



UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
OFFICE FOR CIVIL RIGHTS, REGION I
5 POST OFFICE SQUARE, 8th FLOOR
BOSTON, MASSACHUSETTS 02109-3921

October 5, 2017

Superintendent Nathan Quesnel
Superintendent of Schools
East Hartford Board of Education
1110 Main Street
East Hartford, CT 06108
Email: quesnel.nd@easthartford.org

Re: Case No. 01-17-1083
East Hartford Board of Education

Dear Superintendent Quesnel:

This letter is to inform you of the disposition of the above-referenced complaint filed against the East Hartford Board of Education (District) with the U.S. Department of Education (Department), Office for Civil Rights (OCR), on December 12, 2016, alleging discrimination on the basis of disability. The Complainant alleged specifically that the following pages on the District's website are not accessible to persons with certain disabilities, including but not limited to vision impairments:

- Homepage (including videos on Homepage) at <http://www.easthartford.org>;
- Calendars at <http://www.easthartford.org/page.cfm?p=12622>;
- Subscriptions How To at <http://www.easthartford.org/page.cfm?p=11505>;
- Parent Resource Links at <http://www.easthartford.org/page.cfm?p=7065>;
- Special Education Services at <http://www.easthartford.org/page.cfm?p=7450>;
- Departments at <http://www.easthartford.org/page.cfm?p=11569>;
- Pupil Personnel Services at <http://www.easthartford.org/page.cfm?p=7322>;
- Home Access Center at <https://hac.ehps.org/HomeAccess/Account/LogOn?ReturnUrl=%2fHomeAccess>; and
- School Foods at <http://www.easthartford.org/page.cfm?p=8834>.

OCR is responsible for enforcing Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, 29 U.S.C. § 794, and its implementing regulation at 34 C.F.R. Part 104, which prohibit discrimination on the basis of disability by recipients of Federal financial assistance. OCR is also responsible for enforcing Title II of the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990, 42 U.S.C. § 12131 *et seq.*, and its implementing regulation at 28 C.F.R. Part 35, which prohibit discrimination on the basis of disability by public entities. As a recipient of Federal financial assistance and as a public entity, the District is subject to these laws. Accordingly, OCR had jurisdiction to investigate this complaint.

The Department of Education's mission is to promote student achievement and preparation for global competitiveness by fostering educational excellence and ensuring equal access.

Based on the complaint allegations, OCR opened an investigation of the following issues:

1. Whether, through its website, the District is excluding qualified persons with disabilities from participating in, denying them the benefits of, or otherwise subjecting them to discrimination in its programs, activities, aids, benefits, or services, in violation of the Section 504 implementing regulation at 34 CFR Part 104.4 and the Title II implementing regulation at 28 CFR Part 35.130.
2. Whether, through its website, the District is failing to take appropriate steps to ensure that its communications with applicants, participants, companions, and other members of the public with disabilities are as effective as its communications with others, in violation of the Title II implementing regulation at 28 CFR Part 35.160(a).

Legal Authority:

Section 504 and Title II prohibit people, on the basis of disability, from being excluded from participation in, being denied the benefits of, or otherwise being subjected to discrimination by recipients of federal financial assistance or by public entities. 34 C.F.R. § 104.4 and 28 C.F.R. § 35.130. People with disabilities must have equal access to recipients' programs, services, or activities unless doing so would fundamentally alter the nature of the programs, services, or activities, or would impose an undue burden. 28 C.F.R. § 35.164. Both Section 504 and Title II prohibit affording individuals with disabilities an opportunity to participate in or benefit from aids, benefits, and services that is unequal to the opportunity afforded others. 34 C.F.R. § 104.4(b)(1)(ii); 28 C.F.R. § 35.130(b)(1)(ii). Similarly, individuals with disabilities must be provided with aids, benefits, or services that provide an equal opportunity to achieve the same result or the same level of achievement as others. 34 C.F.R. § 104.4(b)(2); 28 C.F.R. § 35.130(b)(1)(iii). An individual with a disability, or a class of individuals with disabilities, may be provided with a different or separate aid, benefit, or service only if doing so is necessary to ensure that the aid, benefit, or service is as effective as that provided to others. 34 C.F.R. § 104.4(b)(1)(iv); 28 C.F.R. § 35.130(b)(1)(iv). Title II also requires public entities to take steps to ensure that communications with people with disabilities are as effective as communications with others, subject to the fundamental alteration and undue burden defenses. 28 C.F.R. § 35.160(a)(1). In sum, programs, services, and activities—whether in a “brick and mortar,” on-line, or other “virtual” context—must be operated in ways that comply with Section 504 and Title II.

