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K-12 Digital Infrastructure Brief: Accessibility

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PK-12 DIGITAL INFRASTRUCTURE BRIEF: ACCESSIBLITY

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Introduction & Overview

This is the fourth in a series of five briefs published by Office of Education Technology (OET) on the key considerations facing educational leaders as they work to build and sustain core digital infrastructure for learning. This document contains resources that are provided for the audience's convenience. The inclusion of these materials is not intended to reflect their importance, nor is it intended to endorse any views expressed or products or services offered. These materials may contain the views and recommendations of various subject matters experts as well as hypertext links, contact addresses, and websites to information created and maintained by other public and private organizations. The opinions expressed in any of these materials do not necessarily reflect the positions or policies of the U.S. Department of Education (Department) or the Federal government. The Department does not control or guarantee the accuracy, relevance, timeliness, or completeness of any outside information included in these materials. These briefs offer recommendations to complement the fundamental infrastructure considerations outlined in the 2017 OET update to *Building Technology Infrastructure for Learning*. They are meant to provoke conversations, challenge conventions, and deepen understanding. These briefs have been purposefully designed to be easily consumed and shared.

The needs, capabilities, and expectations of technology infrastructure vary significantly by context. A rural outdoor learning school in the mountainous American Southwest will face challenges and have needs much different than a district within an urban center along the East Coast with an all-digital curriculum. The recommendations within these briefs are meant to help build, augment, and sustain digital infrastructure supportive of learning no matter the location.

As the U.S. Government Accountability Office (GAO) notes in its blog post titled *Closing the Digital Divide for the Millions of Americans without Broadband*, America has made incredible progress in closing the digital access divide—providing an ever-greater proportion of students with access to broadband connectivity, devices, and digital resources. At the same time, we acknowledge the last frontiers of connectivity can also present (as to what design theorists Horse Rittel and Melvin Webber referenced as) the most wicked problems of closing that divide. To help readers build solutions for their own contexts, these briefs offer examples from the field of those who faced persistent challenges to connectivity, accessibility, cybersecurity, data privacy, and other infrastructure issues and designed solutions for their challenges. More examples can also be found at tech.ed.gov/stories.

Education Infrastructure is Critical Infrastructure

Education's digital infrastructure is officially considered critical infrastructure, and just as we work to provide physical infrastructure that is safe, healthy, and supportive for all students, we should also work to align resources to create digital infrastructure that is safe, accessible, resilient, sustainable, and forward-looking. This considers the complex interplay of people, processes, and tools, including elements such as connectivity, security, interoperability, accessibility, affordability, and digital literacy as well as, or as the United States Agency for International Development defines it within their *Digital Ecosystem Framework*, "behavioral, social, and physical barriers and opportunities for equitable adoption—who uses and does not use digital technologies and why."

What Are We Working Toward?

We are working toward a future where digital infrastructure empowers inclusive and equitable education for all students, particularly those with disabilities and multilingual learners. This vision includes robust systems that seamlessly integrate data, enable secure and accessible collaboration, and foster personalized learning experiences.

In this future:

- **Educators** can easily access and share real-time, actionable insights from interoperable systems, enabling them to address each student's unique needs.
- **Students with disabilities** benefit from built-in accessibility features and assistive technologies, ensuring they can fully participate in learning activities without barriers.
- **Families** engage meaningfully in their children's education through platforms designed with inclusive communication tools, such as interpreter services and multilingual content.
- **Schools** ensure the safety, privacy, and accessibility of their digital tools, fostering trust while enhancing organizational efficiency.

By embedding accessibility and equity into every aspect of digital infrastructure, we aim to create an educational environment where every learner has the opportunity to thrive.

