



WCAG deadlines looming: Review key compliance tips now

As the U.S. Department of Justice compliance deadlines for the [ADA Title II web accessibility guidelines](#) approach, school districts must ensure their websites and digital platforms are accessible to all.

Under Title II and Section 504, educational agencies are prohibited from affording individuals with disabilities opportunities to participate in or benefit from aids, benefits, and services that are unequal to the opportunities afforded others. [28 CFR 35.130](#) (b)(1); and [34 CFR 104.4](#) (a)(ii). This includes benefits provided through technological devices, software programs, and online content.

To avoid legal violations, find out how districts can comply with the most recent web content accessibility guidelines given the approaching deadline.

Identify key aspects of guidelines

- **Website content.** Say a parent is trying to access Section 504 procedural safeguards or child find obligations, said Daniel Scharf, counsel at Miller Johnson in Michigan. These are prime examples of [website content](#) that districts must consider, he said, because it can be accessed in various ways. For example, some can be accessed via a PDF link that isn't searchable, while others have different levels of usability based on the third-party host, said Scharf. The guidelines just standardize access for all, he added. Stephanie Veniez, associate at Best Best & Krieger LLP in California, said she advises school districts to focus on [accessibility](#) for high-traffic web pages, such as enrollment or parent portals, and special ed materials, such as student learning content and assistive technology. Just because a district might add content to a website, it doesn't automatically mean it reaches everyone, said Veniez.
- **PDFs.** There are different styles of PDFs, said Scharf. PDFs can be a picture, or they could be text-based, he added. Districts should use text-based PDFs, where a description or descriptive term used to identify the PDF can be found under the properties, Scharf said. "This is going to be a big problem for a lot of districts because we can't, for instance, scan the PDFs anymore and just say, 'OK, that's good enough,'" said Veniez. "The PDF has to be tagged, and it has to have an accessible HTML code with a reading order, heading, or searchable text; it can't just be put into a picture."
- **Captioning.** Districts should provide captions for all live streams, videos, and prerecorded videos, said Veniez. They should also be very cautious about how they're implementing captions for live streams, broadcasts, online presentations, and board meetings for large audiences, said Scharf. For example, if a district uses AI-generated captions, it must be prepared to have humans review them and fix any inaccuracies. "To show compliance, you can't just say, 'Well, we use this service, and the service said it was going to be 98 percent accurate -- so sorry that it wasn't,'" said Scharf. The focus will be on whether the district's captioning was accurate and high quality because results matter, he said. "You're probably going to run into trouble if you're not having a human check over that," said Scharf.
- **Social media content.** To the extent that social media is being used to inform parents or the community, posts and videos should have accurate captions, said Scharf. Additionally, districts should be proactive about providing alternate text for images for those who can't see them, he said. It's also good practice to limit the use of emojis and hashtags to avoid confusion for an individual with a visual or cognitive impairment, said Scharf.

Meet compliance deadlines

"If the district serves a community with more than 50,000 people, then the compliance deadline is April 24, 2026," said Scharf. "If they serve a community of fewer than 50,000 people, then they have until April 26, 2027." 28 CFR Sec. 35.200(b)(1).

Veniez said the compliance dates reveal that the DOJ recognizes resource issues. For instance, "Generally, larger metropolitan cities will probably have more resources to deal with this than a smaller district in rural Florida," said Veniez.

Understand ramifications for noncompliance

"The DOJ is supposed to reinforce these laws," said Scharf.

Failure to comply can result in fines, complaints, and lawsuits, he said. Because of the public nature of a website, people can search each district's website for noncompliance and file complaints, so it's best to comply, Scharf said.

Noncompliance also harms a district's reputation, leaving concerned parents questioning whether to send their child to a private or charter school instead of a public school, said Veniez.

See also:

- [Ensure district websites meet accessibility standards](#)
- [SmartStart: Accessible Technology Under the ADA and Section 504](#)
- [Ensure Access to Technology for All Students: Complying With Section 504 and ADA](#), by Jennifer V. Herseim, Joseph Pfrommer, Esq.

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