Investigation To Date:

To date, OCR has investigated this complaint by reviewing information provided by the Complainant and conducting a preliminary assessment of the accessibility of several pages from the District's website.

The complaint alleges that the District's website is not in compliance with Section 504 and Title II because it is inaccessible to individuals with vision disabilities, print disabilities, physical impairments, and hearing impairments. The Complainant used website accessibility checkers (PowerMapper and WAVE) and reported to OCR that the District's Homepage, Calendars page,

Subscriptions How To page, Parent Resource Links page, Special Education Services page, Departments page, Pupil Personnel Services page, Home Access Center page, and School Foods page have accessibility issues for individuals with disabilities. The Complainant then provided OCR with a list of errors copied and pasted from the website accessibility checker that she used.

OCR conducted a preliminary examination of the web pages identified by the Complainant and found possible compliance concerns as to whether the District's online programs, services, and activities were accessible to individuals with disabilities. For example, on several of the webpages there was no skip navigation or keyboard controls to access all content and functions, certain images did not have meaningful alternative text, and a posted video did not have closed captioning. The District provided documentation to OCR of its prior and ongoing efforts to make its website accessible, specifically by hiring a vendor to ensure the accessibility of its website and taking steps to proactively identify and address accessibility issues on its website. During the course of this investigation, the District also made efforts to add closed captioning and alternative text on its website.

Prior to the completion of OCR's investigation, the District asked to resolve this complaint pursuant to Section 302 of OCR's *Case Processing Manual* (CPM). On October 3, 2017, the District submitted the enclosed signed resolution agreement (the Agreement), signed by Superintendent Nathan Quesnel, to OCR. When fully implemented, the Agreement will resolve the allegations in the complaint.

In light of the commitments the District has made in the Agreement, OCR finds that the complaint is resolved, and OCR is closing its investigation as of the date of this letter. OCR will monitor the District's implementation of the Agreement to ensure that the commitments made are implemented timely and effectively. OCR may request additional information as necessary to determine whether the University has fulfilled the terms of the Agreement and is in compliance with Section 504 and Title II with regard to the issues raised.

If the District fails to implement the Agreement, OCR may initiate administrative enforcement or judicial proceedings to enforce the specific terms and obligations of the Agreement. Before initiating administrative enforcement (34 C.F.R. §§ 100.9, 100.10), or judicial proceedings to enforce the Agreement, OCR shall give the District written notice of the alleged breach and sixty (60) calendar days to cure the alleged breach.

This concludes OCR's investigation of the complaint and should not be interpreted to address the District's compliance with any other regulatory provision or to address any issues other than those addressed in this letter.

This letter sets forth OCR's determination in an individual OCR case. This letter is not a formal statement of OCR policy and should not be relied upon, cited, or construed as such. OCR's formal policy statements are approved by a duly authorized OCR official and made available to the public.

Please be advised that the District may not harass, coerce, intimidate, or discriminate against any individual because he or she has filed a complaint or participated in the complaint resolution process. If this happens, the harmed individual may file a complaint alleging such treatment. The Complainant may file a private suit in federal court, whether or not OCR finds a violation.

Under the Freedom of Information Act, it may be necessary to release this letter and related correspondence and records upon request. In the event that OCR receives such a request, it will seek to protect, to the extent provided by law, personally identifiable information, which, if released, could reasonably be expected to constitute an unwarranted invasion of personal privacy.

OCR looks forward to receiving the District's first monitoring report by December 1, 2017. For questions about implementation of the Agreement, please contact Tokufumi Noda, Civil Rights Attorney, who will be monitoring the District's implementation, by e-mail at Tokufumi.Noda@ed.gov or by telephone at (617) 289-0017.

Sincerely,

Meena Morey Chandra *w/p AMM*
Acting Regional Director

Enclosure