This brief, and all of the other four briefs included within this Digital Infrastructure series, are guided by the following foundational principles highlighted throughout this document:

1. **Adequate and Forward-Looking Infrastructure:** Digital infrastructure should meet current educational demands while planning for scalability and financial sustainability to address future needs. Accessibility considerations should be embedded in this planning to ensure equitable access for individuals with disabilities and multilingual learners.
2. **Defensible and Resilient Systems:** Cybersecurity measures should protect people, data, and systems, addressing risks like ransomware while preparing for evolving threats. These protections should also account for accessibility needs, ensuring that security measures do not create barriers for users with disabilities.
3. **Privacy-Enhancing and Interoperable Design:** By prioritizing privacy, schools build trust and protect sensitive student data. Interoperability standards should ensure that data systems not only exchange information seamlessly but also accommodate accessibility standards, such as compatibility with assistive technologies. User data should also be portable and accessible, allowing authorized users to share it across systems where legally permissible.
4. **Accessibility as a Core Principle:** Accessibility should be integrated across all aspects of digital infrastructure, from procurement to implementation, training, and ongoing support. Schools must adhere to the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) accessibility frameworks to guarantee inclusive tools and practices. Accessibility features, such as screen readers,

captioning, and multilingual content, should be built into all systems to ensure equitable access for students with disabilities and multilingual learners.

5. **Enhancing Digital Health, Safety, and Citizenship:** Digital infrastructure should promote healthy, safe, and responsible technology use while prioritizing accessibility. Tools should be designed to support individuals with disabilities in maintaining a positive relationship with technology, fostering digital literacy and citizenship skills in inclusive and accessible ways.

By prioritizing these principles, schools can create robust digital ecosystems that enhance learning, ensure equity, and empower all collaborators, including students with disabilities and multilingual learners, to thrive in an increasingly digital world.

Key Considerations

Key considerations within this brief include:

Breaking down silos: Encourage collaboration among instructional technology, curriculum, and special education departments to ensure accessibility.

Procurement and evaluation: Develop a procurement team that includes information technology (IT) staff, assistive technology (AT) specialists, accessibility specialists, special and general education staff, and procurement directors. This team can adopt or adapt existing accessibility rubrics for evaluating and selecting digital resources and tools.

Collaboration and partnerships: Encourage collaboration between IT, special educators, general educators, and related service providers in evaluating, implementing, and using educational technology (edtech) and AT in the classroom. Establish partnerships with State AT programs for support and loans.

Inclusion and participation: Include potentially impacted individuals in discussions and decision-making processes regarding their needs and services. Form advisory groups with parents, families, caregivers, and students with disabilities to provide input on accessibility and technology procurement.

State Assistive Technology (AT) Act Programs: Learn about and utilize State-level programs and initiatives that promote accessibility, such as the AT Act programs. State guidelines and resources can provide valuable assistance in ensuring accessibility.

Accessible Educational Materials: Provide accessible educational materials (AEM) that are designed to accommodate a wide range of learner variability. Collaborate with technical assistance centers focused on providing accessible materials and technologies. For more information on ways to provide AEM, visit the National Center on Accessible Digital Educational Materials and Instruction (NCADEMI) website at ncademi.org.

The Accessibility of Digital Infrastructure

Accessibility can ensure that all learners are able to experience and participate in their learning environment. Our digital ecosystems should provide learners with disabilities AEM, AT that meets individual needs, and support for all users including educators, parents, families, and caregivers in the successful adoption and use of these powerful tools for learning.

However, getting to that goal is no small feat. Those who work or have worked within districts and schools understand that instructional technology, curriculum, and special education departments may benefit from working more closely together. Collaboration may only be limited to specific projects. Districts and schools should prioritize approaches that promote integration when planning, implementing, and improving upon their digital infrastructure. Active engagement of departments and teams with varied experiences, abilities, and backgrounds allows digital infrastructure to be inclusive of and accessible to all. For more on accessibility, see OET's dedicated webpage at tech.ed.gov/accessibility.

