

School Website ADA Compliance Accessibility Guide



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About Campus Suite

ADA compliance is just one communications challenge Campus Suite is helping schools solve. Our web platform enables schools to manage their websites, notifications, mobile apps and social media – all from one simple command center. We love helping schools, and we love sharing what we know through [Campus Suite Academy free resources](#) such as this guide.

To learn more about how Campus Suite can help improve your school communications, visit us at www.campussuite.com





Introduction

Website accessibility has become a priority communications challenge for school districts across the country. Good-looking, easy-to-navigate school websites may appear plenty accessible and user-friendly to most of us, but are not to everyone. Just as your school buildings and grounds are mandated by law to be barrier free to everyone, your school website is required to be fully accessible.

Individuals with vision, hearing, physical or learning disabilities need to be accommodated so that they can access web content. A significant chunk of your students, parents, staff and school community at large are being shut off from your web communications unless

you've taken the necessary step to be fully ADA compliant.

The *ADA Compliance School Website Guide* is for those responsible for planning and managing your school website to ensure you meet the U.S. federal website accessibility requirements. It's designed to make sure you're prepared to understand all the considerations that go into understanding and resolving the issues that can affect your school's website compliance with ADA law.

This guide is published by Campus Suite and is part of The Campus Suite Academy's commitment to ongoing professional development for educators in the realm of web communications.

Web accessibility and your school district

Simply put, web accessibility means that anyone with disabilities should be able to perceive, comprehend, navigate and interact with your website – students, parents, staff, community members at large. Web accessibility is important for it provides equal access and opportunity for everyone in your school community to participate in the education experience.

It's for your blind teacher, autistic kindergartner, your hearing-impaired high schooler. It's for the learning-disabled student, paraplegic parent, for the ageing grandmother. Web accessibility is for the **one-in-five** of the U.S. population that suffers from one sort of disability or another, and the four who don't. By identifying and knocking down the communication barriers that exist on your website, you can maximize the delivery of content and interaction with your entire school community, and help meet your school's mission.

For all disabilities of all kinds

When thinking of website accessibility for the disabled, most people think of blind or deaf people and their ability to hear or

read what's on your website. Screen readers translate the written screen text into audible language, while captioning and online transcripts bring to life video and multimedia content on the web. But there's more to website accessibility than just satisfying your vision- and hearing-impaired users.

Not everyone has the physical ability to handle a mouse, for example, or even hunt-and-peck simple keyboard navigation. Rotating banners may move much too quickly for a learning disabled user to view, much less comprehend. Do all your users have the ability to fill out the forms you've embedded into your pages?

Disabilities come in all shapes and sizes, and your website needs to accommodate them all and eliminate the obstacles that exclude these individuals from accessing your site.

Assistive Technology

A wide range of hardware and software is available to the disabled to help them access the web. Screen readers (e.g. JAWS, NVDA), magnification and speech input software, and input alternatives such as head pointers, motion, eye-tracking and single-switch entry devices help people access the web.

Four major categories of disabilities:

Visual

Blind, low-vision, color blindness

Variations in type fonts and sizes, color schemes, images, contrasts and other visual elements to convey messages are lost on the visually impaired.

Hearing

Partial, or total hearing impairment

The increasing use of video, audio, slideware, and multimedia on websites doesn't register with someone suffering from hearing loss.

Motor

Impairments to any physical movement

The wide range of congenital conditions and even temporary mobility impairments may preclude users from using a mouse or keyboard.

Cognitive

Learning disorders

Problem-solving, memory, ADD, Down's, traumatic brain injuries and other learning disorders each present unique corresponding web access challenges.

When examining your school's website accessibility, you must take into account the entire spectrum of disabilities.

When to begin

The degree of urgency surrounding school website ADA compliance is starting to heat up. Many schools know they need to make their sites compliant, but either are not taking the steps to do so, or not sure where to turn. What is certain, is that public schools are subject to [Sections 504 and 508 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973](#); that is, **schools are legally obligated** to make their website content accessible to all.

Since 2010, the U.S. Department of Justice has been hammering out the specific regulations details, but it's recently been made official that it will adopt the [Web Content Accessibility Guidelines](#) (WCAG) established by the World Wide Web Consortium (W3C). Schools in Arizona, North Carolina, Texas, Virginia and Washington state are among those currently in litigation over complaints filed with the Office of Civil Rights alleging their websites do not comply with these guidelines. With more claims are sure to follow, school districts face stiff fines and terrible public relations fallout from not addressing this sensitive issue.

