

## DEVELOPING A PERSONAL DICTIONARY

### What is a Personal Dictionary?

A completed Personal Dictionary is a personalized reference guide to assist individual(s) communicating with a non-speaking student. The guide describes the student's method of communication - including sounds facial expressions and movements - and options for responding to the student's attempt to communicate. It is developed by those who know the student intimately. Completing a personal dictionary may demand a fine-tuning of your observational skills. Attached is an example sheet of a Personal Dictionary and a blank form for your team to complete.



*"Not all  
communication  
is spoken."*

**In order to complete a Personal Dictionary your team will need to be familiar with:**

#### **I. Why Do We Communicate?** (see attached page)

- generic list of some of the underlying reasons - expression of needs and wants and social interaction - about why we all communicate
- your understanding and knowledge of the list will assist you in trying to respond to the student, enhance better communication and assist you in completing a Personal Dictionary for the student

#### **II. How Do I Communicate?** (see attached page)

- generic list of some of the ways non-speaking students may be communicating
- some of the modes listed may be used independent from one another or they may be used in a variety of combinations (see examples on Personal Dictionary attached)
- your team may decide that there are other modes besides those listed that the student is using
- your understanding and awareness of options in which the student may be communicating will increase your observational skills and assist you in completing the Personal Dictionary

### How do I complete the Personal Dictionary?

- Use the information from How Do I Communicate? handout and closely observe the student over a 1-2 week period, identifying and documenting all the different behaviors you observe.
- List any additional behaviors that you may have observed in the past that are not on your list.
- Use the information from the Why Do We Communicate? and as you observe a behavior note what you thought the intent might have been given the context of the situation.
- When completing the "How to Respond" column keep in mind and include in your verbal response all three elements: *identify the behavior*, *interpret the behavior* (intent), and *state how to respond* (see e.g. page).
- School staff to complete their form independent from parents/guardians.
- School staff and parents meet and discuss results and develop a composite form.
- Review form 2-3x per year to keep it up-to-date, and remember to date the form.
- Completed Personal Dictionary should be readily available in student's environment(s).