Defining Accessibility

- **Accessibility**: A person with a disability is afforded the opportunity to acquire the same information, engage in the same interactions, and enjoy the same services as a person without a disability, in an equally effective and equally integrated manner, with substantially equivalent ease of use.
- **Accessible Educational Technology (edtech):** The hardware and software that is designed to provide all learners with access to the content in digital materials. Examples of accessible edtech include a digital math tutoring mobile application (app) that supports students to either write or verbalize their responses, a mobile phone with an optional zoom display, or a PDF that is configured so that it has adequate color contrast, and its contents are easily readable by people who are blind who use screen readers.
- **Accessible educational materials (AEM)**: Print and technology-based educational materials, including printed and electronic textbooks and related core materials that are designed or enhanced in a way that makes them usable across the widest range of learner variability, regardless of format (e.g., print, digital, graphic, audio, video).
- **Assistive Technology (AT):** Hardware and software that is designed to address specific barriers learners with disabilities may face when they interact with their materials. Examples of AT include screen readers, adapted daily living devices that ranges from low to high tech (e.g., augmented and alternative communication device), and communication boards.

For more information on terms and definitions mentioned above, visit CAST's webpage at cites.cast.org/more/glossary.

The 2017 National Education Technology Plan called for the development of a "born accessible standard of learning resource design to help educators select and evaluate learning resources for accessibility and equity of learning experience." This means ensuring all devices and resources can support industry

standards such as the Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG) as well as local, State, and Federal statutory requirements for accessibility. As of April 2024, the U.S. Department of Justice updated the implementing regulation under Title II of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) to guarantee that mobile apps and web content are accessible to individuals with disabilities. This includes the services, programs, and activities that State and local governments offer online and through mobile apps. For more information on the new rule or how to implement the WCAG 2.1 Standards, Level AA, to meet the new Title II requirements, visit ada.gov/resources. To report an incident, please contact the U.S. Department of Justice.

Digital Infrastructure: Gateway or Gatekeeper to Accessibility?

Schools and districts should design, procure, implement, and train with accessibility in mind from the start. When schools look to fix accessibility issues after problems arise, it is more time-consuming for the school, may complicate providing free and appropriate public education for students, may delay access for families and school staff, and may create more potential problems down the road. **For edtech and websites to be effective, usable, and meaningful, they should be accessible for all.** The following are ways districts can ensure their digital infrastructure is accessible:

- **Develop a procurement team** including IT staff, AT and technology specialists, accessibility specialists, special and general education staff, and curriculum and procurement directors to create an accessibility rubric the district should use prior to procurement.
- When possible, **hire a specialist** who can support the evaluation, procurement, training, and implementation of AT, IT, or AEM, or work with an organization (such as an Education Service Agency) to do so. It is important to note some technologies are designed specifically for AT or intervention use and may not be fully accessible as per the nature of the tool's purpose. When that is not possible, work with your State AT Act program or community partners to contract appropriate specialists.
- **Enhance educator's understanding on how to ensure the content they create is accessible to everyone**, by defaulting to text to support graphic images, using appropriate color combinations, providing captions for video lectures, and taking other basic steps to ensure accessibility when communicating with students, staff, and families.
- **Accessible materials should be available both internally and externally for all constituents.** Consider support from the National Center on Accessible Digital Educational Materials & Instruction (NCADEMI) or the accessibility modules from the AEM Technical Assistance Center and the digital accessibility video series from the U.S. Department of Education's Office for Civil Rights (OCR).
- **Provide opportunities for various experts and specialists** (e.g., IT, special educators, English Learner specialists, general educators, and related service providers) to discuss and collaborate on evaluating, implementing, and using accessible edtech and AT in the classroom.
- **Create a partnership with the State AT centers**, which provide free consultations and device loans to support learners with disabilities prior to purchasing AT. For more on these centers, see the Assistive Technology below. The AT Guidance references professional development/learning

that supports greater understanding of IDEA's AT requirements and addresses common misconceptions.

