Assistive Technology

Donna Volpe MA CCC-SLP, ATP
Assistive technology devices are identified in the IDEA 2004 as:

Any item, piece of equipment or product system, whether acquired commercially off the shelf, modified, or customized, that is used to increase, maintain, or improve the functional capabilities of children with disabilities.
Assistive technology strategies are used if a student has difficulty reading quickly, following directions, writing etc and teachers believe they may benefit from literacy software with text-to-speech which reads books aloud, speech to tech etc.
The team would need to determine what software, if any, would be most beneficial?
Before answering that, we need to ask other questions like what is the cause of the slow reading (decoding problems, weak vocabulary, visual processing, attention)?
What is the function of the associated tools (e.g., assistance with writing)?
The answers to these questions would allow for the recommendation of a generic technology feature which might be effective (e.g., text-to-speech; text highlighting; adjusting colors, fonts, and word spacing; built-in reference tools; word prediction).
The student's social circumstances and personal preferences (e.g., not wanting to appear different) might call for a less conspicuous solution in certain settings, such as software with a more subtle user interface, or listening to a narrated digital audiobook while following along in the print version.
After matching the student's specific needs with functional features, the team can make educated choices as to which technologies are most likely to produce the desired outcomes.
Examples of Assistive Technology for all learners