



AT Champions Program Overview 2023-2024

NEAT is thrilled to host a unique AT learning program once again, "AT Champions." This program, initially a pilot project during the 2022-2023 school year, will now be repeated and revamped! During an introductory course and an optional advanced course, NEAT will lead professional development exclusively for selected CT educators to build their assistive technology (AT) and augmentative & alternative communication (AAC) capacities.

Professionals ("AT Champions") will develop their confidence and expertise in AT or AAC knowledge, while being part of a unique learning network of fellow Champions. Students ("Peer Mentors/Junior Champions") who show leadership qualities will be able to gain experience in learning new technologies while supporting their peers who use AT through an "AT Buddy" component. Learning Toolkits that contain a variety of assistive technology items will be loaned to AT Champions for the duration of a course semester to give them opportunities for hands-on learning.

Generously funded by the CT State Department of Education, this program is offered to participants at NO COST.

Program Participants

- a) *AT Champions* – educators and professionals with the drive to develop their assistive technology knowledge and skillsets to better serve their students
- b) *Junior AT Champions* – students across elementary, middle, and high school levels who exhibit an interest in technology, and/or demonstrate a knack for teaching and helping others; students who may be considering a career in special education, disability services, or other related fields and who wish to gain an awareness about assistive technology; Junior AT Champions will NOT directly apply to the program and will NOT participate in the coursework, but rather will be selected by AT Champions to engage with items in the Learning Toolkits alongside the "AT Buddies"
- c) *AT Buddies* - students with Individualized Education Plans or 504 Plans who utilize assistive technology and who would benefit from learning more about their tools/devices through a low-pressure peer mentorship model ("Junior AT Champions")

Program Levels

- **Course 1: "AT/AAC Essentials"** – During this introductory course, the AT Champions will engage in content that builds a solid foundation for AT/AAC considerations and implementation processes for students with varying needs. The NEAT instructors will *virtually* teach these selected topics two times, once during Fall 2023 to the first group of participants, and again in Spring 2024 to a second group of participants. This course will provide two tracks for educators to choose from: Augmentative Alternative Communication (AAC) for Engagement *or* AT for Learning.
 - Upon completion of the course and when Learning Toolkits are returned, professionals will be awarded a NEAT Certificate of Completion as a "NEAT Approved AT Champion"
- **Course 2: "Next Level AT/AAC"** – The advanced course will expand upon content taught in the introductory course by including more in-depth guidance for effectively and naturally embedding AT/AAC within school settings. These topics will be taught both *virtually and in-person* at Oak Hill in Hartford

during an intensive two-week summer program. Although participation is not required, the AT Champions are strongly encouraged to apply* to take this second course given the identified benefits:

- An opportunity to set them apart from other colleagues with only a basic level understanding of AT, potentially contributing to career advancement
- Given the nature of the topics, development of skills that can be used to not only help individual students, but whole classrooms of students, support staff departments, and entire districts
- Participation in exclusive, in-person networking opportunities with other professionals to collaboratively foster change in AT perspectives and procedures throughout CT
- Public recognition by NEAT as an “Educator of AT Excellence”; examples may be inclusion on NEAT’s website and acknowledgement at an awards ceremony during the AT Summit
- With successful completion of the coursework, the AT Champion will be awarded an iPad and a \$100 Apple Store gift card

**The application to request participation in the “Next Level AT/AAC” course will open in Spring 2024*

Introductory Course Elements

- a) *Pre-recorded Webinars* – **AT Champions** will independently watch recorded course content using a virtual platform. Short tasks will be embedded into the webinars to solidify participant learning.
- b) *Live Labinars* – **AT Champions** will engage with the NEAT instructors during occasional live sessions to discuss the coursework and assignments as well as inherently form a professional learning network. Participation is required. Exceptions will be considered on a case-by-case basis. Labinar dates for the duration of the semester will be provided at the start of the semester so that participants can plan ahead and mark their calendars.
- c) *Assignments* – **AT Champions** will utilize the knowledge learned in the coursework, paired with the technology provided in the Learning Toolkits, and apply them to meaningful assignments throughout the semester. When applicable, the **Junior AT Champions and the AT Buddies** will be incorporated into the assignments in order to further solidify relevant learning for the AT Champions while offering natural benefits to the students.
- d) *AT Summit* – **AT Champions** will showcase their knowledge by participating alongside the NEAT team in an in-person “AT Summit” at Oak Hill in Hartford. Professional development sessions and interactive AT stations will be open to the public.

Advanced Course Elements

- a) *Pre-recorded Webinars* – **AT Champions** will independently watch recorded course content using a virtual platform. Short tasks will be embedded into the webinars to solidify participant learning.
- b) *Live Labinars* – **AT Champions** will engage with the NEAT instructors and fellow AT Champions during in-person sessions. These NEAT-led sessions will promote networking while AT Champions learn from one another through discussions of “real-life” applications of AT/AAC within CT school districts. Participation is required. Labinar dates will be provided at the time of application to ensure AT Champions’ availability.

Questions? Contact NEAT’s Director of AT Services at Elena.Hurlburt@OakHillCT.org