- Develop an easily findable and searchable directory with all district technology resources and their accessibility features as well as all available district sources for AT.
- Ensure all district and school forms, event registrations, and meetings include areas for participants and attendees to indicate accessibility needs prior to events and meetings.
- **Include potentially impacted individuals** in all teams, committees, and meetings where decisions regarding their needs and services are topics of discussion.
- Form working or advisory groups with parents, families, caregivers, and students with disabilities to advise on issues of accessibility and technology procurement and provision. **Have users with disabilities involved beyond just consultations** such as testing or evaluating options. Wherever possible, create specific structured connections between these groups and all professional groups mentioned above.
- **Diversify the workforce by recruiting teachers with disabilities** like Jonathan Stricklen. Students with disabilities can be motivated to use their AT, and families can better understand AT, when they meet and learn from teachers and other adults who are AT users.

By including accessibility as a foundational element of education's digital infrastructure, schools and districts not only better ensure compliance with Federal, State, and local statutes, they build systems better equipped to meet future needs. Such an infrastructure means shortened lead times between identification of needs and access to resources to meet those needs. What's more, such systems meet the needs of individuals with identified disabilities and provide greater educational access to those whose needs have not yet been identified.

How South Carolina is Supporting Accessibility with Districts

The South Carolina Department of Education (SCDE) has been working to develop a workplace culture that values and promotes digital accessibility awareness. The State has improved the accessibility of online resources, created an agency accessibility committee, implemented an agency-wide digital accessibility policy, and invested in digital accessibility training for staff. While improvement efforts are ongoing, SCDE now looks to share its growing expertise with South Carolina public school districts by providing IT accessibility support to districts.

SCDE's Digital Accessibility Courtesy Observations (DACO) Initiative supports public school district administrators in efforts to improve online resources and grow their digital audience. Each district's website is reviewed for potential barriers to accessibility by skilled SCDE web developers with digital accessibility experience, and feedback is provided to resolve findings for free. Results consultation services and accessible design training opportunities are then offered to communications officers and information technology staff. In addition, district leaders may request guidance in developing their own digital accessibility policies.

The DACO Initiative started in November 2022, but already there have been notable accomplishments. The IT Director of one district was able to use the website review findings as part of their push for an

updated website organizational structure and template. Several other districts have used their findings as leverage when negotiating service updates with their website vendors. Evidence suggests that vendors are making updates to their templates and tools based on these interactions, as several recurring accessibility issues involving embedded calendars, navigation menus, and slide shows/carousels have been corrected on the most up-to-date templates. These responses indicate growing support for digital accessibility practices in South Carolina's districts, a cultural shift the DACO Initiative will continue to cultivate in its ongoing endeavors.

In addition to supporting districts with DACO services at the administrative level, preparations are underway to offer professional learning to classroom educators. While the agency has continually promoted digital accessibility awareness training opportunities to districts, these new opportunities are intended to bridge the gap between theory and practice by applying accessibility practices directly to classroom teaching practices and materials. Session topics include: "Creating Accessible Videos," "Identifying Accessible Digital Resources," "Alt-text for Teachers," and "Is Your Google Classroom Accessible to All Users?"

Accessible Educational Materials

Providing AEM is an essential part of ensuring accessibility for all. Funded by the U.S. Department of Education's Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP) through September 2024, the National Center on Accessible Education Materials (AEM Center) at CAST is a technical assistance center focused on working with "States and districts to build capacity for developing and sustaining robust systems for providing accessible materials and technologies for all learners who need them." In October 2024, a new, OSEP-funded national center focused on digital access in education now known as the National Center for Accessible Digital Educational Materials and Instruction (NCADEMI) launched at Utah State University. Read more about OSEP's priority for this new center.

Francis Howell School District (FHSD) in Missouri is dedicated to providing AEM for all the district's approximately 16,500 students. Over the last several years, FHSD has developed procedures to operationalize this vision in collaboration with Missouri's AEM Leadership Team, the National AEM Center, the Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, and district and State leaders from the other six AEM Cohort States.

- In 2023, FHSD updated the procurement process for content leaders and other purchasing agents, encouraging district leaders to work across the agency to ensure that requests for proposals (RFPs) and conversations with vendors include accessibility requirements.
- The team realized that demonstrating to administrators, teachers, and staff how students can access materials with AT drives change. With that in mind, FHSD now requests that vendors complete a Voluntary Product Accessibility Template (VPAT) for all digital materials and requires that accessibility language is included in any purchase order or RFP. In addition, the district requires textbook publishers to submit files to the National Instructional Materials Access Center (NIMAC) where they are made available for conversion to accessible formats.

