Accessibility of School Websites

Over the past several months, the U.S. Department of Education Office of Civil Rights ("OCR") has brought hundreds of complaints against schools and universities concerning website accessibility. Among other things, the OCR investigations have highlighted the following requirements relative to accessibility:
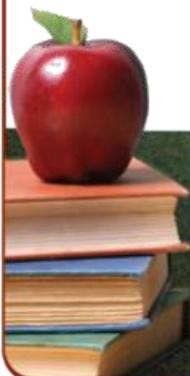
- Providing synchronized closed captioning on all video content;
- Ensuring that all images and graphics have text that is complete and informative in describing the image or graphic;
- Providing content and menus that are available to users of assistive technology, including screen readers and ways to skip repetitive navigation links;
- Providing keyboard controls that are visually apparent and access all content and functions, including video and form controls that can be activated through the keyboard
- Creating sufficient contrast between the text and the background to ensure readability for individuals with moderately low vision;
- Ensuring linked PDF's have selectable text;
- Identifying the primary language of the website and when non-English words appear, ensuring HTML coding indicates the language;
- Providing a way for individuals to request accessible information or services, such as through a telephone number or email address; and
- Maintaining a policy on website accessibility, including a policy and practice requiring third-party vendors or contractors to meet website accessibility standards.

Detailed guidelines for website accessibility compliance include the WCAG 2.0 standards and the federal standards under Section 508 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973:

https://www.w3.org/TR/WCAG20/

https://www.access-board.gov/guidelines-and-standards/communications-and-it/about-the-section-508-standards

Vermont schools should immediately review whether their website complies with federal disability laws concerning access. School websites must be accessible to individuals with disabilities under the Americans with Disabilities Act ("ADA") and Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973.

Advice to Schools

1. Have your IT staff or IT provider complete a full review of school, district, and supervisory union websites using the WCAG 2.0 and Section 508 guidelines and make any accessibility changes needed.

2. Review and update any policies concerning accessibility for individuals with disabilities to include website accessibility.

3. Provide an alternative means for individuals to request accessible information or services, such as through a telephone number or email address.

4. Review and update any third-party agreements to ensure they include website accessibility requirements.

5. If you receive an OCR complaint concerning website accessibility, contact legal counsel.