that provide interesting and innovative research and Jim Gardner has definitely joined the ranks of the best of them. Jim and those of you who serve on the editorial board volunteer many, many hours to ensure that JSET is reflecting the state of the field. JSET is no longer available for free to the public. JSET current and archive issues are available to members only on our website <http://www.tamcec.org/>. You simply select Publications/JSET/Archives and all you need to do is insert your CEC number and last name. Visit our website and see for yourself!

**Professional development:** Last month you received an email from me on the TAM listserv sharing with opportunities to collaborate and share expertise by presenting and attending conferences that TAM is involved with in 2009. Plan ahead and join us for these events

**Technology, Reading & Learning Diversity (TRLD), January 22-24, 2009**  
**Location: San Francisco, California.** This is our first year and we are excited to have TAM members in the East meet those in the West. Check out the TRLD website <http://www.trld.com/>.

**Assistive Technology Industry Association (ATIA), Jan 28-31, 2009**  
**Location: Orlando, Florida.** ATIA offers

many, many strands, for example, Learning Disabilities, Autism and Research, and Professional Development. Take a closer look at <http://www.atia.org>.

**Council for Exceptional Children Conference (CEC), April 1-4, 2009**  
**Location: Seattle, Washington.** CEC offers a wonderful venue of sessions. If you haven't been to CEC in the past few years now is the time to rejuvenate by attending great sessions. If you attended CEC last year in Boston—TAM Social attendees are ready to compare seafood from both coasts! <http://www.cec.sped.org>.

Looking forward to seeing you in Orlando or San Francisco or Seattle... or all three! As always, I would love to hear from you! Send your ideas, suggestions, and feedback anytime to me at [jeffst@ecu.edu](mailto:jeffst@ecu.edu).

### The Connector Goes Electronic

Two TAM products—The *Connector* and *Technology in Action*—are moving to 100% electronic delivery! You will be alerted by an email to the TAM List when a new issue is available in the Publications area of the TAM website at <http://www.tamcec.org/>. Using your CEC number and last name to log in, you can retrieve the current edition. Please send Diane Painter [dpainter@su.edu](mailto:dpainter@su.edu) your up-to-date email address so that you do not miss anything! As always, TAM respects your privacy. Your email address will be used only for TAM communication.

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# The Aims of AIM

David Gordon and Joy Zabala

Center for Applied Special Technology (CAST)

It's no secret to TAM Connector readers that accessible instructional materials (AIM) open doors to teaching and learning—doors that conventional printed materials may have closed for some students.

Did you know ...

- That more than half a million US students are documented as having print disabilities?
- That the actual number of students affected by print disabilities is likely closer to 1.3 million, since print disabilities impact students across disability categories?
- That federal statutes and those of several states have created compelling mandates for states and districts to ensure that students with disabilities have access to accessible instructional materials?

What are State and Local Education Agencies (SEAs/LEAs) charged with doing? And what resources are available to help them meet this responsibility? Read on to find out!

## The Charge of SEAs & LEAs

The most recent authorization of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA)—passed by Congress in 2005 and signed into law by the President in 2006—requires SEAs and LEAs to “provide core instructional materials to blind persons or other persons with print disabilities in a timely manner” (Part B, Sec. 612(a)(23)(B) and Sec. 613(a)(6)(B)).

Instructional materials, including textbooks and related materials that are necessary for students to fully participate and achieve in the curriculum, must be provided in specialized formats

that include Braille, large-print, audio, and digital text, as appropriate for the student's needs and abilities.

## The NIMAS Connection

To make it easier for SEAs and LEAs to meet its obligation, IDEA also established the National Instructional Materials Accessibility Standard (NIMAS). The writing of NIMAS was commissioned and funded by the Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP) of the U.S. Department of Education.

NIMAS provides publishers with a guide for making digital formats of their content—the same content, or “file sets,” that are used to make printed textbooks or workbooks, for example—so that this content can quickly and easily be transformed into accessible formats for students with disabilities.

When purchasing textbooks and related core instructional materials, SEAs and LEAs must include language that requires publishers to develop files that meet the NIMAS and deposit those files in the National Accessible Materials Access Center (NIMAC) as a condition of the contractual agreement. (visit [nimas.cast.org](http://nimas.cast.org) for suggested language). For some students with disabilities served under IDEA, NIMAS files can be downloaded from the NIMAC and assigned to a third-party Accessible Media Producer (such as Bookshare, American Printing House for the Blind, RFB&D) for conversion to the student-ready version that meets each student's individual needs. In some states SEA and LEA internal resources can also convert NIMAS files to student-ready versions. For students not eligible for materials through the NIMAC, other sources are becoming increasingly available, including but not limited to free or fee-based materials available directly from publishers or on the web.