- Future Forward: The district plans to further develop its vetting process, including identifying some end users to screen content and tools and provide feedback on usability and accessibility. Once in place, the district can give the vendors feedback about specific accessibility issues.

Learn more about how FHSD approaches accessibility and the procurement process from Coordinator for OT/PT, AT, ADA Compliance Cathy Fortney, Technology Services Manager Jason Adams, and Instructional Technology Content Leader April Burton on the "Procurement as a Collaborative Process" episode of the National AEM Center's *Accessible Learning Experience* podcast.

Assistive Technology

AT devices and services can help improve outcomes for children, develop important skills and abilities, and prepare them for the workforce and life after high school. Additionally, artificial intelligence (AI) is significantly enhancing assistive technologies, offering personalized support, and improving accessibility for individuals with disabilities. AI-driven tools, such as real-time transcription services and adaptive learning platforms, are creating more inclusive educational environments by catering to diverse learner needs. By providing children with disabilities with the tools they need to succeed, we can help break down barriers and create a more inclusive and equitable educational system for all. Unfortunately, there are many misconceptions about AT devices and services. For more information about AT from the U.S. Department of Education's experts, check out *Myths and Facts Surrounding Assistive Technology Devices and Services*, published in January 2024 as a joint publication of OSERS and OET.

Each time an individualized education plan (IEP) Team develops, reviews, or revises a child's IEP, 34 C.F.R. § 300.324(a)(2)(v) states that the IEP Team must consider whether the child needs AT devices and/or services. In cases where it is determined that AT devices and/or services are needed to enable the child to receive a free appropriate public education (FAPE), according to 34 C.F.R. § 300.6, the local educational agency is responsible for providing and maintaining the AT device and any necessary AT service. The IEP Team has discretion in determining the type of AT device and/or service that the child needs to receive meaningful educational benefit.

North Dakota AT Guidelines

In 2015 the North Dakota Department of Public Instruction (ND DPI) published a user-friendly AT guidance document. ND DPI Director, Specially Designed Services Mary McCarvel-O'Connor wishes to give credit to the foundational work of the Georgia Project for Assistive Technology (GPAT) Assistive Technology Process Consideration Guide and the Wisconsin Assistive Technology Initiative (WATI) Assistive Technology Consideration Guide, whose work the ND DPI resource builds on. Written in plain language with families and educators in mind, *Guidelines for the Provision of Assistive Technology to Students with Disabilities under IDEA Part B* "provides a framework for AT consideration, identifies the difference between AT consideration and an AT assessment, and includes an AT assessment process to give structure to the AT decision making for all parties." The guide also provides examples of AT-specific IEP goals, a progress monitoring tool, and an AT Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ).

State AT Act Programs

As leaders building and supporting accessible and equitable digital infrastructure, it's essential to know how to help students, families, and staff access the AT they need to be successful. The AT Act—originally passed by Congress in 1988, reauthorized in 2004, and updated and modernized in December 2022—provides AT program funding to all 50 States, four U.S. territories, the District of Columbia, and Puerto Rico. States "carry out a continuum of specified State level and State leadership activities that promote the ability of people with disabilities to know about, have access to, and ultimately be better able to obtain AT, [including]:"

- **AT demonstration activities** that provide opportunities for people to become familiar with specific types of AT by comparing the functions and features of devices through hands-on exploration guided by a knowledgeable professional.
- **AT device loan activities** that allow individuals to borrow AT for a limited time to use and determine if a device will meet their needs before a purchase is made.
- **AT reutilization activities** that support the reuse of AT that is no longer needed or used by its original owner and is acquired by a new owner at substantial cost savings.
- **AT State financing activities** that support the purchase/acquisition of AT through financial loans or other initiatives that directly provide AT to consumers at no cost using dollars from non-AT Act sources or save consumers money when purchasing AT.

