**What is AAC?**

AAC stands for Alternative and Augmentative Communication. AAC is anything that we use to communicate that is not verbal speech. AAC can be *aided* (it makes use of one or more things to support communication) or it can be *unaided* (the person uses only their body to convey their message). In our schools we regularly see use of sign, pics (Boardmaker picture symbols), and a variety of technology (often a dedicated iPad with a communication app).

**Who Uses AAC, Why, and For How Long?**

Many people do not have verbal speech that meets their daily communication needs. The use of speech generating devices (i.e. talkers or communication devices) is an important piece of their daily interactions and learning. Talkers are used *in addition* to whatever verbal speech, gestures, sign or other methods the person uses. The goal is never to replace verbal speech; the goal is functional communication that allows for social interactions, self-representation and learning.

Children with significant speech sound disorders, children who are pre-verbal, non-verbal or minimally verbal, and children for whom the acquisition of language is challenging can all make use of AAC. It can be short- or long-term. It can be as a supplement to other communication methods, or it can be the primary or sole method. In addition to meeting their daily communication needs and increasing language complexity, using AAC effectively has been shown to contribute to the development of verbal speech skills.

**How Do Skills Develop**

Communication encompasses a broad set of skills that children acquire across their day and throughout the years. Adding the component of technology complicates the process, but the principles of learning to communicate are the same. Learning comes from exposure and opportunities and encouragement. AAC learners need people around them who are positive about the talker and use it themselves to model simple language throughout the day, and they need meaningful engagement rather than drills.