

ACCESSIBILITY:

A KEY TO CREATING AN EQUITABLE, EFFECTIVE LEARNING ECOSYSTEM EVERYWHERE, ALL THE TIME FOR ALL STUDENTS.

Accessibility is an essential principle in delivering equal educational opportunities for all students, including those with disabilities and English language learners. But accessibility impacts more than students. Schools and districts also need to ensure that all information provided to the public, parents, guardians, and staff is accessible as well. In short, accessibility is part of the education equation. Districts need to keep accessibility policies and practices front and center—and equally important they need to make their commitment vocal and visible.

FIVE COMPELLING STEPS TO TAKE NOW TO ENSURE ACCESSIBILITY.

- **1 STAY CURRENT WITH FEDERAL AND STATE LEGISLATION**

Innovations in technology continually change the way students can engage and interact with educational materials and the settings where learning takes place. By keeping current with regulations, and adjusting your accessibility policies as needed, you can adjust and update your policies to address students' needs and opportunities proactively. It's helpful to review the accessibility policies of other districts. Designating an accessibility coordinator often helps to keep your programs and policies current.
- **2 DEVELOP AND COMMUNICATE A DISTRICT-WIDE POLICY FOR ACCESSIBILITY INCLUDING GUIDELINES FOR ACCESSIBLE PURCHASING**

Your district's accessibility policies and procedures should be, that's right, accessible...on your website, your student and parent information materials, employee handbooks, annual report, and other district information resource channels. Part of any 21st century accessibility policy should be guidelines for the purchase of technology equipment, content, and programs. Many districts now inform vendors and publishers that they expect digital textbooks, resources, and learning materials to be built according to industry accessibility standards. This language is included in all vendor contracts. Further, reviews for accessibility are often embedded into the purchasing and procurement process.
- **3 BUILD STAFF CAPACITY**

Accessibility is a shared responsibility and a system-wide commitment. Professional development programs, regular updates about new tools and resources for making materials accessible, and support for extending accessibility to communication with parents and guardians, all help to build staff and faculty's ability to make sure every student has an equal opportunity to learn and participate in the learning environment. Building staff capacity not only serves students but also works to save time and money, and helps protect the district from liability.
- **4 CONDUCT REGULAR ACCESSIBILITY AUDITS**

Don't wait for a problem to arise. Conduct accessibility audits of your technology programs, devices, activities, and digital content regularly. If you haven't done this yet, consider starting with core curriculum resources and the most popular or frequently used content for students. It's also helpful to solicit feedback from students, parents, teachers, aides, and school librarians, to evaluate the accessibility needs in the learning environment. As you evaluate the results of these regular audits, you can chart progress, identify areas for improvement, and share your findings with your stakeholders to underscore your commitment to educational equity.
- **5 SET EXPECTATIONS. MODEL ACCOUNTABILITY.**

Establish a clear expectation that accessibility is mandatory and advantageous to every student, teacher, staff member, and stakeholder. Encourage the "accessibility" mindset and encourage teachers, technology leaders, and curriculum developers to think "accessibility first, accommodation second." Visibly demonstrate accessibility in your communications and outreach to students, board members, faculty, staff, and parents.