



UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
OFFICE FOR CIVIL RIGHTS

400 MARYLAND AVENUE, SW
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REGION XI
NORTH CAROLINA
SOUTH CAROLINA
VIRGINIA
WASHINGTON, DC

June 29, 2017

Via Email: pwcssupt@pwcs.edu

Steven L. Walts, Ed.D.
Superintendent of Schools
Prince William County Public Schools
P.O. Box 389
Manassas, Virginia 20108

Re: OCR Docket #11-16-1205
Resolution Letter

Dear Dr. Walts:

This letter is to inform you of the disposition of the above-referenced complaint filed against Prince William County Public Schools (Division) with the U.S. Department of Education (Department), Office for Civil Rights (OCR), on XXXX, alleging discrimination on the basis of disability. Specifically, the complaint alleged that certain of the Division's web pages are not accessible to students and adults with disabilities, including vision impairments. These include, but are not limited to:

1. Homepage: <http://www.pwcs.edu/>
2. Special Education Page:
<http://pwcs.ss9.sharpschool.com/cms/One.aspx?portalId=340225&pageId=755210>
3. Section 504 Page:
<http://pwcs.ss9.sharpschool.com/cms/One.aspx?portalId=340225&pageId=756964>
4. Parent Resources:
<http://pwcs.ss9.sharpschool.com/cms/One.aspx?portalId=340225&pageId=755210>

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 Division is subject to these laws. Accordingly, OCR had jurisdiction to investigate this complaint.

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

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

- whether the Division, on the basis of disability, excluded qualified persons with disabilities from participation in, denied them the benefits of, or otherwise subjected them to discrimination in its programs and activities based on disability, in violation of the regulation implementing Section 504 at 34 C.F.R. § 104.4 and the regulation implementing Title II at 28 C.F.R. § 35.130; and
- whether the Division failed to take appropriate steps to ensure that communications with applicants, participants, members of the public, and companions with disabilities are as effective as communications with others, in violation of 28 C.F.R. § 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 Division's website.

The complaint alleges that the Division'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 Homepage, Special Education Page, Section 504 Page, and Parent Resources have accessibility issues for individuals with disabilities. She 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 Division's website is accessible to individuals with disabilities. For example, on the Division's parts of the website are not fully accessible to the keyboard which means that a person who is blind or has low vision who requires a screen reader is not provided all content because he/she cannot access all content on the website; important images were missing text descriptions, called "alt tags," that describe the images to blind users who use special software; some links were not meaningfully labelled, impacting people who use a screen reader because, to be more efficient, they will sometimes only look at links contained on a website, but when a link is labeled "read more," that does not provide enough information to know what the link is for; and parts of the website used color combinations that made text difficult or impossible for people with low vision to see.

Prior to the completion of OCR's investigation, the Division asked to resolve this complaint pursuant to Section 302 of OCR's *Case Processing Manual* (CPM). On June 9, 2017, the Division submitted the enclosed signed resolution agreement (the Agreement) to OCR. When fully implemented, the Agreement will resolve the allegations in the complaint.

In light of the commitments the Division 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 Division'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 Division 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 Division 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 Division'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 Division 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.

Thank you for the assistance the recipient's personnel, especially Mary McGowan, extended to OCR in resolving this complaint. We look forward to receiving the recipient's first reports about its implementation of the Agreement by July 9, 2017. If you have any questions, please contact Judith Risch at 202-453-5925 or at Judith.Risch@ed.gov.

Sincerely,

/s/

Dale Rhines
Acting Team Leader, Team V
Office for Civil Rights
District of Columbia Office

Enclosure: Resolution Agreement

cc: Mary McGowan, Division Counsel