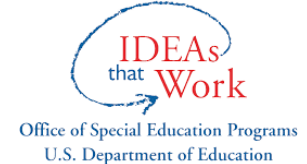


Technical Assistance Needs of Parent Centers: Summary of 2025 Data Collection

September 2025

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Introduction

This document was prepared by the National Center on Accessible Digital Educational Materials & Instruction (NCADEMI or “n-cademy”) to report on the findings of a mixed methods study of the current challenges and opportunities OSEP-funded Parent Centers experience in relation to supporting parents and caregivers of children and youth who require accessible educational materials (AEM). The purpose of the mixed methods study was to identify specific technical assistance (TA) products and services NCADEMI can provide Parent Centers to help parents and caregivers better communicate the digital accessibility needs of their children with disabilities.

To that end, NCADEMI conducted three knowledge development activities, targeted at Parent Centers, between April and July 2025. These three activities were a focus group, a survey, and conversations at the *National Parent Center Conference*. This report presents summaries of the information collected from each activity. The closing section describes NCADEMI’s proposed TA products and services for Parent Centers during the second year of the project period, October 1, 2025–September 30, 2026.

Intended readers of this report are the leadership and interested staff of Parent Centers around the country. Users of this report will understand the baseline data collected, through the aforementioned activities with Parent Centers by NCADEMI, and how that data is informing NCADEMI’s targeted TA for this crucially important population.

Findings from the National Parent Center Conference

NCADEMI enjoyed hosting an exhibit booth at the *2025 National Parent Center Conference* in Denver, Colorado, April 8–10, 2025. Two of NCADEMI’s TA specialists connected with a wide range of Parent Center representatives from around the country throughout the conference’s two and a half days. Through numerous conversations, the NCADEMI team learned Parent Centers are eager to learn more about AEM and assistive technology (AT) and to provide related resources to families.

Conference participants who visited NCADEMI’s exhibit table were primarily at the beginning stages of exploring AEM for students with disabilities. Most Parent Center staff who met NCADEMI cited a need for resources providing basic information for parents to initiate conversations with teachers. Many Parent Center staff mentioned a preference for

fact sheets or one-pagers as valuable resources. Many conversations centered around disability-specific or student need-specific resources.

Additional needs discussed at the conference included resources in languages other than English as well as resources specifically for military-connected families who often change schools frequently, finding themselves repeating accommodation processes with each new school.

In addition to disseminating information about NCADEMI and conversing with Parent Center staff, the *National Parent Center Conference* was an opportunity to recruit participants for NCADEMI's Parent Center focus group and survey discussed in the following sections.

Survey Findings

NCADEMI's *Survey for Parent Centers* was open between January 15–June 30, 2025. A copy of the survey instrument is available in Appendix A.

Fifteen participants completed the survey. Of the 15, 10 were representatives of Parent Training and Information (PTI) Centers; three represented Community Parent Resource Centers (CPRCs), and two selected “other” without specifying a category of Parent Center. Survey participants were geographically distributed across the country. Pennsylvania and Virginia each had two Parent Center representatives complete the survey. Each of the following states was represented by one survey participant: Alaska, California, Colorado, Georgia, Indiana, Iowa, New Hampshire, Pennsylvania, and South Dakota.

Eight survey participants identified their primary role as “Director” (e.g., Executive Director, Program Director). One identified as a “Trainer/Educator.” Other roles listed were “Family/School Partnership Facilitator,” “Accessibility Consultant,” and “Data Coordinator.”

The following page is a summary of the fifteen responses to five multiple-choice items in the survey:

In your opinion, what are the greatest barriers to parents being able to communicate their child's need for accessible learning materials?

Ten respondents (67%) cited a lack of information provided to parents by agencies or schools. The second most cited barrier was a lack of guidance on how to include AEM in the Individualized Family Service Program (IFSP) or Individualized Education Program (IEP),

with nine participants (60%) selecting this option. Finally, a lack of knowledge, a lack of skills in service providers or teachers, and a lack of attention to accessibility in relation to other needs of children with disabilities and their families all came in third, with a total of six participants (40%) selecting them as barriers.

Does your Parent Center currently offer staff training on assistive technology (AT) and/or accessible educational materials (AEM)?

53%, or eight respondents, answered yes, with 47%, or seven, answering no.

What AT and/or AEM training topics does your Parent Center currently offer?

According to the results, most Parent Centers currently offering related training provide it on the basics of AT (five responses). Three respondents indicated their Parent Centers currently offer training on how to recognize a child's need for AT, how to provide accessible formats of educational materials, and how to communicate a child's need for AT in the IFSP and/or the IEP development process.

What staff training topics would be most useful to your center?

