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Electronic Accessibility for Schools

Presented by Mark W. Cheramie Walz

SWEET | STEVENS | KATZ | WILLIAMS

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Accessibility in General

Defining Accessibility

- ❖ Accessibility refers to designing and developing web content in a way that ensures people with disabilities can perceive, understand, navigate, and interact with websites and web applications. This includes individuals with visual, auditory, cognitive, physical, or other impairments.

How to Disabled People Access Web Content?

- ❖ Visual Impairments - Screen Readers (e.g. JAWS)
- ❖ Visual Impairments - Keyboard Navigation only
- ❖ Visual Impairments - Screen Magnifiers
- ❖ Visual and Motor Impairments - Alternative Keyboards
- ❖ Hearing Impairments - Captions
- ❖ Motor Impairments - Eye Navigation, Speech Navigation Tools
- ❖ Cognitive Impairments - Writing Assistants

Defining WCAG 2.1AA

- ❖ WCAG 2.0, or the Web Content Accessibility Guidelines 2.0, is a set of guidelines developed by the World Wide Web Consortium (W3C) to make web content more accessible to people with disabilities. WCAG 2.0 has four main principles for web content:
 - ❖ Perceivable – Information and user interface components must be presented in ways that users can perceive. This includes providing text alternatives for non-text content, captions for multimedia, and making content adaptable for different devices or assistive technologies.
 - ❖ Operable – Interface and navigation must be operable for all users. This includes ensuring that users can navigate with a keyboard (not just a mouse), providing enough time to interact with content, and making sure that content does not cause seizures or physical reactions (e.g., no flashing lights).
 - ❖ Understandable – Information and the operation of the user interface must be understandable. This means the text must be readable and predictable, with consistent navigation and input assistance for form elements.
 - ❖ Robust – Content must be robust enough to be interpreted reliably by a wide variety of user agents, including assistive technologies. This means using standards that will ensure content remains accessible as technologies evolve.

What are we trying to avoid?

Examples

- ❖ Visual Impairments:
 - ❖ Images without Alternative Text: If a website has images but doesn't provide alternative (alt) text, a person who is blind and using a screen reader won't know what the image is about.
 - ❖ Poor Color Contrast: Users with low vision or color blindness may struggle to read text if there is insufficient contrast between text and background colors (e.g., light gray text on a white background).
 - ❖ Inaccessible PDFs: A visually impaired user relying on a screen reader may not be able to read documents that are scanned as images without proper tagging or alternative formats.

Examples

- ❖ Hearing Impairments:

- ❖ Videos without Captions: Someone who is deaf or hard of hearing will miss out on important information if videos or audio content do not include captions or transcripts.
- ❖ Audio-based Navigation: Some websites use audio cues or instructions that a person with hearing loss won't be able to perceive.

- ❖ Motor Disabilities:

- ❖ Mouse-Only Navigation: A person with limited hand mobility who cannot use a mouse may be unable to navigate a website that doesn't support keyboard shortcuts or tab-based navigation.
- ❖ Small Clickable Areas: Buttons or links that are too small or close together can be difficult for someone with tremors or motor control difficulties to click accurately.

Examples

- ❖ Cognitive Disabilities:

- ❖ Complex or Jargon-filled Language: People with cognitive impairments or learning disabilities may have trouble understanding websites with overly complicated language or unclear instructions.
- ❖ Time Limits: If a user has slow reading or processing speeds, they may be locked out of forms or activities due to short time limits without the option to extend the time.

- ❖ Epilepsy:

- ❖ Flashing Content: People with photosensitive epilepsy may experience seizures triggered by flashing images or rapid changes in light or color, especially if they flash between 2 and 55 Hz without warnings or controls to pause them.

ADA Accessibility Regulations

New Regulations

- ❖ New regulations issued in April 2024 by the Department of Justice under the Americans with Disabilities Act.
- ❖ The regulations target local and municipal governments (including school districts and charter schools) and require that all of their websites and apps are accessible to individuals with disabilities.
- ❖ The regulations require a fixed technical standard for the first time - WCAG 2.1.

Effective Date

- ❖ Compliance is required in 2 years (from 04 / 24 / 24) for public entities with a total population of 50,000 or more, and 3 years for public entities with a total population of less than 50,000.
- ❖ Use the total census population of your school district or IU to determine your compliance date.