For more information on your State's AT Act program, visit the State AT Programs Directory on the National Assistive Technology Act Technical Assistance and Training (AT3) Center website.

EasterSeals Massachusetts AT Mobile Van: Bringing AT into the Community

In Massachusetts, the State AT program provides innovative programs that expand the reach of AT activities. The MassMATCH Assistive Technology Regional Centers (ATRC), hosted by EasterSeals Massachusetts (ESMA) and United Cerebral Palsy of Western Massachusetts, provide access to all the activities listed above, including an extensive lending library of AT equipment, software, and toys for individuals with disabilities, families, and educators to see, touch, and borrow. After they identified traveling to the ATRC's as a barrier and equity issue, in 2022, ESMA launched the MassMATCH ATRC Mobile Van to "allow us to get out into the community to all areas of the State to make sure people have equal access to assistive technology available." Now people with disabilities can explore AT devices in their schools or communities with the support of AT specialists. If people find devices that may meet their needs, they can borrow the devices up to 30 days and then work with ESMA to finance the AT device with a low-interest loan through the Massachusetts Alternative Finance Program.

Accountability in Action: The Office for Civil Rights

OCR enforces Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 and shares enforcement of Title II of the ADA with the U.S. Department of Justice, including in a digital context, addressing digital access barriers often in real time and supporting schools to ensure that digital access is equally available for people with disabilities and for people without disabilities. Section 504 ensures people with disabilities are not discriminated against by recipients of Federal funds, including State departments of education, school districts, public charter schools, and postsecondary institutions. Title II applies to public entities,

including State departments of education, school districts, public charter schools, public libraries, and public postsecondary institutions. OCR works with covered entities to bring their online programs, services, and activities into compliance with these laws. OCR not only investigates and resolves complaints of discrimination alleging violations of Section 504 and Title II, but also engages in substantial outreach and technical assistance efforts, reaching thousands of audience members each year. Recognizing that schools and districts often rely on private companies to provide the technology necessary for many of their digital services, OCR also provides robust technical assistance to the vendor community, helping dozens of companies provide more accessible products to the educational community, thus making it easier for covered entities to come into compliance with the laws enforced by OCR.

The following cases illustrate how OCR's enforcement work ensures equal access to digital materials for people with disabilities:

- Cabarrus County Schools (NC): A September 2021 resolution identified concerns, based on the evidence obtained during investigation, that technological barriers may have impeded the ability of some students with disabilities to access some of the district's course materials that were provided digitally, and that the alternative means utilized by the district to present that course content may not have provided equal access for some students with disabilities. The resolution agreement requires the district to ensure that all applications or other digital means of delivering course material—or alternative means of presenting that material—comply with accessibility standards that OCR approves.
- Arlington Public Schools (VA): In September 2021, OCR resolved a complaint about the accessibility of digital programs and services the district offered to students and families when schools were closed, beginning in March 2020, due to the COVID-19 pandemic. OCR's investigation examined whether blind parents were able to access their kindergarten son's remote learning management system (LMS) and PDF document work packets. OCR tested the accessibility of the LMS on a computer web browser and tested various PDF document work packets. This testing identified various compliance concerns including, for example, some instances where users with disabilities who use computer keyboards for navigation due to a disability would not have access to all contents and functions in the LMS. Other compliance concerns related to access to certain important graphics or images in the learning management system and PDF work packets that were missing meaningful alternative text, posing a barrier to people with vision disabilities who use screen readers. The district entered a resolution agreement in which it committed to work with OCR and the software vendor to ensure that the LMS software is successfully updated to make it accessible for individuals with disabilities. The district also agreed to provide interim measures in any classrooms that use the software while updates are being made to ensure individuals with disabilities have equally effective alternative access to all class content and functionality. In addition, the district agreed to provide training to appropriate staff members regarding the development and deployment of those interim measures and of accessible electronic documents.
- Inter American University of Puerto Rico - Metro Campus – San Juan (PR): In May 2023, OCR resolved concerns regarding the accommodations provided by this university to a blind doctoral