Ten respondents (71%) selected the basics of AEM. Eight respondents (57%) answered they would find the basics of AT, how to recognize a child's need for AEM, and how to provide accessible formats of educational materials all as useful topics. Respondents also specified topics around the differences between AT and AEM and how to get information to families would be useful.

What format(s) of training materials would be most useful?

Nine respondents (64%) selected fact sheets and one-pagers as the most useful training materials. Seven participants (50%) selected policy publications. Six participants (43%) selected web-based professional learning modules.

Focus Group Findings

NCADEMI hosted the two-hour virtual event, *Focus Group for Parent Center Representatives* on July 15, 2025. The NCADEMI team's protocol and the questions asked of participants are provided in Appendix B.

Of the 19 Parent Center representatives who signed up for this focus group, two participated. Participant A is an accessibility consultant at a Parent Center and a person with lived disability experience. Participant B, while not a Parent Center representative, is

the parent of a child with a visual impairment as well as an administrator of a company providing services related to the needs of visually impaired children.

Both participants considered their own subjective experiences with AEM and AT. Their responses suggest rural Parent Centers may have a greater need and would more broadly benefit from TA products and services to support parents than their urban counterparts. Concerns that parents would not be able to advocate for their children due to a lack of knowledge about AEM and AT surfaced throughout the conversation as well as concerns that parents may not be able to recognize which AEM and AT might be best for a child due to a lack of available information.

Each participant shared their experiences with AEM and AT. Participant A lives in an urban area while Participant B and their child live in a rural setting. The participants' experiences show the discrepancies that parents face depending on geographic location. For example, Participant B explained, "I think one thing that we face being in a rural state was that...our (case manager) was not really well-versed in (my child's) particular low incidence disability. And that would have helped a great deal."

Participant B also mentioned the differences between access to technology in a rural state compared to more urban areas. From a parent perspective, Participant B shared how the resource center in their state typically had outdated models of technology available for their child. Conversely, from a professional perspective, Participant B has seen families in a more urban state get new technology delivered to them. Echoing the experience of Participant B, Participant A shared as a student in a more urban, well-funded district, they felt they always had access to the technology they needed. Along with that, their parents did not have to be as involved in their education regarding AEM and AT: "You know, my parents didn't really need to, like, advocate for me because (the schools) had a lot of the infrastructure in place..."

Both participants reflected on the need for parents to understand AEM and AT to better advocate for their children with disabilities. Participant B provided a useful perspective for parents: "What are your rights? Like, what does access mean? It does not always mean equality, but it means that (the child) has access to the content in a way that makes sense for (them)." Participant B also suggested parents should have access to a variety of information, including the importance of AEM, how to determine if your child is eligible for AEM, and knowing one's rights regarding AEM. Participant A echoed the importance of families having access to a library of resources. They specifically pointed out that Parent Centers should have this information available on their websites and be able to answer questions parents may have. Participant A also shared a personal story of their mother

being overwhelmed when they first entered school. Their mother didn't realize all the other people who would be advocating for students with disabilities to gain access. Participant A pointed out this is an example of parents needing access to resources before their child enters school.

Finally, Participants A and B explored the need for both parents and students to understand which AEM and AT are most applicable for a student's individual needs. Participant B stated that, as a mother, they would like their child to be able to work as independently as possible, and the correct learning media is necessary for that. They explained, in addition to AT being provided to students with disabilities, software needs to be accessible. Participant B further expressed that while the latest AT can be exciting and often promises improved access, there is a cost both financially and in missed opportunities. Students are often pulled out of enrichment activities and have less time with their peers to learn new technology, which may or may not yield long-term improvement in their access and quality of life. Educational teams, and especially parents, must weigh the cost and benefits; often with little experience to guide them. Participant A shared throughout elementary and middle school they used an outdated AT device, but it was the device they preferred. But in high school, they had to transition to a new device. Although they were able to successfully learn and use this new device, they were not informed about the device change beforehand, something that would have made such a transition easier.

Technical Assistance for Parent Centers

The data collected from Parent Center representatives indicates family members can often be the first to realize a child with a disability is having difficulty using their assigned educational materials (e.g., a print textbook, a hard copy worksheet, a digital learning platform, or mobile learning app). As a result, parents and caregivers play a vital role in ensuring their children with disabilities are provided with the appropriate AEM/ AT.

To provide Parent Centers with information and resources for parents and caregivers of children who require AEM/AT, NCADEMI proposes the following mix of synchronous and asynchronous TA products and services.

