New ADA Accessibility Compliance Requirements for Districts

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Strategic Plan

- **Priority 1: Increase Academic Achievement**
  - *Strategy 9: Ensure specially designed instruction and supports for students with disabilities that are individualized and coordinated across teachers and support staff in reading and math.*
- **Priority 2: Provide a Culture of Safety, Wellness, and Belonging**
  - *Strategy 9: Increase awareness of, access to, and opportunities for family engagement events, including Back to School Night, Parent/ Teacher Conferences, Family University events, and workshops.*
  - *Strategy 10: Utilize diverse communication channels (including Parent Square and new website) to inform and engage staff, students, and families to promote student success and overall engagement.*
- **Priority 4: Ensure Effective and Efficient Operation**
  - *Strategy 14: Offer timely, accurate, and transparent communication and reporting of financial information to the members of the community*
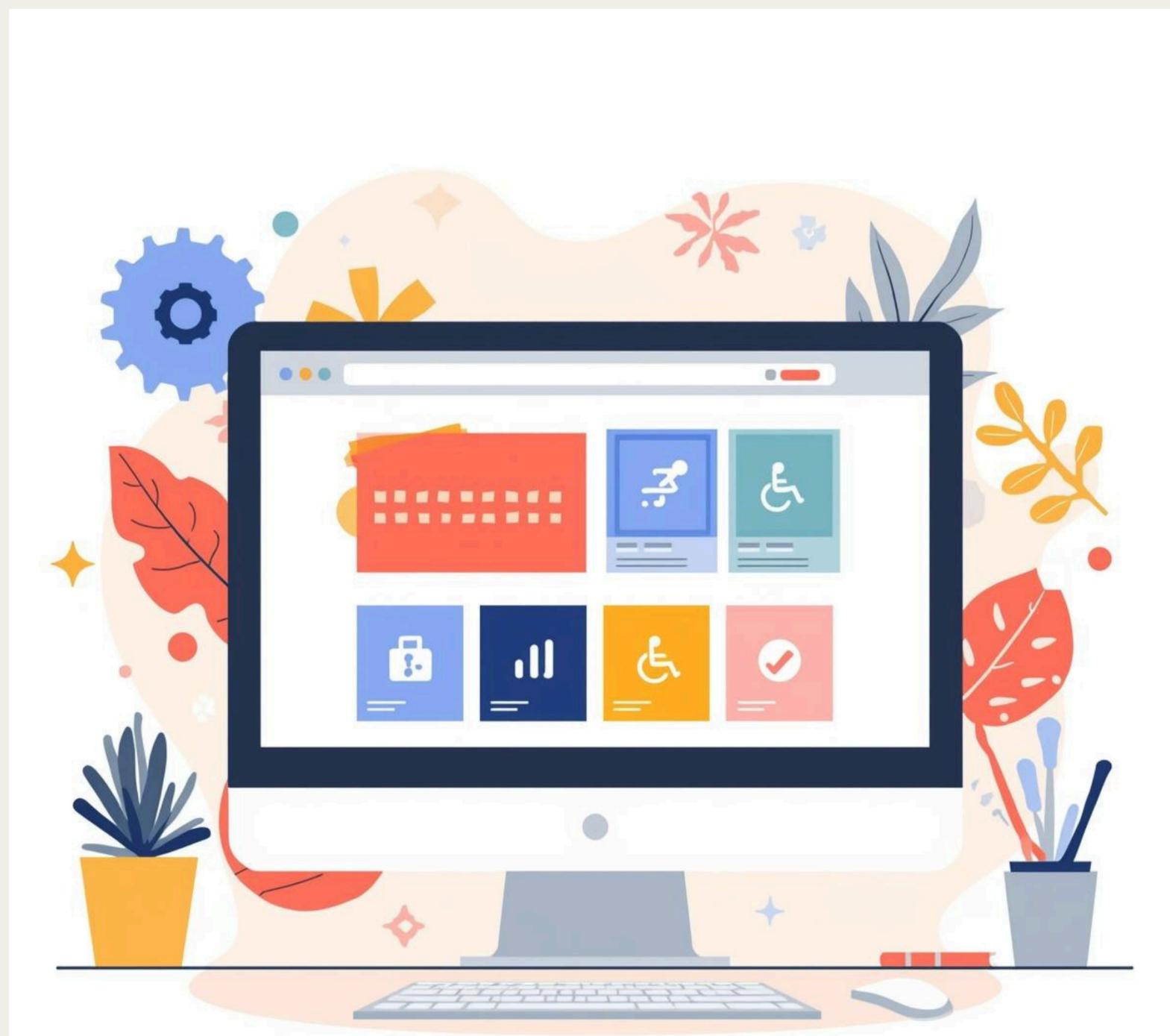
The New Standard

Districts must adopt the **Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG) 2.1 Level AA** as their technical standard. This includes ensuring accessibility across all websites, mobile applications, and learning management systems to benefit all users, especially those with disabilities.