A recent [Campus Suite Academy](#) poll of school communicators showed that 50% didn't know if their website is ADA compliant, and another 25% know it's not. Factor in too that [20 percent of the](#)

[U.S. population has a disability](#), and these alarming numbers are why many school administrators are scrambling to understand what it takes to bring their websites into compliance.

Regardless whether your district comes under direct legal pressure to comply with web accessibility, it's both right thing and the legal thing to begin assessing your school website's ADA compliance issue now, and begin resolving them.

Common myths about accessibility

Concerns about web accessibility are nothing new. Likewise, so-called remedies for a website's accessibility shortcomings are neither new nor comprehensive.

Myth #1

Just use plain text: avoid the bells and whistles.

A text-only website is not the answer. Video, audio and multimedia should and can be displayed on your website, if it's designed and developed correctly. The goal of web accessibility is not to alter content to fit the ADA requirements, but broaden the reach of content using the right tools.

Myth #2

Just add ALT tags to my images.

An alt tag, which is when you include a clear text description to accompany the image, enables screen readers to translate the image into text. While certainly recommended, alt tags address only a sliver of the full ADA-compliance challenge, for the non-blind disabled still face obstacles.

Myth #3

Youtube video links are good to go.

Let's just say all your home grown videos do comply with ADA guidelines. What about the ones linked to those not hosted by your school? The automatic captioning third-party hosting services like Youtube and Vimeo probably don't pass muster.

Myth #4

Compliance is not a priority of federal agencies.

All you need to do is check the U.S. Dept. of Education website, where there's a dedicated web page: "[How to File a Discrimination Complaint with the Office of Civil Rights](#)." Across the country, notification letters from disability advocates are being written and lawsuits have begun.

There is no quick fix when it comes to making your school website fully ADA compliant for all your users. When taking

into account all the users that span the range of disabilities, and a legacy of creating content with no or little regard to their special requirements, years of website content cannot be remedied simply with alt tags and screen readers.

Evaluating your website

You need to first understand just where and what about your website is non-compliant. Most schools' websites, for example, are loaded with PDFs that are not compliant; images that aren't adequately described or searchable; not enough visual contrast on pages; videos without closed-captioning.

You may have had an occasional complaint about your website's accessibility and solved it with some workaround, but that's no solution. You need a strategic approach through a thorough examination of all its content; a continuous vigilance using the right tools on your website's compliance; and the knowledge and resources to manage the process.

1. Be strategic.

In order for your website to be fully website accessible, you first need a shift in philosophy by school administration to

embrace the obligation to serve every student, parent, staff and community member. As you begin the **audit of your existing school website(s)**, brace yourself for what's likely to be a minefield of compliance issues. When you consider that each and every menu, page, link, image, video, pdf, slide show and other component that comprises your site will need attention, the prospect of compliance may seem daunting.

2. Use the right tools.

There are host of compliance evaluation tools available to check specific components of a typical web page. The W3C has a [list of these ADA compliance checkers](#) here. These tools help you examine the parts of a website that are most likely to be out of compliance:

- Page title
- Images
- Headings
- Menus
- Contrast ratio
- Text re-sizing flexibility
- Keyboard access and visual focus
- Forms, labels and error interaction
- Multimedia
- Basic structure

One huge beneficial outgrowth of focusing on web accessibility for people with disabilities, is that web content is becoming more usable even to those

without disabilities. Web accessibility is consistent with the design principles that make for good design. In just about every case, adaptations benefit nearly everyone. Well-organized content, logical navigation, captions and other features are welcomed by all. Transcripts, for example, of audio or video files, benefit not only the hearing impaired, for whom these accommodations are required.

3. Tap the knowledge and resources.

Another important way to gauge a website's compliance is the human element. People themselves are great resources to use to check your site's accessibility score.

Ask someone who is actually disabled to take a page for a 'test drive' and check pages or page elements. In addition to applying what you know about the issues that put a site out of compliance, people most affected by accessibility are usually more than willing to point out issues and help bring your site into compliance.

Few if any schools will have the in-house resources to tackle converting your website into full ADA compliance. Whether you're fixing an existing website or starting anew, it's critical that you **build in the website accessibility requirement specifications.** Your web

development team and suppliers should have a solid understanding of accessibility and have the technical chops to satisfy your requirements.

