



UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
OFFICE FOR CIVIL RIGHTS

400 MARYLAND AVENUE, SW
WASHINGTON, DC 20202-1475

REGION XI
NORTH CAROLINA
SOUTH CAROLINA
VIRGINIA
WASHINGTON, DC

March 16, 2017

Dr. Jeffery Smith
Superintendent
Hampton City Schools
One Franklin Street
Hampton Virginia 23669

Re: OCR No. 11-16-1165
Letter of Finding

Dear Dr. Smith:

This is to advise you of the resolution of the above-referenced complaint investigation of Hampton City Schools (the recipient) by the United States Department of Education (Department), Office for Civil Rights (OCR). The complaint, which was received on February 8, 2016, alleged that the recipient is discriminating, on the basis of disability, because its website is not accessible to persons with disabilities.

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 regulation 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. OCR also is responsible for enforcing Title II of the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990, as amended (Title II), 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 in programs, services, and activities of public entities. As a recipient of federal financial assistance from the Department and as a public entity, the recipient is subject to OCR's jurisdiction under Section 504 and Title II.

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 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

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

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:

OCR examined the pages on the recipient’s website identified by the complainant to determine whether they are accessible to persons with disabilities. These web pages included:

- Homepage (<http://www.hampton.k12.va.us/index.html>);
- Special Education Page (<http://www.hampton.k12.va.us/departments/specialed/specialed.html>); and
- Parents Page (<http://www.hampton.k12.va.us/parents/parents.html>).

OCR evaluated the above-listed pages and determined that parts of the website are not fully accessible. Specifically, OCR found that: certain parts of the navigation bar could not be accessed using the keyboard, which means that a person who is blind or has low vision and requires a screen reader is not provided all content because he/she cannot access all content on the website; some images containing important information were missing “alt tags,” which are text descriptions that convey information contained within the image to blind users who use special software; certain links were not labeled or not labelled in a way that someone who uses a screen reader could infer the content of the link—for example, hyperlinks with “Read More” labels did not provide enough context for individuals who use screen readers to infer what information could be obtained by clicking the link; some PDF documents, such as forms, do not contain fillable text boxes and cannot be completed electronically, which means that a person who is blind or who has low vision cannot fill out the form without help from another; and parts of the website used color combinations that made text difficult or impossible for people with low vision to see. These barriers deny persons with disabilities access to programs, services, and activities offered on the website, impede the recipient’s communications with persons with disabilities, and, therefore, violate Title II and Section 504.¹

Before OCR conducted additional investigation of the recipient’s website, the recipient expressed an interest in voluntarily resolving this case. In light of the recipient’s willingness to

¹ OCR acknowledges that the Division voluntarily corrected many of the accessibility issues identified in this paragraph prior to the conclusion of this investigation. The Division’s effort to promptly address these issues illustrates a commitment to providing its programs, services, and activities in a non-discriminatory manner.

address its website comprehensively, OCR determined that entering into a voluntary resolution agreement is appropriate.

Resolution Agreement:

The recipient submitted a signed resolution agreement (Agreement) to OCR on March 14, 2017. When fully implemented, the Agreement will address the findings of noncompliance noted above as well as resolve issues of accessibility pertaining to the rest of the recipient's website. The recipient committed to take actions including:

- selecting an assessor or assessors who have the requisite knowledge and experience to identify barriers to access on the recipient's website and conducting a thorough assessment of existing online content and functionality;
- developing a corrective action plan to prioritize the removal of online barriers over a 20-month period;
- making sure that all new website content and functionality is accessible to people with disabilities or that it provides equally effective alternative access when online content and functionality cannot be made accessible;
- 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 recipient's implementation of the Agreement. When OCR concludes the recipient 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 recipient 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 recipient 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 recipient'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 recipient 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 that Division personnel and the School Board Attorney extended to OCR in resolving this complaint. We look forward to receiving the recipient's first reports about its implementation of the Agreement by April 15, 2017. If you have any questions, please contact the assigned OCR attorneys: Eugene Sowa at 202-453-6869 or by email at Eugene.Sowa@ed.gov or Betsy Trice at 202-453-5931 or by email at Betsy.Trice@ed.gov.

Sincerely,

/s/

David Hensel
Supervisory Attorney, Team III
Office for Civil Rights
District of Columbia Office

Enclosure: Resolution Agreement

cc: Nanci W. Reaves, School Board Attorney (via email)