With the right planning, students needing accessible versions of core instructional materials should receive materials in specialized formats around the same time that their peers receive print-based materials. In this way, it can be ensured that all students have the materials they need to participate in and benefit from a free, appropriate, public education.

## The AIM Consortium

In 2007, OSEP sponsored a new initiative to help SEAs and LEAs advance the work of providing accessible instructional materials in a timely manner. Fifteen states have banded together with CAST to form the Accessible Instructional Materials (AIM) Consortium.

The AIM Consortium is working to improve academic outcomes for approximately 1.3 million K-12 students with print disabilities through the timely selection, acquisition and use of high-quality educational materials in accessible formats. In particular the goals of the AIM Consortium include:

- Helping states develop systems for identifying, acquiring, and using accessible instructional materials;
- Ensuring that these systems employ high quality procedures and practices; and
- Producing related products and services that can be made available to all States, Outlying Areas, and Freely Associated States.

Because of the urgent need to develop more effective and efficient systems for delivering AIM, the Consortium is fast-tracking its efforts to devise and share its solutions with an eye toward completing its work in mid 2009.

*(continued on page 3)*

# On-line Learning Opportunities in AT

The University of South Carolina offers a Masters degree in Educational Technology. The USC Columbia College of Education and the USC Aiken School of Education offer the graduate program jointly. The program consists of 12 courses (36 credit hours) that are all offered in web-based format. Students meet instructors and other students through online discussion groups in Blackboard and Adobe Connect chat sessions.

The Master's Degree in Educational Technology is designed to provide advanced professional studies in graduate level coursework to develop capabilities essential to the effective design, evaluation, and delivery of technology-based instruction and training (e.g., software development, multimedia development, assistive technology modifications, web-based development, and distance learning). The program that consists of 36 hours is intended (1) to prepare edu-

cators to assume leadership roles in the integration of educational technology into the school curriculum, and (2) to provide graduate-level instructional opportunities for several populations (e.g., classroom teachers, corporate trainers, educational software developers) that need to acquire both technological competencies and understanding of sound instructional design principles and techniques. The Educational Technology program offers a M.Ed. degree but with no certification for teaching. Therefore, application to the program can be made after completion of at least the bachelor's degree from an accredited college or university.

Students in each program complete courses in three areas: Foundation, Design and Technology. Foundation courses include research and applications of learning principles. Design courses focus on development and skills in essential technology tools

and principles in instructional design. Technology courses consist of courses on management, Universal design for learning, internship, and seminar.

Many of the current students are educators from K-12 and higher education, and others work in industry as instructional designers or related fields. To address the chief concerns of a diverse group of students, the activities and projects in the program are customized to the professional goals of each student. Each student may choose to apply to the program through either the Columbia campus or the Aiken campus. Application to USC Columbia can be completed online through the Graduate School admission form available at: <http://www.gradschool.sc.edu/>. For more information about the program visit the web site at <http://edtech.sc.edu> or contact Dr. Cheryl Wissick at [cwissick@sc.edu](mailto:cwissick@sc.edu) or Dr. Tom Smyth at [smyth@usca.edu](mailto:smyth@usca.edu).

## The Aims of AIM (continued from p. 2)

### Available and Emerging Resources

CAST is also developing a more general website called Accessible Instructional Materials to collect and disseminate information about AIM. Go to <http://aim.cast.org> for more information. This site includes a tutorial about AIM as well as resources on Sources of AIM, Formats and Technologies, Research, Policy, Parental Issues, and so forth. News and Events related to accessible instructional materials will also be highlighted.

CAST has just gone live with a Web site (<http://aim.cast.org>) dedicated to collecting and disseminating information about accessible instructional materials in general. This site includes a tutorial about AIM as well as resources on Sources of AIM, Formats and Technologies, Research, Policy, Parental

Issues, etc. News and events related to accessible instructional materials will be highlighted as they develop. The site provides links to the NIMAS and the AIM Consortium.

The AIM Consortium site includes information about each of the fifteen states in the Consortium and the activities and products of the Consortium as a whole. The site also contains the first product of the AIM Consortium, "Quality Indicators for the Provision of Accessible Instructional Materials" which is located at [http://aimconsortium.cast.org/best\\_practices](http://aimconsortium.cast.org/best_practices). This product describes the characteristics of a high-quality system for the provision of accessible instructional materials. The purpose of the quality indicators is not to create identical systems, but rather to provide a tool that can be used by SEAs and LEAs to analyze and improve their services.

