NCADEMI

National Center on Accessible Digital Educational Materials & Instruction

Technical Assistance Needs of Part C Lead Agencies and Early Intervention Service Providers: 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 on the current challenges and opportunities Part C Lead Agencies and early intervention service providers experience in preparing toddlers with disabilities and their families to use assistive technology (AT) and accessible educational materials (AEM) in early childhood education environments. This study was meant to identify specific technical assistance products and services NCADEMI can provide Part C Lead Agencies and early intervention service providers to improve outcomes for young children with disabilities.

To that end, NCADEMI conducted three knowledge development activities targeted at Part C Lead Agencies and early intervention service providers between January and March 2025. These activities were a focus group, a survey, and a shared article discussion. This report summarizes the information collected from each activity. The closing section describes NCADEMI's proposed technical assistance products and services for Part C Lead Agencies and early intervention service providers during the second year of this center's project period, October 1, 2025–September 30, 2026.

The intended audience of this report is the leadership and interested staff of Part C Lead Agencies, early intervention service providers, and early childhood education providers. Users of this report will understand the baseline data collected by NCADEMI and how that data informs our targeted technical assistance for this crucially important population.

Focus Group Findings

NCADEMI hosted a two-hour virtual *Focus Group for Representatives of Part C Lead Agencies and Early Intervention Programs* on March 11, 2025. The NCADEMI team's protocol and the questions asked of participants are provided in Appendix A.

The focus group included seven participants. Three participants represented higher education institutions, three represented Part C Lead Agencies, and one represented a Part C school for the blind.

The focus group discussion reflected a strong emphasis on accessible, everyday resources and low-tech AT as cornerstones of effective early learning for children with disabilities. A common theme was the value of professional development for equipping early intervention providers with strategies for using both high-tech and low-tech solutions, from

big books, visuals, and props to mobile apps and augmentative and alternative communication (AAC) tools.

Another key theme was the importance of training and partnership with families, especially in the context of natural environments, aligning with best practices in early intervention. Lending libraries and related programs were cited as essential for hands-on access and experimentation with AT. Participants also stressed the need to clarify the definition of AT, recognizing it goes beyond costly equipment to include materials supporting an individual child's access and participation. AT also ensures families are connected to the materials and supports they need.

Participants' responses revealed a mixed, but often informal, approach to assessing infants' and toddlers' needs for AT in early intervention. Assessments may involve a multidisciplinary team including speech, physical, and occupational therapists, though much of the AT consideration happens spontaneously during ongoing interventions rather than through structured evaluations. Formal AT assessments may be triggered if a specific device is needed, but trial-and-error methods and practitioner experience often drive decisions. Specialized assessments—such as functional vision or learning media evaluations—play a clearer role in identifying AT for children with vision impairments.

A consistent point was the need for AT to be documented in the Individualized Family Service Plan (IFSP) and Individualized Education Program (IEP). Low-tech solutions like visual schedules, adaptive utensils, and picture books are commonly used, though they are often not recognized or recorded as AT, especially if the child doesn't require high-tech support. The focus group responses highlighted the critical role of intentional planning and training for AT and AEM in early childhood learning environments.

Parents were identified as key players in this AT process. Responses indicated that support for active parent engagement can become fragmented in Part B preschool/school-aged services. This fragmentation places more responsibility on families to be proactive about their child's needs, particularly when services such as parent training are not embedded in the IEP development and implementation process.

Another theme found in people's responses was the importance of transition planning to ensure AT needs and training are provided as children move from Part C to Part B. This includes documenting any required AT tools and related supports so transitions are as seamless and supportive as possible.

The responses emphasized a clear need for comprehensive, systems-level, professional development and family training to support the use of AT and AEM for young children with

disabilities. A recurring theme in these responses was the importance of incorporating training in both the IFSP and IEP development and implementation processes, ensuring providers, educators, and families understand the use of AT and AEM not just in learning settings but also in home environments.

The following two lists were identified as resources the participants used to inform their understanding of AT and AEM in early childhood learning.

