

# COMPUTERS: Opening Doors to Learning

Revolutionary Common Sense by Kathie Snow, [www.disabilityisnatural.com](http://www.disabilityisnatural.com)

*IDEA (Individuals with Disabilities Education Act) states: "A child with a disability is not removed from education in age-appropriate regular classes solely because of needed modifications in the general curriculum." For example, a 10-year-old student should not be removed (or denied placement) in a fifth grade classroom just because he isn't reading at grade level—the class reading material (in this case) should be modified so he can "be involved and make progress" (per IDEA) in the fifth grade curriculum. This is one in a series of articles about curriculum modifications.*



Computers, tablets, and smart phones: indispensable aids to efficiency, creativity, learning, and more—at work, at school, and in the home. They can and should play the same important role in the lives of students with disabilities.

With the variety of software available today, providing curriculum modifications in the classroom can be easy as pie! If, for example, a child has difficulty reading or comprehending school textbooks, a computer program that's similar to the regular curriculum can be substituted for a book. Enjoyable and educational software titles for geography, math, history, social studies, and other subjects are widely available. You could find the one that best matches the school curriculum via an Internet search.

Screen-reading software or a tablet that can read out-loud may also be beneficial. Just because a child can't read doesn't mean he can't learn! Pages of a school textbook can be scanned into the student's computer or the same book may be available as an E-book.

If a child has difficulty with handwriting, in general, and/or writing legibly or quickly enough to "keep up" in class, why not let him use a computer or tablet, instead of spending hour after hour practicing handwriting, often at the expense of other, more important academic subjects? My son has used voice recognition software on his computer for many

years. Many tablets and smart phones allow a person to dictate instead of using a keyboard to type. We need to think about what's really important: good penmanship or the child learning what's important for long-term success? (In this day and age, who writes much by hand?)

"Word predictor" software can help children who struggle with grammar/language concepts. For a student who has difficulty writing with a pencil and/or using a keyboard, voice recognition software (like Naturally Speaking) can get the job done. The student reads a sample text to create a baseline recording, and then the computer recognizes his speech. This technology can enable a student to answer test questions, write a book report, and more, just by talking to the computer. Eye-gaze software, touch screens, and other computer components may also be crucial to a child's success at school. A laptop computer, combined with the appropriate software, can also become an augmentative communication device.

With technology that's available today, students with disabilities can successfully learn academics in general ed classrooms (*and* be included). In the process, they'll be on the road for post-secondary education and/or successful entry into the job market as adults, so they can live the lives of their dreams!