



UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
OFFICE FOR CIVIL RIGHTS

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REGION IV
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July 14, 2023

By email only to: monarrezr@worcesterschools.net

Dr. Rachel Monárrez
Superintendent
Worcester Public Schools
20 Irving Street
Worcester, MA 01609

Re: OCR Docket No. 01-23-1136
Worcester Public School District, Massachusetts

Dear Superintendent Monárrez:

This letter is to advise you of the resolution of the investigation that the U.S. Department of Education (Department), Office for Civil Rights (OCR) initiated in Worcester Public School District (District). OCR investigated whether the District's online programs, services, and activities exclude qualified persons with disabilities from participation in, deny them the benefits of, or otherwise subject them to discrimination under any program or activity, in violation of Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 and its implementing regulation at 34 C.F.R. § 104.4 and Title II of the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 and its implementing regulation at 28 C.F.R. Part 35. In addition, OCR investigated whether the District fails to take appropriate steps to ensure that communications with applicants, participants, members of the public, and companions with disabilities are as effective as its communication with others, in violation of 28 C.F.R. § 35.160(a).

OCR enforces Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 (Section 504) and its implementing regulation at 34 C.F.R. Part 104, which prohibit discrimination on the basis of disability in any program or activity receiving Federal financial assistance from the Department. OCR also enforces Title II of the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 (Title II) and its implementing regulation at 28 C.F.R. Part 35, which prohibit discrimination against qualified individuals with disabilities by public entities, including public education systems and institutions, regardless of whether they receive Federal financial assistance from the Department.

OCR conducted an assessment of the District's online programs, services, and activities and noted possible compliance concerns including, but not limited to:

- Users with disabilities who use computer keyboards for navigation due to a disability did not have access to all contents and functions.
- Links were not meaningfully labeled or titled, posing a barrier to people with vision disabilities who use screen readers.

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

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- The foreground and background colors of important content lacked sufficient contrast, posing a barrier to people with low vision.

On July 13, 2023, the District signed the enclosed resolution agreement (Agreement) to voluntarily resolve the investigation pursuant to Section 302 of OCR's *Case Processing Manual*. Prior to entering into the Agreement, the District took interim measures to improve the accessibility of its current website for people with disabilities, including, but not limited to, providing keyboard access to a sitemap when the page is magnified, correcting color contrast throughout the website, replacing link labels to be more meaningful, and remediating the calendar in PDF. Additionally, the District's website provides notice, which is prominently posted in the footer, directing users who experience any technology-based barriers to a specific contact for assistance, and the District informs the public on its website that it is committed to following website accessibility standards, specifically the Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG), version 2.1, level AA. OCR will monitor the implementation of the Agreement.

This concludes OCR's investigation. This letter 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 matter. 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. An individual may have the right to 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 document and related correspondence and records upon request. If OCR receives such a request, we will seek to protect personally identifiable information that could reasonably be expected to constitute an unwarranted invasion of personal privacy if released, to the extent provided by law.

If you have any questions, please contact me at (202) 987-1868 or Miyong.Loughlin@ed.gov.

Sincerely,

/s/

Miyong Loughlin
Attorney

Enclosure

Courtesy copy by email only to:

Paige Tobin
Attorney for the District
ptobin@mlmlawfirm.com