Programs, Centers, & Initiatives

- Autism Navigator – Developed by the Florida State University Autism Institute; offers tools and courses for families and providers focused on early identification and intervention (0–3 age group).
- Center for Autism and Related Disabilities (CARD) – Regional support services for families and professionals, including those with very young children.
- PACER Center (Minnesota) – Parent advocacy and support for children with disabilities; includes resources on early learning and technology.
- Early Childhood Technical Assistance Center (ECTA) – National center for improving service systems for infants, toddlers, and preschoolers with disabilities.
- IDEA Infant & Toddler Coordinators Association (ITCA) – National voice for Part C leadership focused on infants and toddlers with developmental delays.
- Division for Early Childhood (DEC) – A division of the Council for Exceptional Children; develops recommended practices and offers professional learning opportunities.
- STEMIE (STEM Innovation for Inclusion in Early Education) – Resources and practices for equitable access to science, technology, engineering, and math learning.

Publications, Newsletters, & Digital Health Platforms

- KidsHealth.org – Child development, health, and parenting tips from Nemours Children's Health centers; includes family-friendly and provider-friendly content.
- Pathways.org – Developmental milestones, activities, and early intervention awareness materials.
- Bright Futures (AAP.org) – National health initiative focused on preventive care and developmental well-being.

- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC.gov) – Milestone checklists, early signs of developmental delays, and disability inclusion.
- Sesame Workshop – Media and educational content for young children including materials on inclusion and emotional development.
- Early Care Mobile Library – Local or regional mobile access to early learning materials and possible assistive technology supports.

Survey Findings

NCADEMI's *Survey for Part C Lead Agencies, Early Intervention, and Early Childhood Education Programs* was open between January 15 and March 28, 2025. A copy of the survey instrument is available in Appendix B.

Five participants completed the survey. Of the five, three were representatives of Part C Lead Agencies; one represented Part B, Section 619 staff; and one self-identified as "Part C local agency staff." For geographic location (U.S. region), half the survey respondents selected "South Atlantic." Each of the following regions was represented by one survey participant: "East North Central," "West North Central," and "Pacific." To the question, "Do you work for an agency or program that provides Part C services to children who are likely to transition to a Part B program funded by the Bureau of Indian Education?," two participants selected "yes" and three selected "no."

The most selected barrier to identifying a child's need for AT and AEM was a "wait and see" approach (selected by four respondents). This was followed by "limited resources to deliver and sustain necessary services" (three responses), "limited information" (selected by two respondents), and "lack of staff training" (selected by two respondents). Other challenges mentioned were absence of inclusive environments, lack of parent awareness of legal rights, and limited collaboration among educators and service providers.

Most agencies or programs represented by the five respondents are taking proactive steps to consider a child's need for AT and AEM. Four people reported they evaluate children's needs for AT, and they include related goals in the IFSP/IEP. Three people noted their efforts to support parents and caregivers of children using AT and AEM. Two people reported providing therapy to improve a child's ability to use materials and also conducting assessments to identify accessibility needs. However, one respondent indicated no current actions, and only one respondent mentioned transition planning as a focus.

The five respondents expressed unanimous interest in three technical assistance topics highlighting a strong need for support in both high-tech and low-tech design and delivery of

accessible content. These three topics are providing accessible formats of early learning materials, creating accessible low-tech learning materials, and creating digitally accessible learning material.

Among the five respondents, the most preferred training formats were fact sheets and one-pagers (selected by four people). This suggests a strong preference for concise, easy-to-reference materials that can be quickly applied in practice. Two respondents indicated interest in live webinars with direct instruction, facilitated virtual learning communities, and web-based professional learning modules, highlighting a desire for both structured instruction and opportunities for peer collaboration.

Fewer respondents selected live virtual coaching and practice publications, each chosen by only one person, suggesting these topics may be valuable for targeted audiences but less universally needed. Overall, responses point to a need for varied formats blending quick-reference tools with opportunities for deeper learning and interaction.

The final survey question asked about accessibility requirements when procuring teaching and learning materials. Of the five respondents, two indicated their agencies include accessibility requirements in procurement. One respondent indicated their agency does not include accessibility requirements in procurement, and another indicated accessibility requirements were either not applicable or they were unaware of their agency's procurement procedures. These responses suggest uneven implementation and awareness, highlighting a need for clearer guidance, training, and systems-level policies to ensure accessibility is consistently considered during procurement processes in early childhood education.

Shared Reading Discussion

On February 18, 2025, NCADEMI facilitated a shared reading discussion of the article, Toddlers, Tech & Talk: 0–3-Year-Old Children's Language and Literacy Learning at Home in a Post-Digital Age by Flewitt et al., 2024. The small group included two NCADEMI team members and three representatives of early intervention/early childhood special education research and preparation in higher education. The discussion guide is available in Appendix C.