AEM Tips for Parent Centers

Recurring information sessions with tips from NCADEMI highlighting AEM resources and strategies for finding and using appropriate AEM. These monthly, 30-minute sessions will be easily digestible gatherings for NCADEMI to provide relevant information to Parent

Centers. While live participation will be encouraged, it will not be required, alleviating the difficulty of scheduling. Information sessions will be recorded and hosted on NCADEMI's website. Additionally, Parent Centers will have the option to host the recordings on their own staff portals for their convenience. The information session model will allow NCADEMI to focus on topics targeted to the Parent Center audience in a way that builds knowledge gradually and sequentially.

AEM One-Pager for Parent Centers

A one-pager of information outlining the importance of AEM for students with disabilities, along with examples of AEM available to students in classrooms and at home organized by need or disability category. Many of NCADEMI's discussions with participants at the *National Parent Center Conference* indicated that, while Parent Centers generally have good information about AT, much less is known about AEM, particularly for students who fall outside the blind and visually impaired disability category. Conference participants were excited about the concept of cognitive accessibility, but it was clear they were unsure of where to start. One-pagers can deliver information efficiently to people who are just beginning their learning journey. NCADEMI will request feedback from Parent Centers about the right audience for such a one-pager (e.g., is it for Parent Center staff or for the families they work with?) as well as what languages to prioritize for translation of the one-pager.

Guide for Parents with More Advanced Knowledge of AEM

An in-depth evergreen guide, or living resource, will be made for parents with more advanced AEM knowledge and experience. The participants of NCADEMI's focus group represented parents and self-advocates who have extensive AEM knowledge and who are looking to NCADEMI for answers to more complicated questions, such as, "Is it worth the time away from peers for my child to learn this new system?" or, "What kinds of AEM can be most easily integrated into my child's life post-graduation using the technology they already have available?" The NCADEMI team will request feedback from Parent Centers about the best way to develop and disseminate such an in-depth guide targeted at parents with more advanced knowledge and experience, given that Parent Centers typically serve in a more generalist role.

An Early AEM ECHO

Project ECHO is an "all teach, all learn" learning model developed by Dr. Sanjeev Arora in 2003. ECHO participants engage in a virtual community with their peers where they share

support, guidance, and feedback. As a result, the virtual community’s collective understanding of how to disseminate and implement best practices across diverse disciplines continuously improves and expands. ECHO sessions connect academic hubs, community-based providers and parents in a digestible way. ECHO sessions are case-based and center around problem-solving activities as a group. Fifteen minute flash talk sessions by specialists provide participants with valuable information related to the cases and issues discussed. Ongoing sessions provide opportunities for participants to form long-term connections and to collect resources that help move their work forward over time.

NCADEMI is organizing an ECHO community for Part C Lead Agencies and early intervention service providers with the goal of better preparing toddlers with disabilities, and their families, to use AEM when they arrive in early learning settings and preschool. We recognize the overlap of this ECHO community with the crucial role of Parent Center staff in supporting families of infants and toddlers with disabilities, so we will expand the ECHO community to include this group. This “Early AEM ECHO” community will build the capacity of both Parent Centers and Part C Lead Agencies/early intervention service providers. An area of focus for this ECHO community will be best practices for including AEM considerations in the IFSP to the IEP transition process.

ECHO sessions will be 90 minutes each month. Certificates of Attendance will be available to participants who attend the session and complete the post-session survey. These certificates can be used for participants’ individual licensing requirements.

Summary

NCADEMI’s mixed methods study generated valuable information on the current challenges and opportunities OSEP-funded Parent Centers face in supporting parents and caregivers of children and youth who require AEM. The purpose of the study was achieved in that NCADEMI was able to use collected data to identify potentially useful TA activities for the consideration of Parent Centers. The NCADEMI team looks forward to partnering with Parent Centers on a shared pursuit of better preparing parents to communicate the accessibility needs of their children with disabilities.

Recommended Citation

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Appendix A. Survey Instrument

The *NCADEMI National Digital Accessibility Needs Survey for Parent Centers* was administered entirely online via an accessible online form. Informed consent was required from participants per Utah State University's Institutional Review Board.

- 1. Please select the Parent Center category for which you work:**
 - Parent Training and Information Center (PTI)
 - Community Parent Resource Center (CPRC)
 - Parent Technical Assistance Center (PTAC)
 - Other (Please specify)

- 2. What is the state or jurisdiction of your PTI or CPRC?** (Dropdown menu of states and jurisdictions was informed by this web page: [Find Your Parent Center - Center for Parent Information and Resources](#))

- 3. What is the region covered by your PTAC?** (Dropdown menu of the four regions was informed by this web page: [Regional PTACs - Center for Parent Information and Resources](#))

- 4. Are you associated with the Bureau of Indian Education?**
 - Yes
 - No

- 5. What is your primary role?**
 - Executive Director
 - Director
 - Program Manager
 - Trainer/Educator
 - Coordinator
 - Specialist
 - Other (Please specify)

- 6. In your opinion, what are the greatest barriers to parents being able to communicate their child's need for accessible learning materials? Choose up to 3 options.**
 - Lack of information provided to parents by agencies or schools.
 - Lack of knowledge and skills of service providers or teachers.