WCAG 2.1AA - What is Required?

Key WCAG Requirements

- ❖ 1. Text Alternatives for Non-Text Content (1.1.1)
 - ❖ Provide text alternatives (like alt text for images) so content can be changed into other forms that people need, such as large print, braille, speech, or symbols.
- ❖ 2. Keyboard Accessibility (2.1.1)
 - ❖ Ensure that all website functionality is available via keyboard navigation, allowing users who cannot use a mouse to interact with the content. This is critical for users with motor disabilities.
- ❖ 3. Color Contrast (1.4.3)
 - ❖ Ensure that there is sufficient contrast between text and background colors (minimum of 4.5:1 for normal text and 3:1 for large text) so that users with visual impairments, like color blindness, can easily read the content.

Key WCAG Requirements

- ❖ 4. Captions for Multimedia (1.2.2 & 1.2.4)
 - ❖ Provide captions for audio content and transcripts for videos to assist people who are deaf or hard of hearing. This ensures they can understand spoken information.
- ❖ 5. Resize Text Without Loss of Content or Functionality (1.4.4)
 - ❖ Users should be able to resize text up to 200% without disrupting the layout or functionality of the website, which is essential for users with low vision.
- ❖ 6. Consistent Navigation and Identification (3.2.3 & 3.2.4)
 - ❖ Use a consistent navigation structure and consistent identification of components across the website to help users with cognitive disabilities or learning difficulties. This ensures predictability and reduces confusion.
- ❖ 7. Forms with Clear Labels and Instructions (3.3.2)
 - ❖ Ensure that form fields have clear labels and provide instructions or error messages to assist users with cognitive or visual impairments when filling out forms.

Key Areas of WCAG Compliance

- ❖ 8. Accessible Error Prevention and Handling (3.3.4)
 - ❖ When users fill out important forms provide a way to review and correct their input to prevent errors that may arise due to accessibility issues.
- ❖ 9. Responsive Design for Mobile Devices (1.4.10)
 - ❖ Ensure that content is responsive and can be reflowed to fit different screen sizes, such as on mobile devices or when users zoom in on the content.
- ❖ 10. Avoid Flashing Content (2.3.1)
 - ❖ Limit flashing content to avoid causing seizures in users with photosensitive epilepsy. If flashing is necessary, it should not flash more than three times in any one-second period.

Just the tip of the iceberg

- ❖ There are 78 different "success criteria" under the WCAG 2.1aa standard.
- ❖ The law requires compliance with all 78 by the compliance date.

Exceptions

- ❖ Exceptions to the new rule:
 - ❖ archived web content
 - ❖ pre-existing conventional electronic documents, unless such documents are currently used to apply for, gain access to, or participate in the public entity's services, programs, or activities
 - ❖ content posted by a third party, unless the third party is posting due to contractual, licensing, or other arrangements with the public entity
 - ❖ convention electronic documents that are about a specific individual, their property, or their account and that are password-protected or otherwise secured; and
 - ❖ pre-existing social media posts.
- ❖ NOTE - there is no exception for course content that is posted in a learning management system.

Implementing WCAG in Schools

I'm going to be honest with you...

Main Website

- ❖ This is almost certainly going to require an accessibility audit - for each page on the District's domain.
- ❖ You can use a publicly available accessibility tool, such as WAVE, to determine your level of compliance with the WCAG 2.1 standard.
- ❖ You could alternatively outsource this to a contractor to assess and make the corrections to your website.

Demonstration – Wave Accessibility Tool

Putting Ideas into Practice

Main Website

- ❖ But this is not a one time activity - so you'll need to train everyone who is responsible for adding web content to comply with the WCAG standards.
 - ❖ What should that training look like?
- ❖ Focus first on the highest frequency errors and the areas that are likely to have the greatest impact like alt text, accessible forms, video captions, and keyboard accessibility.
- ❖ Once you have established accessibility standards, you will need to monitor in some way to ensure that your content continues to be accessible.

Mobile App

- ❖ If your school district has its own mobile app - you are responsible for ensuring compliance with WCAG standards.
- ❖ How to you check mobile app accessibility?
 - ❖ Through publicly available testing tools.
- ❖ But as your content is updated - again, you have to monitor to ensure compliance.

What about policies?

