

Accessibility

EMPOWERING ALL STUDENTS TO BECOME EXPERT LEARNERS.

Accessibility is an essential principle in delivering equitable educational opportunities for ALL students, especially those with disabilities, learning differences, and English language learners. Beyond guaranteeing that ALL students can access course content and tools, schools and school systems also need to ensure that all information provided to the public, parents, guardians, and staff is accessible from any device. In addition to the legal requirements of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), school systems need to make accessibility policies and practices a priority for all students. Equally important, they need to make their commitment vocal and visible.

FIVE COMPELLING STEPS to address accessibility

1 • Stay current with federal and state legislation

Innovations in technology continually change the way students can engage and interact with educational materials as well as the settings where learning takes place. By keeping current with regulations, and adjusting your accessibility policies accordingly, you can be more proactive with your policies. It is also helpful to review the accessibility policies of other school systems. Designating an accessibility or Universal Design for Learning (UDL) coordinator often helps to keep your programs and policies current.

2 • Develop and communicate a school system-wide policy for accessibility including guidelines for purchasing

Your school system's accessibility policies and procedures should be accessible...on your website, your student and parent information materials, employee handbooks, annual reports, and other school system information resource channels. This means that all of your policies are available digitally as well as in print and can be accessed by a variety of learners as well as devices. Additionally, these guidelines should also address the purchase of technology equipment, content, and programs. Many school systems now inform vendors and publishers that they expect digital textbooks, resources, and learning materials to be built according to industry accessibility standards. 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 helps protect the school system from liability.

4 • Conduct regular accessibility audits

Don't wait for a problem to arise. Regularly conduct accessibility audits of your technology programs, devices, activities, and digital content. Consider starting with core curriculum resources and the most popular or frequently used content and tools for students. It is also helpful to solicit feedback from students, parents, teachers, aides, para-professionals, and school librarians, to evaluate the accessibility needs throughout 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 in terms of how they ensure that all learning is universally accessible, meaning that ALL students benefit. Visibly demonstrate accessibility in your communications and outreach to students, board members, faculty, staff, and parents, including newsletters, presentation slides, and web sites.