



Preparing Your School's Website for the DOJ Accessibility Updates

Understand the latest ADA updates and ensure your school's digital presence is using the latest best practices for web accessibility.

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ADA Updates and the Countdown to Accessibility



The U.S. Department of Justice recently updated The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) to prevent the exclusion of people with disabilities from the digital world.

This update, known as the ADA Title II update, was signed in April 2024, and it ensures websites, mobile apps, and other digital tools used by state and local governments, including public K-12 schools, are accessible to everyone, especially people with disabilities.



What's the Significance?

The new rule addresses gaps in digital accessibility and ensures that all web users have equal access to resources, regardless of their physical abilities. However, the specific requirements must be met by a deadline.

“

“This final rule marks the Justice Department’s latest effort to ensure that no person is denied access to government services, programs, or activities because of a disability.”

- ATTORNEY GENERAL MERRICK B. GARLAND

”

What Does the ADA Title II Update Mean?

The new rule states that all digital content and services provided by state and local governments — including schools — are accessible to everyone, particularly individuals with various disabilities, including those affecting vision, hearing, cognitive function, and manual dexterity.

Previously, the ADA's guidelines implied the need for digital accessibility but didn't explicitly mandate it for web content and mobile applications. The ambiguity created some inconsistencies in how different governmental services handled accessibility, but this update hopes to remove any uncertainty and create a uniform approach to ADA compliance and accessible school websites.

Why the Urgency?

By April 2026, the majority of public K-12 schools must ensure their websites, mobile apps, and social media posts meet specific ADA accessibility standards or face possible violations from the Office of Civil Rights (OCR).

This shift in focus is mainly due to the increasing number of people with disabilities, which is now more than 1 billion worldwide. In the U.S. alone, the CDC reports that 61 million adults live with some type of disability.



Despite this growing population, many digital platforms, both desktop and mobile, remain inaccessible to people with disabilities.

To understand the extent of this issue, AudioEye, a leading provider in online accessibility, scanned nearly 40,000 enterprise websites, covering about two million web pages.

Their report found:

- 56% of images aren't accessible to people with visual impairments
- 93% of domains have at least one page with an inaccessible image
- 60% of images had no alternative text (alt text)

Key Features of the ADA Title II Update

By defining what digital accessibility looks like and setting a timeline for compliance, the update helps ensure that future digital content is accessible from the start. The update brings a few changes, including:

EXPLICIT ACCESSIBILITY STANDARDS

The rule sets specific standards for digital content based on WCAG (Web Content Accessibility Guidelines) 2.1 Level AA standards and covers a wide range of recommendations for making digital content more accessible.



BROADER SCOPE

This new rule applies not only to state and local government bodies but also to organizations that work with them, such as hospitals, police departments, and, yes, public schools.



EXEMPTIONS

There are some exemptions. For example, web content that's archived and not in active use doesn't need to be updated to meet these standards. Other exceptions include older archived electronic files, password-protected documents, third-party content, and specific social media posts made before the compliance deadlines.

Read the Full Document

[Fact Sheet: New Rule on the Accessibility of Web Content and Mobile Apps Provided by State and Local Governments](#)



The Update's Impact on K-12 Schools

Compliance Deadlines

The rule took effect in June 2024, but schools have time to become fully compliant based on their size and the population they serve:

Large Public School Districts

For K-12 school districts (and state universities) in areas with a population of 50,000 or more, the deadline to comply with the new ADA standards is April 24, 2026, about two years from the rule's effective date.

Smaller Districts

The deadline is extended to April 26, 2027, for smaller school districts and special district governments (like county community colleges or independent school districts) located in areas with fewer than 50,000 residents. Smaller entities may have fewer resources and may need more time to make the updates.

Considerations and Requirements to Meet Compliance

Many will need to consider the following to meet the new ADA guidelines:

1. **Web Content and Mobile Apps:** All online educational material, from class assignments to school announcements, needs to be accessible. For instance, text must be resizable, videos need captions, and all interactive functions should be operable through keyboard inputs.
2. **Social Media and Digital Communications:** Under the new rules, any future social media content must be accessible, meaning descriptions must be added to images and captions to videos for users, regardless of their abilities. For example:
 - Images from school events posted on Facebook should include alt text.
 - Videos posted on YouTube should have captions or transcripts.
 - Posts or links shared on X (Twitter) should be clear and descriptive so everyone can understand the message and navigate any linked content.
3. **Testing and Learning Platforms:** Any digital testing, grading, and learning management platforms must be fully accessible.