Importance of Accessibility

The adoption of WCAG 2.1 AA is crucial for ensuring **equal access** for students with disabilities. Improved accessibility not only enhances the educational experience but also significantly reduces the risk of costly lawsuits, fostering an inclusive learning environment for all.

Remediating Electronic Documents

Tagged PDFs

PDFs must be tagged for **correct reading order** and structural accessibility to ensure compliance.

Machine-Readable Text

Text in documents must be **machine-readable**, as scanned images of text do not meet requirements.

Media Accessibility Updates

All audio and video content must now include **synchronized captions** for improved accessibility. Additionally, videos relying on visual cues must provide audio descriptions. These enhancements ensure that all students can engage fully with educational media, fostering an inclusive learning environment.

Vendor Management

Districts must ensure **vendor accessibility** before procurement. This includes requiring Accessibility Conformance Reports (ACRs) or VPATs from all third-party content providers. Contracts should also include indemnification clauses to protect districts if products fail to meet WCAG 2.1 AA standards.

Exceptions to Manage Workload

Key Exceptions for Remediation Efforts
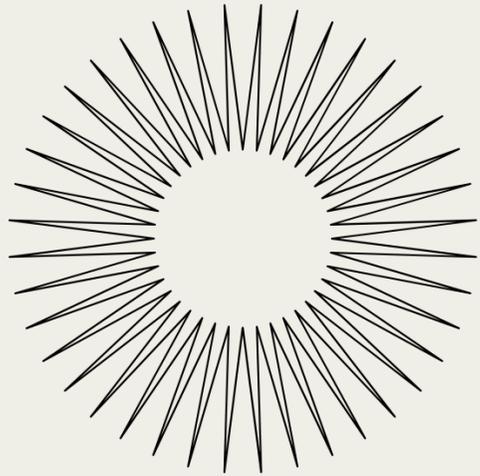
- Archived content is exempt
- Preexisting documents don't require fixes
- Password-protected files are exempt
- Active use determines necessity
- Accessible versions must be provided

Compliance Deadlines

April, 2026

New requirements take effect (not for CCS)

April 24, 2026

Large districts with 50,000+ students must comply

2027

Final compliance deadline approaches

April 24, 2027

Small districts must comply - CCS!

Key Actions for Districts

Adopt

Adopt WCAG 2.1 AA as the official standard for all digital content across the district.

Remediate

Implement a document remediation strategy that includes creating, fixing, and removing non-compliant documents.

Media

Ensure all media content has synchronized captions and audio descriptions to improve accessibility for all users.

Vendor

Require accessibility documentation and contract protections from vendors to guarantee compliance with WCAG standards.

Deadlines

Meet established compliance deadlines based on district size to avoid legal risks and enhance accessibility.

Work Completed

- (2023) Adoption of ParentSquare with built-in accessibility features
- (2023) Migration of website to Smart Sites (a division of ParentSquare)
  - All provided websites meet the WCAG 2.1 accessibility standards and have built-in accessibility guardrails
  - Smart Sites designs use appropriate font sizes, line height, and color contrast.
  - The platform requires alt text for all non-decorative images and offers the option for AI to generate detailed descriptions.
  - Visitors can easily navigate the website via keyboard, screen reader, or other assistive technologies.
  - More information about ADA & SmartSites

Work Completed

- Read&Write Student Chromebook Extension (2020 or prior)
  - Considered ADA Compliant
  - Makes digital content more accessible
  - Reads text aloud (text to speech)
  - Talk and Type
  - Highlighting tools
  - Works across Chrome, Google Docs, PDFs, etc…

Work In Progress

- Review and gathering of materials on all platforms (primarily website)
- Evaluate vendors for support
- Community Relations Office PL
- Staff awareness and education
- Evaluation of outside consultants who specialize in ensuring ADA compliance

Next Steps? Looking Ahead

- Unanticipated needs
- Training for stakeholders
- Work of converting existing documents and spaces
- Ensuring all content produced meets expectations