



UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION  
OFFICE FOR CIVIL RIGHTS, REGION IV

61 FORSYTH ST., SOUTHWEST, SUITE 19T10  
ATLANTA, GA 30303-8927

REGION IV  
ALABAMA  
FLORIDA  
GEORGIA  
TENNESSEE

September 28, 2017

Sidney L. Cottingham  
Cottingham & Porter, P.C.  
319 East Ashley Street  
Douglas, Georgia 31533-5301  
[scottingham@windstream.net](mailto:scottingham@windstream.net)

Letter Transmitted via Email  
**Re: OCR No. 04-17-1159**

Dear Mr. Cottingham:

This is to advise you of the resolution of the above-referenced complaint investigation of your client, the Coffee County School District (District), by the United States Department of Education (Department), Office for Civil Rights (OCR). The complaint, which was received on December 8, 2016, alleged that the District is discriminating, on the basis of disability, because its website is not accessible to persons with disabilities. Specifically, the complaint alleged that the following District web pages are not accessible: Homepage, Calendar, Schools, Wiregrass Regional College and Career Academy, School Nutrition, Exceptional Student Education, Student Services.

OCR is responsible for enforcing Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, as amended (Section 504), 29 United States Code (U.S.C.) § 794, *et seq.*, and its implementing regulations at 34 Code of Federal Regulations (C.F.R.) Part 104, which prohibit discrimination on the basis of disability in programs and activities of recipients of federal financial assistance. As a recipient of federal financial assistance from the Department, the District is subject to OCR's jurisdiction under Section 504.

This letter summarizes the applicable legal standards, the information gathered during the investigation, and how the investigation was resolved.

Legal Authority:

Section 504 prohibits individuals, 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. 34 C.F.R. § 104.4. Section 504 prohibits 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). 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). An individual with a disability, or a class of individuals with disabilities,

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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). 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.

Investigation to Date:

Before OCR conducted an investigation of the District’s website, the District expressed an interest in voluntarily resolving this case. In light of the District’s willingness to address its website comprehensively without further investigation, OCR determined entering into a voluntary resolution agreement is appropriate.

Resolution Agreement:

The District submitted a signed resolution agreement (Agreement) to OCR on September 28, 2017. When fully implemented, the Agreement will address any barriers as well as resolve issues of accessibility pertaining to the rest of the District’s website. The District committed to take actions including:

- selecting an auditor who has the requisite knowledge and experience to identify barriers to access on the District’s website and conducting a thorough audit of existing online content and functionality;
- making all new website content and functionality accessible to people with disabilities;
- developing a corrective action plan to prioritize the removal of online barriers over an 18-month period;
- posting a notice to persons with disabilities about how to request access to online information or functionality that is currently inaccessible; and
- providing website accessibility training to all appropriate personnel.

OCR will monitor the District’s implementation of the Agreement. When OCR concludes the District has fully and effectively implemented the terms and obligations of the Agreement and is in compliance with the statutes and regulations at issue in the case, OCR will terminate its monitoring and close the case. If the District fails to implement the Agreement, OCR may initiate administrative or judicial proceedings to enforce specific terms and obligations of the Agreement. Before initiating administrative (34 CFR §§ 100.9, 100.10) or judicial proceedings to enforce the Agreement, OCR will give the District written notice of the alleged breach and sixty (60) calendar days to cure the breach.

This concludes OCR’s investigation of the complaint. These findings 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. The complainant may have the right to file a private suit in federal court whether or not OCR finds a violation.

Please be advised that the District may not harass, coerce, intimidate, discriminate or otherwise retaliate against any individual because he or she asserted a right or privilege under a law enforced by OCR or filed a complaint, testified, or participated in the complaint resolution process. If this happens, the individual may file a retaliation complaint with OCR.

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

If you have any questions, please contact Angela Collins, Senior Attorney at (404) 974-9346 or me, at (404) 974-9408.

Sincerely,

/s/

April England-Albright, Esq.  
Supervisory General Attorney