The content management system (CMS) you choose will have a dramatic impact on how smoothly the process will be. Seek a CMS provider that is versed in understanding the complexities of identifying and resolving ADA compliance issues, and can help you build a website that serves everyone.

Making and keeping it accessible

Implementing a web accessible site in your district requires a plan that includes training and testing. As we addressed earlier in this guide, your school needs to take a strategic approach by first embracing a philosophy of accessibility. Top-level administrative support and instilling a culture of accommodating the disabled is at the heart of a successful program.

Planning

An overarching goal of your planning should be to treat web accessibility as a part of proper web design, and not apart from it. Don't view it as an additional or supplemental consideration, rather as part of the fabric of your website.

Providing your district has the full support of its school board and superintendent, assembling a web accessibility team is your next step. Comprised of senior communications and IT staff, your team should also include representation from key content contributors who can share the technical direction required to create content properly and fix the problems when they occur.

Training

Training should encompass all individuals who contribute to your website. These would include in-house technical staff, content authors and contributors, and any outside design and CMS contractors that need to be up to speed on fulfilling the web accessibility mission.

Your training should include an overview that helps everyone understand the perspectives of users with disabilities. Be sure to include the ethical and legal obligations of your school district to

Fixing compliance problems

When a formal complaint is lodged about a school's website's accessibility, it typically comes from the U.S. Department of Education Office of Civil Rights. Often prompted by a notification letter from a disability advocate, these complaints usually give the school 90 days to either comply or offer a plan to comply, or else face fines or other legal action.

comply with these standards. From a technical standpoint, your appropriate IT staff and outside web vendors must be well-versed and will likely require training on specific design, coding and multimedia

considerations of your site. Your content contributors may not need to know code, but they nonetheless need to know the technical boundaries of the content they're creating.

WebAIM, an organization dedicated to making the web more useful for the disabled, has a wealth of training and support information to share, including a model for an [implementation plan you could use in your district](#).

Testing

Once your web team knows the standards that need to be met, keeping your site accessible requires a vigilance using the right tools and the right people.

There are a host of [accessibility checkers and validators](#) available. These software plug-ins determine if your web pages and content meet 508 compliance. Some are free, some are more comprehensive than others. Use a program gives you the reports and level of detail you need.

Just as important, if not more so, than any software to **monitor your site is using real, live people**. As web accessibility expert Keith David Reeves points out, "Nothing beats the human element when it comes to testing your site." When a problem arises, bring it to the attention of the web administration so it can resolve the issue and avoid similar ones going forward.

How to make your website ADA compliant

Most of the problems that occur on a school website fall in one or several of the following categories. Check out this resource from the WebAIM group for a [WCAG 2.0 Checklist](#).



Contrast and colors

Some people have can't pick up contrasts, and some are color blind, so there needs to be a distinguishable contrast between text and background colors. This goes for buttons, links, text on images – everything. Consideration to contrast and color choice is also important for extreme lighting conditions.

Contract checker: <http://webaim.org/resources/contrastchecker>



Using semantics to format your HTML pages

When web page codes are clearly described in easy-to-understand terms, it enables broader sharing across all browsers and apps. This 'friendlier' language not only helps all the users, but developers who are striving to make content more universal on more devices .

Helpful article: <http://webaim.org/techniques/semanticstructure>



Text alternatives for non-text content

Written replacements for images, audio and video should provide all the same descriptors that the non-text content conveys. Besides helping with searching, clear, concise word choice can make vivid non-text content for the disabled.

Helpful article: <http://webaim.org/techniques/alttext>



Ability to navigate with the keyboard

Not everyone can use a mouse. Blind people with many with motor disabilities have to use a keyboard to make their way around a website. Users need to be able to interact fully with your website by navigating using the tab, arrows and return keys only. A “skip navigation” option is also required. Consider using [WAI-ARIA](#) for improved accessibility, and properly highlight the links as you use the tab key to make sections.

Helpful article: www.nngroup.com/articles/keyboard-accessibility

Helpful article: <http://webaim.org/techniques/skipnav>



Easy to navigate and find information

Finding relevant content via search and easy navigation is a universal need. Alt text, heading structure, page titles, descriptive link text (no ‘click here’ please) are just some ways to help everyone find what they’re searching for. You must also provide multiple ways to navigate such as a search and a site map.