candidate, including whether the school gave the student the opportunity to request auxiliary aids or other accommodations he requires to access PDF communications he received from the university's Institutional Review Board (IRB). OCR also noted concerns as to whether the university's programs, services, and activities communicated through its website and IRB platform are accessible to individuals who use screen readers and refreshable Braille displays. In addition, OCR found that the university failed to afford persons with disabilities who use assistive technologies, including screen readers and refreshable Braille displays, access to important information about the university's process for requesting academic adjustments and auxiliary aids and services. Finally, OCR found that the university failed to provide required notice of its designated Section 504 Coordinator. To ensure that students with disabilities have the information needed in order to request auxiliary aids and services, the university agreed to update its Section 504 notice to include the name and/or title and the contact information of the Section 504 Coordinator, and to publish a version of the university's Guidelines, Standards, and Procedures regarding Student Requests for Reasonable Accommodations that is accessible for students with disabilities who use screen readers and refreshable Braille displays. The university also agreed to invite the graduate student who filed the complaint to engage in an interactive process regarding his communications with the IRB. As a result, the student was able to restart his doctoral program with appropriate academic adjustments and auxiliary aids and services.

Accessibility Resources to Explore

Resources for creating digitally accessible materials.

Educators (certified and classified) are becoming increasingly more accustomed to creating and implementing digital materials, such as collaborative documents, multimedia learning tools, and online resources. Now it is time to make sure ALL users can access these materials. Creating materials that are accessible from the start is more efficient and practical than retrofitting or remediating inaccessible content to make it accessible; whenever possible, build accessibility from the beginning. The following resources are designed to help creators understand how to improve their digital accessibility with simple changes that make a world of difference.

- **OET Digital Accessibility Webpage**: OET launched a landing page for accessibility resources and funding opportunities that are available at the U.S. Department of Education.
- **Digital Accessibility Video Series**: OCR created 20 brief videos on the importance of accessibility and how to create digitally accessible materials.
- **Designing for Accessibility**: The AEM Center's website includes resources for teachers, administrators, and other designers organized around the four POUR accessibility principles: Perceivable, Operable, Understandable, and Robust.
- **Accessibility Guide for Creating Materials**: The National Research and Training Center on Blindness and Low Vision developed simple how-to guides to ensure your documents, QR codes, and surveys are accessible.

- **Accessibility Resources for Developers & Document Authors**: The Social Security Administration shares resources to create accessible digital content, including a web accessibility testing tool, information on how to add alternative text, and accessibility checklists for documents.
- **OSERS' Accelerate Access: Resources for Digital Accessibility in Education:** This blog post highlights resources and centers funded by OSERS that range from tools to create accessible digital materials and resources to access beyond the classroom.

Resources for educators and families to use with learners.

Today's classrooms leverage a variety of digital tools and materials to enhance teaching and learning. With the number of tools available, it is important to select and implement those that are accessible for all learners. The following resources provide information on how to bring accessible technology into the classroom, community, and home.

- **AT Act Programs**: The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS), Administration for Community Living supports a State Grant for Assistive Technology Program in each State and territory where educators and families can receive personalized support to learn about AT devices, request demonstrations, borrow a device for trial use, and even learn about financial loan options. The AT3 Center includes contact information for each of the State and territory AT Act Program.
- **EdTech for All Webinar Series**: OET and OSEP co-hosted webinars on free or low-cost edtech designed with learners with disabilities in mind. Recordings of the webinars are posted on the OET YouTube channel.
- **OSEP Technical Assistance Centers for Technology**: OSEP funds various technology centers and tools that support AT.
- **Technology for Special Education**: The Institute of Education Sciences' National Center for Special Education Research (NCSER) funds evidence-based edtech for learners with disabilities, educators, and families. Use this search engine to learn about these tools and projects.

Resources for educators

Educators are the core of the educational system. The following resources provide information on how to support and accommodate staff, offer learning opportunities and trainings on accessibility, and leverage existing funds to create more accessible opportunities for learners and educators.