- Lack of guidance on how to include accessible materials in the Individualized Family Service Program (IFSP) or Individualized Education Program (IEP).
- IFSP, IEP, and other service or education teams fail to effectively include parent input when developing programs.
- Lack of attention to accessibility in relation to other needs of children with disabilities and their families.
- Other (Please specify).

7. Does your center currently offer staff training on assistive technology (AT) and/or accessible educational materials (AEM)?

- Yes
- No

8. What AT and/or AEM training topics does your center currently offer? (Choose all that apply)

- Basics of AT (e.g., definitions, examples, legal requirements).
- Basics of AEM (e.g., definitions, examples, legal requirements).
- How to recognize a child's need for AT.
- How to recognize a child's need for AEM.
- How to provide accessible formats of educational materials (e.g., braille, large print, audio, digital text, tactile graphics).
- How to communicate a child's need for AT in the IFSP and/or the IEP development process.
- How to communicate a child's need for AEM in the IFSP and/or the IEP development process.
- How to include the child's need for AT or AEM in the conversation for AT or AEM in the IFSP or IEP.
- Other (Please specify).

9. What staff training topics would be most useful to your center? (Choose all that apply.)

- Basics of AT.
- Basics of AEM.
- How to recognize a child's need for AT.
- How to recognize a child's need for AEM.
- How to provide accessible formats of educational materials (e.g., braille, large print, audio, digital text, tactile graphics).
- How to communicate a child's need for AT in the IFSP and/or the IEP development process.

- How to communicate a child’s need for AEM in the IFSP and/or the IEP development process.
- How to include the child’s need for AT or AEM in the conversation for the IFSP or IEP.
- Other (Please specify).

10. What format(s) of training materials would be most useful? Choose up to 3.

- Live webinars with direct instruction (low interactivity).
- Live virtual coaching (high interactivity).
- Fact sheets and one-pagers.
- Policy publications (e.g., documents related to federal regulations and guidance).
- Practice publications (e.g., documents with practice-based recommendations).
- Web-based tutorials.
- Web-based professional learning modules.
- Facilitated virtual learning communities with peers who work in other Parent Centers.
- Other (Please specify)

11. Please share any additional information regarding the needs of your Parent Center in relation to helping parents understand accessible educational materials. (Open ended.)

Appendix B. Focus Group Protocol and Questions

The *NCADEMI National Digital Accessibility Needs Focus Group for Parent Center Representatives* was convened on July 15, 2025, 5:30–7:30 p.m. ET. The virtual meeting was recorded with transcription enabled. Informed consent was required from participants per Utah State University’s Institutional Review Board. Participants were informed they could leave the meeting at any time, and they were free to answer or not answer any question. Participants were also informed no personally identifiable information would be used by the researchers in the analysis process or in using the data collected from the focus group. Participants were given the following list of 12 questions.

1. Let’s start with brief introductions. Please state your name, job title, and organization. Optionally, we welcome knowing your reason for choosing to participate in this focus group. [Facilitator calls on participants one at a time.]
2. What challenges do Parent Centers face in the development and delivery of training and information about accessible educational materials and technology?
3. What accessibility challenges do parents often mention about their children’s school materials?
4. What gaps in knowledge or resources have you identified among the parents and caregivers you serve regarding accessible educational materials?
5. What types of resources or training would help your Parent Center better support families in advocating for their children’s connection to accessible digital materials and technologies?
6. How do you currently collaborate with other entities, including schools and other OSEP-funded centers, to support families of children with disabilities who need accessible materials and technology?
7. Based on your experience, what are the most impactful strategies for empowering parents and caregivers to advocate for their children’s accessibility needs?
8. When seeking information and resources on parent training topics, what are your go-to sources?
9. What parent training-related publications or newsletters do you subscribe to? What do you like about these?
10. What social media accounts do you follow to stay updated on parent training topics, and why? What social media platforms do you prefer?

- 11.** As a reminder, this focus group of Parent Center representatives is meant to collect information that will help the NCADEMI team understand current challenges and opportunities experienced by OSEP-funded Parent Training & Information Centers, Community Parent Resource Centers, and Parent Technical Assistance Centers in relation to accessible digital educational materials for children and youth with disabilities. Specifically, we are interested in learning how NCADEMI can assist you in supporting parents and caregivers who need to communicate the needs of their children who require accessible materials and technology. To that end, is there any information we've missed?
- 12.** Of all the things we discussed, what is the most important to you?
- 13.** We are in the final minutes of the session. Any additional comments anyone would like to make?