Helpful article: <http://webaim.org/techniques/sitetools/>



Properly formatting tables

Tables are hard for screen readers to decipher. Users need to be able to navigate through a table one cell at a time. In addition to the table itself needing a caption, row and column headers need to be labeled and data correctly associated with the right header.

Helpful article: <http://webaim.org/techniques/tables/data>



Making PDFs accessible

PDF files must be tagged properly to be accessible, and unfortunately many are not. Images and other non-text elements

within that PDF also need to be ADA-compliant. Creating anew is one thing; converting old PDFs takes time.

Helpful article: <http://webaim.org/techniques/acrobat/acrobat>



Making videos accessible

Simply adding a transcript isn't enough. Videos require closed captioning and detailed descriptions (e.g., who's on screen, where they are, what they're doing, even facial expressions) to be fully accessible and ADA compliant.

Helpful article: <http://webaim.org/techniques/captions>



Making forms accessible

Forms are common tools for gathering info and interacting. From logging in to registration, they can be challenging if not designed to be web accessible. How it's laid out, use of labels, size of clickable areas and other aspects need to be considered.

Helpful article: <http://webaim.org/techniques/forms>



Alternate versions

Attempts to be fully accessible sometimes fall short, and in those cases, alternate versions of key pages must be created. That is, it is sometimes not feasible (legally, technically) to modify some content. These are the 'exceptions', but still must be accommodated.



Feedback for users

To be fully interactive, your site needs to be able to provide an easy way for users to submit feedback of any website issues. Clarity is key for both any confirmation or error feedback that

occurs while engaging the page.



Other related requirements

No flashing

Blinking and flashing are not only bothersome, but can be disorienting and even dangerous for many users. Seizures can even be triggered by flashing, so avoid using any flashing or flickering content.

Timers

Timed connections can create difficulties for the disabled. They may not even know a timer is in effect, it may create stress. In some cases (e.g., purchasing items), a timer is required, but for most school content, avoid using them.

Fly-out menus

Menus that fly out or down when an item is clicked are helpful to dig deeper into site's content, but they need to be available via keyboard navigation, and not immediately snap back when those using a mouse move from the clickable area.

No pop-ups

Pop-up windows present a range of obstacles for many disabled users, so it's best to avoid using them altogether. If you must, be sure to alert the user that a pop is about to be launched.

Glossary

Assistive technology	Hardware and software for disabled people that enable them to perform tasks they otherwise would not be able to perform (e.g., a screen reader)
WCAG 2.0	Evolving web design guidelines established by the W3C that specify how to accommodate web access for the disabled
504	Section of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 that protects civil liberties and guarantees certain rights of disabled people
508	An amendment to the Rehabilitation Act that eliminates barriers in information technology for the disabled
ADA	
Screen reader	Software technology that transforms on-screen text into audible voice. Includes tools for navigating and accessing web pages.
Website accessibility	Making your website fully accessible for people of all abilities
Keyboard trap	Using the keyboard to navigate to a feature, then being unable (trapped) to navigate away from a website feature
W3C	World Wide Web Consortium – the international body that develops standards for using the web
OCR	Department of Education, Office of Civil Rights – the office that files discrimination complaints

Related links and articles

Understanding Sections 504 and 508 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973

<http://www.hhs.gov/web/section-508/what-is-section-504/>

WCAG 2.0 Guidelines Overview

<http://webaim.org/standards/wcag/checklist>

Quick Reference: Web Accessibility Principles

<http://webaim.org/resources/quickref/quickref.pdf>

Intro to Web Accessibility

<https://www.w3.org/WAI/intro/accessibility.php>

Web Accessibility Implementation Plan from WebAIM

<http://webaim.org/articles/implementation/plan>

Monitoring your Web Accessibility Program

<http://webaim.org/articles/implementation/plan#monitoring>

Website Accessibility Checkers and Validators

<https://www.w3.org/WAI/ER/tools>

Public Schools Need to Audit their Website

<http://www.3playmedia.com/2016/05/27/why-public-schools-need-to-audit-their-website-for-accessibility-right-now/>

Accessibility complaints on the rise

<https://www.audioeye.com/school-ada-website-accessibility-complaints-on-the-rise/>

Legal Update on School District Website Accessibility from Texas School Board Assoc.

<http://bit.ly/2ghVP46>

HTML Semantics Guide

http://www.w3schools.com/html/html5_semantic_elements.asp