The NIMAS Development and Technical Assistance Centers at CAST (<http://nimas.cast.org>) also provide a wealth of information about accessible instructional materials. These include the complete text of the Standard itself, related federal and state documents, presentations from NIMAS meetings, links to disability-specific resources, and other helpful documents that explain accessible instructional materials.

#### TAM CONNECTOR

TAM Connector is published 4 times a year by the Technology & Media Division of the Council for Exceptional Children. Email all news items to Joy Zabala ([joy@joyzabala.com](mailto:joy@joyzabala.com)). Change of address should be sent to Susan Simmons at the Council for Exceptional Children, 1110, N. Glebe Rd., Arlington, VA 22201-5704.

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[www.tamcec.org](http://www.tamcec.org)

## CAN Report

# You Can Make a Difference in Policy

Joel Mittler, Ed. D., CAN Coordinator

Summertime in Washington is usually a busy time of year, with all the tourists visiting and everyone trying to deal with the heat and humidity of the season. However, with the campaigns for President continuing to command the news, and with all of the House of Representatives and one-third of the Senate up for reelection in the Fall, plus the pressing issues of the economy and gasoline prices, Congress is unlikely to take any major steps in the area of Special Education. While there were hopes that Congress would deal with the reauthorization of No Child Left Behind, most predictions are that this will not happen until there is a new President and a new Congress in 2009.

That is not to say that all is absolutely quiet in Washington in the areas that we care about. For one, the annual budget and appropriations process is underway. As we go to press, a budget plan, which serves as a guideline for the actual appropriations of money, is yet to be agreed to by the Congress with indications that even that process may bog down. Yet Congress is scheduled

to address their appropriations for both IDEA and for students who are gifted and will be motivated to get that done so they can get home to campaign for office early in the Fall. While the appropriations process is supposed to be completed by the beginning of the Fiscal Year, October 1, in some recent times even those dates have not been met. Just recently, I read that it is possible that even the Appropriations legislation will have to wait until the next President is inaugurated on January 20, 2009. Secretary of Education Margaret Spellings, aware that NCLB is unlikely to be reauthorized, issued several proposed regulations to NCLB. Regulations are often used to add some detail to an existing law and Secretary Spellings wants to be certain that the Bush administration gets to make some changes in the law while still in office. Comments from the field on these proposed regulations will be accepted until late June and it is likely that permanent regulations will be issued in the Fall. This column will report on these regulations in future newsletters.

However, this summer is an excellent time for you to become more active in guiding the policy of our field. CEC has made a wonderful service available to its members that permit you to communicate directly to your representatives in Washington. CEC provides a link to the "Legislative Action Center" where you can communicate directly to your members of Congress about issues that impact children who are exceptional. The easy to use website, available via the Policy and Advocacy link at the CEC website ([www.cec.sped.org](http://www.cec.sped.org)) will give you information about current issues that impact our field, identify your members in both the House and the Senate, set you up to either write or email them, (using pre written letters that can be modified if you wish), and link you to other useful information. It takes only a few moments to communicate to your

members of Congress. I have personally witnessed members of Congress coming to the floor of the Senate or House and stating that they have received many letters from their constituents about an issue.

It is very important that members of CEC take advantage of this service to express their opinions to their members of Congress. With the ease of email from anywhere in the country, many members of Congress have established a system in their offices that deletes any communication that doesn't come from their own constituents. Thus, CEC cannot communicate to your members of Congress, nor can I. They will only accept a message from you!! As we go to press, CEC is asking for letters on full funding of IDEA, support for gifted education, support for students with disabilities in college and for increased funding for infants, toddlers and preschoolers with disabilities. Topics change as events demand. I urge you to go to the Legislative Action Center and start to feel like an advocate for the students you care about.

If you have any questions or comments for me, or wish to get a weekly alert on policy from CEC, email me at [jmittler@liu.edu](mailto:jmittler@liu.edu).

## TAM Publications Chairperson Update

TAM welcomes John Castellani as he assumes the role of TAM Publications Chairperson. As an active member and past president of TAM, John brings a wealth of background and experience with all aspects of TAM to the important position of guiding and coordinating TAM's publication efforts. It is certain that John's leadership will ensure the continuation of high quality products from TAM. Contact John Castellani at [jcastellani@jhu.edu](mailto:jcastellani@jhu.edu).

## New TAM Product

Coming in September, 2008

### *Readings in Special Education Technology*

Edited by Jim Gardner and Dave Edyburn.

For updates, visit [www.tamcec.org](http://www.tamcec.org)