



UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

OFFICE OF THE UNDER SECRETARY

MEMORANDUM

SEP 28 2011

TO: Assistant Secretaries
Senior Officers

FROM: Tony Miller, Deputy Secretary *Tony Miller*
Peter Cunningham, Assistant Secretary for Communications and Outreach
Martha Kanter, Under Secretary *Martha Kanter Peter Cunningham*

SUBJECT: Accessibility Enhancement Initiative

Ensuring that government information is accessible and transparent to all internal and external stakeholders has been a major focus of the Obama administration. Therefore, now more than ever, the Department of Education actively uses the Internet as an important tool to communicate with employees, grantees, contractors, school officials, organization leaders, students, parents, teachers, and other concerned members of the public. With the rapidly growing use of social media, electronic information and the Internet, it is particularly important that our use of Web sites, social media, and other electronic information comply with federal legal requirements for accessibility. In addition to our legal obligations, Secretary Duncan has stated that access to information about the Department's work for all, especially individuals with disabilities, is "a necessary step toward fully engaging our colleagues in ways that will help address our education system's greatest challenges and promote the successful work of schools across the country." The purpose of this memorandum is to briefly outline the federal legal requirements on accessibility and to outline our initiative to improve Department-wide electronic information technology and Internet accessibility.

To continue to carry out our responsibilities to provide all stakeholders with equal access to information, all of us in the Department of Education must work together to help meet the goal of ensuring compliance with accessibility requirements in Section 508 and Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973. Section 508 generally requires that Federal agencies ensure that electronic and information technology which they develop, maintain, use, or procure be accessible to persons with disabilities. Unlike Section 508, which is focused on technology, Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act requires equal access for individuals with disabilities to all programs or activities receiving Federal financial assistance, as well as to activities conducted by Federal agencies. While the immediate focus of this initiative is accessibility to electronic information technology and the Internet, it is part of a larger and on-going effort to help ensure that individuals with disabilities are included and can participate equitably in all our agency's programs and activities.

To ensure that the Department continually makes accessibility a priority and meets its obligations under Section 508 and 504¹, a small workgroup of members from OCIO, OCO, OSERS, OCR, OGC, and OUS was convened to advise us on launching and implementing a Department-wide accessibility initiative.

The goals of the initiative include, but are not limited to:

- establishing more robust accessibility policies and standards;
- developing tools, support, and training for those responsible for developing and maintaining content; and
- establishing processes for periodic review and evaluation of accessibility policies, standards, and practices at the Department.

We also expect to work more closely with recipients of Department funds to help ensure that they are meeting their responsibilities and addressing these goals.² This initiative will engage all Department offices and we are asking each of you to designate a specific staff member in your Principal Office to act as a contact point and to assist the workgroup in implementing this very important effort. The current members of the workgroup will reach out to the designated Principal Office contacts and to other representatives, to participate in these efforts as needed. Please provide the name of your office's contact point to Holly Anderson, Policy Liaison for Individuals with Disabilities, Office of the Under Secretary, by October 14, 2011.

Finally, we want to thank you in advance for your cooperation and for assisting in this very important initiative.

If you have any questions, please contact Holly Anderson at holly.anderson@ed.gov or (202) 453-6380.

cc:	Russlyn Ali	Nia Phillips
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¹ Ensuring that individuals with limited English proficiency [LEP] receive meaningful access to Department services, programs, or activities, is also a Department priority and is required by Executive Order 13166. In response to a February 17, 2011 Memorandum issued by the Attorney General to all Federal agencies, the Department is revising its Language Assistance Plan and Procedures that provide guidelines for Department personnel to follow when providing services to individuals who are LEP.

² We will also be working with grantees and contractors to remind them of their obligations to meet accessibility requirements under Section 504 and under the Americans with Disabilities Act, which requires that a recipient make its programs, services, and activities accessible to people with disabilities.