



**UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
OFFICE FOR CIVIL RIGHTS**

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August 23, 2017

Dr. Brad Buck
Superintendent of Schools
Cedar Rapids Community Schools
2500 Edgewood Road N.W.
Cedar Rapids, Iowa 24405

Re: OCR Docket #05-17-1078
Cedar Rapids Community Schools

Dear Dr. Buck:

This letter is to inform you of the disposition of the above-referenced complaint filed against the Cedar Rapids Community Schools District (District) with the U.S. Department of Education (Department), Office for Civil Rights (OCR), on February 21, 2017, alleging discrimination on the basis of disability.

Specifically, the complaint alleged that certain District web pages are not accessible to students and adults with disabilities. These include:

- Homepage;
- Facebook page;
- YouTube Channel ;
- Academic Performance;
- Student Development;
- Food and Nutrition;
- Virtual Backpack;
- Student Services;
- Kids on Course University,
- Schools;
- Wellness Live Wellness;
- Success Stories; and
- Let's Talk.

OCR established jurisdiction under Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 (Section 504), 29 U.S.C. § 794, and its implementing regulation, 34 C.F.R. Part 104, and Title II of the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990, 42 U.S.C. § 12131-12134, and its implementing regulation, 28 C.F.R. Part 35, which prohibits discrimination on the basis of disability by public entities. These laws prohibit discrimination on the basis of disability in educational programs or activities that receive Federal financial assistance from the Department (FFA) or

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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are a public entity, respectively. As a recipient of FFA and as a public entity, the District is subject to these laws.

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

Legal Authority

Section 504 and Title II provide that no qualified persons with disabilities shall, on the basis of disability, be excluded from participation in, be denied the benefits of, or otherwise be subjected to discrimination by recipients of federal financial assistance or by public entities.¹ Persons with disabilities must have equal access to the programs, services, or activities unless doing so would fundamentally alter the nature of the programs, services, or activities, or would impose an undue burden.² Under Section 504 and Title II, individuals with disabilities must be afforded an opportunity that is equal to the opportunity afforded others to participate in or benefit from aids, benefits, and services³ and must be provided with aids, benefits, or services that provide an equal opportunity as others to achieve the same result or the same level of achievement.⁴ 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.⁵ 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.⁶ 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.

Recipients and public entities must ensure equal access to the educational benefits and opportunities afforded by technology and equal treatment in the use of the technology for all individuals with disabilities who access their programs or activities, including members of the public.

Investigation To Date

During the course of the investigation, OCR examined a number of the District’s webpages to determine whether they are accessible to persons with disabilities, including Homepage,

¹ 34 C.F.R. § 104.4 and 28 C.F.R. § 35.130

² 28 C.F.R. § 35.164

³ 34 C.F.R. § 104.4(b)(1)(ii); 28 C.F.R. § 35.130(b)(1)(ii)

⁴ 34 C.F.R. § 104.4(b)(2); 28 C.F.R. § 35.130(b)(1)(iii)

⁵ 34 C.F.R. § 104.4(b)(1)(iv); 28 C.F.R. § 35.130(b)(1)(iv)

⁶ 28 C.F.R. § 35.160(a)(1)

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Facebook page, YouTube Channel,⁷ Academic Performance, Student Development, Food and Nutrition, Virtual Backpack, Student Services, Kids on Course District, Schools, Wellness Live Wellness, Success Stories, and Let's Talk.

OCR conducted a preliminary evaluation of the above-listed pages and had concerns with the accessibility of certain features to persons with disabilities, including visually impaired persons (blind and low vision), mobility impaired persons, and hearing impaired persons. These concerns include that linked images were missing "alt tabs," descriptions or text labels for persons who use a screen reader, and certain items may have low contrast, which may render the item unreadable for persons with low vision. These barriers may deny persons with disabilities access to programs, services, and activities offered on the website and may impede the District's communications with persons with disabilities.

Prior to the conclusion of OCR's investigation, the District expressed an interest in voluntarily resolving this case. In order to conclude OCR's investigation of this complaint, OCR would have had to conduct interviews, review documents, and examine a broader range of pages on the District's website. In light of the District's willingness to address its website comprehensively without further investigation and given that the District has begun to address some of the accessibility barrier concerns, OCR determined entering into a voluntary resolution agreement would be appropriate.

Resolution Agreement

The District submitted a signed resolution agreement (Agreement) to OCR on August 22, 2017. Under the terms of the Agreement, the District will have 90 days from the date of the Agreement to demonstrate that no barriers to access for people with disabilities using or attempting to use the District's online programs, services and activities exist on its new website. If, after 90 days, OCR confirms that no such barriers exist, the Agreement will be terminated, no further reporting will be required, and this matter will be closed. If OCR continues to identify barriers to access after this 120-day period, the District agrees to fulfill all the remaining terms of this Agreement, 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;
- 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.

⁷ The District informed OCR that it has no authority to modify the content of the Facebook and YouTube sites. Therefore, OCR will not assess the accessibility of these pages.

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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. OCR will monitor the District's implementation of the Agreement. When OCR concludes the District has fully implemented the terms 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 seek compliance with the federal civil rights laws through any means authorized by law, including the enforcement of the terms of the enclosed Agreement.

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.

Thank you for the assistance the District extended to OCR in resolving this complaint. If you have any questions, please contact Geraldo Perez, Equal Opportunity Specialist, at (312) 730-1646 or by email at geraldo.perez@ed.gov.

Sincerely,

Ann Cook-Graver
Supervisory Attorney

cc: Brett Nitzschke
Enclosure