



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

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REGION XV
MICHIGAN
OHIO

June 28, 2017

Vickie Coe, Esq.
LaPointe & Butler, P.C.
6639 Centurion Drive, Suite 140
Lansing, Michigan 48917

Re: OCR Docket #15-17-1365

Dear Ms. Coe:

This letter is to inform you of the disposition of the above-referenced complaint filed against the West Michigan Academy of Environmental Science (the Academy) on April 3, 2017, alleging discrimination based on disability. Specifically, the complaint alleged that certain of the Academy's web pages are not accessible to students and adults with disabilities including, but not limited to, vision impairments. These included, but were not limited to, the following pages:

- Homepage: <https://www.wma-es.com/>
- Calendar: <https://www.wma-es.com/calendar/all-events/monthcalendar/2017/05/->

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 Academy 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:

- whether the Academy, 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 Academy 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 Academy's website.

The complaint alleges that the Academy'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 evaluation tools (PowerMapper and WAVE) and reported to OCR that the Academy's website, including but not limited to the pages noted above, have accessibility issues for individuals with disabilities. She then provided OCR with a list of errors copied and pasted from the website accessibility tools that she used. OCR conducted a preliminary examination of the web page identified by the

Complainant and found possible compliance concerns as to whether the Academy's website is accessible to individuals with disabilities. For example, the pages (at the time of OCR's review) the pages were missing skip navigation, lacked some alternative text, and had low contrast in some portions.

Prior to the completion of OCR's investigation, the Academy asked to resolve this complaint pursuant to Section 302 of OCR's *Case Processing Manual* (CPM). On June 26, 2017, the Academy 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 Academy 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 Academy'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 Academy 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 Academy 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 Academy 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 Academy'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 Academy 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.

OCR looks forward to receiving the Academy's first monitoring report by September 1, 2017. For questions about implementation of the Agreement, please contact xxxxxxxxxxx xxxxxxxx, who will be monitoring the Academy's implementation, by e-mail at xxxxxxxxxxx.xxxxxxxxxx@ed.gov or by telephone at (216) xxx-xxxx. For questions about this letter, please contact xxxxxxxxxxx xxxxxxxx, Supervisory Attorney/Team Leader, at (216) xxx-xxxx.

Sincerely,

/s/

Meena Morey Chandra
Regional Director

Enclosure