The article from Manchester Metropolitan University explores how digital tools influence language and literacy development in children aged zero to three, but it notably lacks sufficient representation of parents of children with disabilities, comprising only 4% of the study sample. This under-representation highlights a broader issue in the scarcity of

research on how digital materials specifically support development for young children with disabilities.

A finding from the article, noted by the discussion participants, is parents of children with disabilities are 1.9 times more likely to “often” use devices for play and engagement than parents of children without disabilities, signaling a potential reliance on digital tools in homes where traditional learning interactions may be more challenging. The conversation on this difference pointed to a gap, emphasizing the need for further exploration into how screen-based interactions shape developmental outcomes for children with disabilities and how parents leverage technology in meaningful ways. Additionally, participants noted a need to explore how families use a broad array of screen-based devices such as smartphones, tablets, smart TVs, Alexa-enabled tools at home, and what screen-based devices are also in early childhood classrooms where accessibility and equity should be considered.

A key conversation topic was the lack of documented use of low-tech AT with young children. The conversation suggested a broader range of recognition to include low-tech everyday supports helping children access digital learning materials. Despite AT being part of early intervention practices, it's often not well documented in the IFSP, leaving a gap in intentional planning. Participants noted children with disabilities need early exposure and practice with technology to prepare for preschool and beyond, ensuring they’re on equal footing with their peers, both developmentally and socially.

Finally, the discussion explored opinions on screen exposure stressing that technology, such as AAC, augments and does not replace interaction and learning. The use of accessible digital materials and assistive tools was seen as a powerful lever for supporting children's cognitive, social-emotional, and language development, particularly during transitions like the move to preschool at age three.

Summary of Findings

A key conclusion drawn from all three data collection activities is the recognition that AT supports and services are essential for most infants and toddlers with disabilities to effectively access and benefit from future use of AEM. AT and AEM are necessary to bridge the gap between a child’s abilities and the demands of early digital learning experiences.

Additionally, four main concepts consistently emerged from the survey, focus group, and article discussion. These concepts are described below.

Concept 1. Emphasis on Low-Tech Assistive Technology and Everyday Accessibility

Participants highlighted the essential role of low-tech universally available tools. These tools are widely used in practice but often not documented or identified as AT in IFSPs/ IEPs, signaling a need for improved planning and recognition. Families and educators benefit from professional development that clarifies what constitutes AT and how to implement it effectively.

Concept 2. Early Exposure to Digital Tools and Equity in Access

A key insight gained from the shared reading of Flewitt et al., (2024) was parents of children with disabilities are nearly twice as likely to frequently use electronic devices for engagement. This likelihood points to a high motivation to use digital tools in environments where traditional interaction may be more difficult. Participants expressed concern about the lack of research on how screen-based interactions shape developmental outcomes. They also stressed the importance of preparing young children with disabilities to access both home-based and classroom-based digital tools such as smartphones, tablets, and Alexa-enabled devices so children with disabilities can engage equitably alongside their peers.

Concept 3. Need for Systemic Training, Documentation, and Transition Planning

Participants emphasized any effective use of AT depends on consistent training and documentation, especially during IFSP and IEP development. Participants made a strong call for professional development and parent coaching to bridge learning between school and home. Transition planning from Part C to Part B was also highlighted as a critical opportunity to ensure AT needs are clearly identified and supported.

Concept 4. Priority Barriers and Technical Assistance Needs

The most frequently cited barrier to identifying a child's AT needs was a "wait and see" approach, often leading to missed early intervention opportunities. Other common barriers included resource limitations, insufficient staff training, and low family awareness of legal rights. When asked about technical assistance needs, respondents unanimously prioritized training on accessible formats, low-tech and digital material creation, and IFSP/IEP integration. Preferred formats included concise fact sheets and one-pagers, as

well as interactive options like webinars and online learning communities, reflecting a desire for both practical tools and collaborative learning opportunities.

Technical Assistance for Part C Lead Agencies & Early Intervention Service Providers

The combined results of the three aforementioned data collection activities indicate Part C Lead Agency staff and early intervention service providers would benefit from a customized Extension for Community Healthcare Outcomes (ECHO) community. 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 community's collective understanding of how to disseminate and implement best practices across diverse disciplines continuously improves and expands. ECHO sessions connect academic hubs with 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-long 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 collect resources, helping move the work forward over time.