- ❖ If someone in the school district is uploading a policy to Boarddocs, and Boarddocs is merely hosting the content - it is a school district website and is subject to the accessibility regulations.
- ❖ Even if someone at Boarddocs were uploading the content on behalf of the District - it would be subject to these regulations.
- ❖ Consider not just the accessibility of the PDFs themselves, but the navigation of board agenda, supporting documents, and their accessibility also.
- ❖ Accessibility extends to content in the password protected area.

More on Policies

- ❖ So this is another enormous website with hundreds of subpages that need to be brought into compliance.
- ❖ This is where it is key that archived web content does not have to be updated.
- ❖ But the Wave tool doesn't work with Boarddocs - so it's difficult to assess.
- ❖ Can you add it to your contract that Boarddocs will ensure accessibility, at least in the standard formatting, forms, navigation, etc.?

School Lunch Websites

- ❖ If content is posted by a third party on behalf of the district due to a contractual, licensing, or other arrangement with the public entity - the content is subject to the WCAG standards.
- ❖ Does you use a food service company that runs a website? What about a mobile app?
- ❖ Is the portal for updating payments and accounts hosted through a third party provider? Is there tool also accessible?

Sports Websites

- ❖ If a sports website is hosted by a third party and merely based upon information from the school district, you need not worry about WCAG compliance.
- ❖ But if the sports website is updated by the athletic director or someone within the district, you'll also be responsible for ensuring WCAG compliance.

Social Media

- ❖ Only pre-existing social media posts are exempted from compliance
- ❖ Ensuring accessibility is of the key reasons why we recommend that school districts and IUs have a social media policy.
- ❖ You must determine which social media accounts are your district-operated accounts (including many operated by your employees).
- ❖ Because so many users add content to district or IU-operated social media accounts, this is yet another area where accessibility training will be necessary.
- ❖ Your obligation to make content accessible extends across platforms, regardless of the accessibility tools of that platform.
- ❖ If your social media content is cross posted to your website, consider whether your website carries over the accessibility features available in the native application.

YouTube Videos

- ❖ If content is being uploaded by school officials or teachers, it is treated as any other social media content and will be subject to the WCAG accessibility requirements.
- ❖ School board meetings, graduation ceremonies, informational meetings, etc will be subject to the WCAG standards.
- ❖ Key standards:
 - ❖ 1.2.2 Captions are provided for all prerecorded audio content in synchronized media, except when the media is a media alternative for text and is clearly labeled as such.
 - ❖ 1.2.4 Captions are provided for all live audio content in synchronized media.
 - ❖ 1.2.5 Audio description is provided for all prerecorded video content in synchronized media.

Learning Management Sites

- ❖ Unlike the *draft* regulations, the final regulations to not provide for an exception for online content uploaded by teachers to a learning management site.
- ❖ If you are linking to third party content (e.g. a Pearson video on YouTube) you need not ensure that all of the linked content is accessible. It would be on that end user to address their own accessibility.
- ❖ New content, such as PDFs, should be uploaded in a rich text format, not as images.
- ❖ This is particularly tricky with certain documents like math and science worksheets - with illustrations, drawings, and the like.

More on Learning Management Sites

- ❖ Here again, we're back to another area of training - this time for teachers.
- ❖ In the next two years, you'll need to prioritize the key areas for accessibility based upon your learning platform, and work with teachers for how to implement those changes.
- ❖ We recommend focuses on high impact changes such as captions for videos, alt text for images, accessible forms and PDFs, etc.
- ❖ Because these sites are so voluminous and changing daily, we don't think it's possible to regularly audit such content. You'll have to rely on teacher compliance and spot checks to ensure compliance.

Other Classroom Sites

- ❖ What about Class Dojo and parent communication apps?
- ❖ Remind for sports teams?
- ❖ Bus tracking apps?
- ❖ Discord for e-sports competitors?
- ❖ Individual teacher Google Sites?
- ❖ Student-led school newspaper?

High Impact

- ❖ One of the biggest impact steps you can take to assist your district or IU is to communicate with your business office about these new standards, and the necessity of ensuring that all new contracts address accessibility by contractors.
- ❖ If you are signing a contract with a food service vendor, transportation contractor, substitute teacher service, etc - and they are going to operate a website or app on the District or IU's behalf - you should have a provision ensuring WCAG compliance by your compliance date.

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