- **How to Leverage Funds for Edtech**: OET's Dear Colleague Letter provides an overview of various Federal funding streams, including the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), to purchase accessible edtech and provide training to staff on implementing accessible edtech.
- **Myths and Facts Surrounding Assistive Technology Devices and Services for Children with Disabilities**: OSERS and OET Dear Colleague Letter and myths and facts guidance provides State and local practitioners with information about IDEA requirements and addresses common misconceptions regarding AT.
- **A to Z of Disabilities and Accommodations**: The Job Accommodation Network offers this resource to support and accommodate staff with example accommodations based on disability.

- **Disability Policies**: The Office of Disability Employment Policy (ODEP) disseminates policy strategies, effective practices, and provides technical assistance to government agencies, service providers, and non-governmental entities.
- **Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) Resources**: The ADA National Network disseminates many free resources to educate people on providing individuals with disabilities an equal opportunity to participate in all services, programs, and activities. The ADA Action Guide includes ADA requirements, FAQs, best practices, and quizzes for staff to review and complete. The ADA National Network also has free webinars on Accessible Technology and 508 Best Practices for staff to review.
- **OSEP Technical Assistance Centers for Technology**: OSEP funds various technology centers and tools that support AT.
- **Section 508 Course**: The U.S. Department of Homeland Security offers multiple free courses on Section 508 for IT, procurement, and instructional design. Section 508 requires Federal agencies to ensure their information and communication technology (ICT) is accessible to individuals with disabilities.
- **Guidance on Web Accessibility and the ADA**: The U.S. Department of Justice provides resources on the importance of accessible websites and instructions to create accessible webpages so all users can access information. The Department hosts www.ADA.gov and also maintains an ADA Information Line, 1-800-514-0301 (voice) or 1-800-514-0383 (TTY).
- **Fact Sheet: New Rule on the Accessibility of Web Content and Mobile Apps Provided by State and Local Governments:** The U.S. Department of Justice provides resources on its final rule updating its regulations for Title II of the ADA. The final rule has specific requirements about how to ensure that web content and mobile apps are accessible to people with disabilities.
- **ICT Resources**: The U.S. Access Board provides information, trainings, and webinars to educate staff on the importance of accessibility of ICT.
- **Section 508 Resources**: The General Services Administration shares FAQs and how-to guides for digital accessibility policies, procurement, content creation, design and development, testing, and tools. While these are designed primarily for Federal agencies covered by Section 508, the resources may be helpful for a wider audience interested in accessibility issues.
- **Digital Accessibility**: OCR's Digital Accessibility web page provides guidance about educational institutions' legal obligations with respect to digital accessibility and information that can help everyone learn how to make digital content more accessible to all.

Ensuring accessibility in digital infrastructure is crucial for providing equal educational opportunities for all learners, including those with disabilities. To achieve this goal, it is important for schools and districts to foster robust communication between instructional technology, curriculum, and special education departments, and prioritize accessibility from the planning stage. By implementing processes that involve collaboration among various stakeholders and incorporating accessibility standards into procurement and implementation practices, schools can build a solid foundation for inclusive education. This approach not only ensures compliance with legal requirements but also creates systems that can adapt to future needs and prevent costly retrofits. Initiatives such as the SC DoE's DACO Initiative and

State AT Act programs provide valuable support and resources for districts in their journey towards accessibility.

In addition to promoting accessibility at the administrative level, it is vital to equip educators with the knowledge and tools to choose educational materials and digital resources that are accessible and, when authoring their own materials, maximizing the accessibility of those materials. Professional learning opportunities, such as training sessions focused on creating accessible videos and identifying accessible digital resources, bridge the gap between theory and practice. Collaborating with community partners and utilizing AT specialists can further enhance the accessibility efforts of schools and districts. By prioritizing accessibility as a foundational element of digital infrastructure, educational institutions not only fulfill legal obligations but also create a more inclusive and equitable learning environment, meeting the needs of all students and enabling greater educational access for individuals whose needs have not yet been identified.