This NCADEMI-led "Early AEM ECHO" community will build the capacity of both Parent Centers and Part C Lead Agencies/early intervention service providers to better support parents of infants and toddlers with disabilities who will require AEM in early childhood education. After developing a shared understanding of AEM and its relevance to early intervention for children with disabilities and their families, a specific focus for this ECHO community will be best practices for including AEM considerations in the IFSP to the IEP transition process.

Beginning in February 2026, ECHO sessions will be 90 minutes monthly. Certificates of attendance will be available to participants who attend individual sessions and who complete the post-session survey. These certificates can be used for participants' individual licensing requirements.

Recommended Citation

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Appendix A. Focus Group Protocol and Questions

The *NCADEMI National Digital Accessibility Needs Focus Group for Representatives of Part C Lead Agencies and Early Intervention Programs* convened on March 11, 2025 from 2:00–4:00 p.m. ET. The meeting was recorded with the transcription feature 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 process of analyzing and using the data collected from the focus group.

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 materials (digital or non-digital), technology, or other resources have you found most helpful for supporting early learning for children with disabilities in their home or preschool program?

3. In the context of providing access to materials and objects that support learning and social development, what services or resources related to assistive technology (AT) and environmental accessibility does your agency or program provide to infants and toddlers with disabilities and their families?

4. How are infants' and toddlers' needs for AT supporting learning and social development assessed? To what extent does assessment in early intervention include the accessibility of materials such as books, toys, and other learning tools (digital or non-digital)?

5. How are AT and accessible materials for learning and social development considered and documented in the IFSP or IEP process?

6. How are parents involved in the consideration of a child's need for AT and accessible materials in the Individualized Family Service Plan (IFSP) or Individualized Education Program (IEP) development process?

7. How are parents supported in using AT and accessible materials in the home environment?

8. What training or resources are needed in your agency or program to help prepare infants and toddlers with disabilities, and their families, to use learning materials and technology in preschool or another early childhood education program?

9. When seeking information and resources on early intervention topics, what are your go-to sources?

10. What early intervention-related publications or newsletters do you subscribe to? What do you like about these?

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 OSEP-funded Parent Training & Information Centers, Community Parent Resource Centers, and Parent Technical Assistance Centers experience 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 to you is the most important?

13. We are in the final minutes of the session. Are there any additional comments anyone would like to make?

Appendix B. Survey Instrument

The *NCADEMI National Digital Accessibility Needs Survey for Part C Lead Agencies, Early Intervention, and Early Childhood Education Programs* 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 your role:**
    - Part C lead agency staff
    - Part B, Section 619 staff
    - Disabilities coordinator
    - Technical assistance provider
    - Head Start partner
    - Hearing/vision specialist
    - Related service provider (e.g., physical therapist, occupational therapist, speech-language pathologist)
    - Other (please specify)

2. **In which U.S. region do you work?**
    - New England: Connecticut, Maine, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, Rhode Island, or Vermont
    - Middle Atlantic: New Jersey, New York, Pennsylvania, Maryland, or Delaware
    - East North Central: Illinois, Indiana, Michigan, Ohio, or Wisconsin
    - West North Central: Iowa, Kansas, Minnesota, Missouri, Nebraska, North Dakota, or South Dakota
    - South Atlantic: Florida, Georgia, North Carolina, South Carolina, Virginia, Washington, D.C., or West Virginia
    - East South Central: Alabama, Kentucky, Mississippi, or Tennessee
    - West South Central: Arkansas, Louisiana, Oklahoma, or Texas
    - Mountain: Arizona, Colorado, Idaho, Montana, Nevada, New Mexico, Utah, or Wyoming
    - Pacific: Alaska, California, Hawaii, Oregon, or Washington
    - U.S. Territories: American Samoa, Commonwealth of Northern Mariana Islands, Guam, Puerto Rico, or U.S. Virgin Islands

3. **Do you work for an agency or program providing Part C services to children who are likely to transition to a Part B program funded by the Bureau of Indian Education (BIE)?**
    - Yes
    - No

4. **In your opinion, what are the greatest barriers to considering a child's expected or current need for accessible learning materials? Choose up to 4 options.**
    - Limited information
    - A lack of urgency to determine a child's need for accessible materials (i.e., a "wait and see" approach)
    - Staff lack training in evaluating a child's need for accessible materials
    - An absence of inclusive environments that promote accessibility for children with disabilities
    - A lack of collaboration among educators, families, and disability or special education service providers
    - Limited resources for the delivery and sustainability of necessary services
    - A lack of education for parents and caregivers to know the legal rights of children with disabilities who need accessible materials
    - Other (please specify)

5. **What actions, if any, is your agency or program currently taking to consider a child's need for accessible materials in early learning environments? Choose all that apply.**
    - Conduct developmental/functional assessments identifying a child's need for accessible materials
    - Evaluate a child's need for assistive technology (AT) in relation to a sensory, physical, or learning disability
    - Provide therapy to improve a child's ability to use learning materials
    - Acquire accessible formats and adaptive learning materials (e.g., voice-activated or switch-activated toys, ebooks, or materials in braille)
    - Turn on the accessibility features of devices (e.g., customization of text size, color contrast, speech input or output)
    - Include related goals and services in the Individualized Family Service Plan (IFSP)
    - Include related goals and services in the Individualized Education Program (IEP)

- Provide services for parents and caregivers to support their children who use AT and accessible materials
- Provide transition planning including the consideration of a child's need for AT and accessible materials
- I'm not aware of actions being taken by my agency or program
- Other (please specify)

6. **What technical assistance topics would be most helpful to improve the provision and use of accessible materials for children with disabilities served by your agency or program? Choose up to 4 options.**
   - Basics of accessible learning materials
   - Including accessible learning materials in the IFSP or the IEP
   - Providing accessible formats of early learning materials (e.g., braille, large print, audio, digital text, tactile graphics)
   - Creating digitally accessible learning materials (e.g., websites, documents, videos, slide decks)
   - Creating accessible low-tech learning materials
   - Evaluating digital learning materials for accessibility
   - Including accessible learning materials in transition planning
   - Collecting and using data to monitor the progress of children who use accessible learning materials
   - Other (please specify)

7. **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 Part C lead agencies, early intervention (EI) programs, or early childhood education (ECE) programs
   - Other (please specify)

8. **Does your agency or program include accessibility requirements when procuring materials for teaching and learning?**
    - Yes
    - No
    - I'm not aware of my agency/program's procurement procedures
    - Not applicable

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

Appendix C. Article Discussion Guide

1. **Title of the Article**: Toddlers, Tech & Talk: 0-3-year-old children's language and literacy learning at home in a post-digital age.

2. **Author and Source**: Flewitt, R., El Gemayel, S., Arnott, L., Gillen, J., Goodall, J., Winter, K., Dalziell, A., Liu, M., Savadova, S., and Timmins, S. (2024). *Toddlers, Tech and Talk: Very young children's language and literacy learning at home in a post-digital age. Summary Report.* Manchester: Manchester Metropolitan University.

3. **Publication Date**: November 2024

4. **Summary**: The Toddlers, Tech and Talk project was funded by the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC). The project takes an in-depth review of how digital technologies intersect with the home lives of very young children and their families across the four United Kingdom nations.

5. **Key Points for Discussion**
   - Children are born into highly technologized environments from higher to lower income households. Children ages 0-3 are developing digital literacy skills and knowledge.
   - Broader descriptions of digital devices, with and without screens, including smartphones, tablets, e-readers, electronic toys, Yoto/Toniebox, story-playing devices, and smart home devices.
   - Parents agreed digital devices offer opportunities for learning, and most of them disagreed digital devices are damaging to children's learning.
   - Most parents are concerned that too much time on electronics will negatively impact the amount of time their child spends socializing with others.
   - Child disability: 4% (n = 63) respondents.
   - Parents of a child with a disability were 1.9 times more likely to report "often" using a device to play with their child than parents of children with no disability.
   - Parents who have a child with a disability were nearly twice as likely to state their child often played on devices on their own.

- A parent's gender (fathers more likely) and a child's disability status are the strongest predictors of frequent parent-child shared device use.
- Many early childhood educators/care practitioners recognize the benefits; some have negative views about how parents overuse.
- Parents and professionals (in study) agree on the need for more information on good practice for use of digital devices/media.

6. Thoughts and Questions for Consideration

- Overall thoughts about the relevance of the study.
- Would a survey/interviews with parents of transition-aged children contribute to the NCADEMI work on the use, perceptions, and importance of digital devices?
- Consider a broader description of digital materials for transitioning toddlers.
- Discuss varied practitioner views (negative and positive) on the use of digital devices/materials.
- Consider a Part C transition readiness assessment, the inclusion of current use and the need for digital devices to access classroom environments, communicating with others, and engaging socially.