The ADA Title II updates primarily apply to public entities, including public schools and other government services. Private schools and charter schools may fall under different categories:

PRIVATE SCHOOLS

In terms of accessibility, private schools generally fall under Title III of the ADA, which refers to “nondiscrimination on the basis of disability.”

Schools are required to provide equal access to students with disabilities, including making reasonable modifications and ensuring that their facilities are accessible.

CHARTER SCHOOLS

Although charter schools often operate with more flexibility than traditional public schools, they’re typically considered public entities and, therefore, are subject to Title II of the ADA.

This means charter schools must ensure that their programs, services, and facilities are accessible to students with disabilities.

The Title II updates do not directly apply to private schools unless they receive federal funding, in which case they must also comply with Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act.

- That said, a more accessible digital experience benefits everyone, so private schools should follow accessibility best practices and welcome a more diverse audience.

Keep Reading: [How to Keep Your School District’s Website Accessible](#)



Requirements to Meet Compliance

Public K-12 schools must ensure all digital content aligns with WCAG 2.1 Level AA standards, which include:

- Providing alt text for non-text content, like images or videos.
- Making all functionality available from a keyboard.
- Ensuring users have time to read and engage with content.
- Not designing content or using a strobe effect in a way that could cause a seizure.
- Helping users navigate, find content, and determine where they are.

While this isn't an exhaustive list of all the standards your site is expected to meet, you can reference AudioEye's WCAG Checklist for a more complete list of Level A and Level AA criteria.

The POUR Principle

Essentially, these requirements mean your school's digital content needs to consider the POUR Principles, a framework for creating and managing accessible content. The acronym POUR stands for perceivable, operable, understandable, and robust, meaning:

PERCEIVABLE

Content and user interfaces must be recognized and used by users, regardless of their sensory abilities. This is where adding alt text and captions for video and media becomes essential.

- When posting photos from a school event like a sports game or a field trip, each image should include alt text that describes the scene, like "A group of students playing soccer outside during the annual Sports Day."
- For videos, such as a principal's welcome message or an instructional video for online classes, include captions so students with hearing impairments can follow along.



OPERABLE

This means your school’s website is usable by all users, particularly those who use assistive technologies and screen readers or keyboard users. Your site provides more than one way to interact with the website (keyboard functionality/shortcuts), give clear instructions or error messages, and use Semantic HTML attributes that explain to assistive technologies how to use web links or buttons.

- Ensure that your website's pages are fully navigable by keyboard, allowing visitors who use assistive technologies to browse and submit forms. Descriptive links and error messages, like “Begin Enrollment Process” and “View District Information,” assist users in understanding how a website operates and what actions to take so they can operate the web content.

UNDERSTANDABLE

An understandable website is one where the content and how the website functions are clear and understandable to all users. All users should be able to access your site, understand the information, and how to navigate content or use tools/features, including consistent font styles, easy-to-use navigation structure, and clear instructions.

- When describing your school’s curriculum or programs, use straightforward language. For instance, instead of saying, “Our pedagogy employs differentiated instruction to accommodate diverse learner profiles,” you might say, “Our teaching methods are designed to help each student learn in the way that’s best for them.”
- You might include a glossary or tips for any technical terms, especially in areas like enrollment policies or information about accommodations for learning differences.

ROBUST

Your content must be robust enough to be interpreted by various assistive technologies, like screen readers.

- When creating your school’s online handbook or course catalogs, ensure that all documents are formatted so that screen readers can read them. This means using proper HTML tags for headings, lists, and links so that a student who relies on a screen reader can easily navigate the document and understand the content.



[Learn more](#) about one of the world’s most popular screen readers, the JAWS (Jobs Access With Speech) Screen Reader, to test web accessibility.

Watch [this video](#) to see and hear how a screen reader interprets content on the web!



PDF REMEDIATION VS. TRANSFERRING PDF CONTENT

“I’ve heard about ‘PDF remediation.’ Is that just the same thing as just transferring a PDF’s content onto a webpage?”

“No — both are meant to improve accessibility, but they’re not the same thing.”



Here’s the difference:

PDF remediation focuses on making an existing PDF accessible, whereas transferring content to a webpage is about converting the content into a different, typically more accessible format.

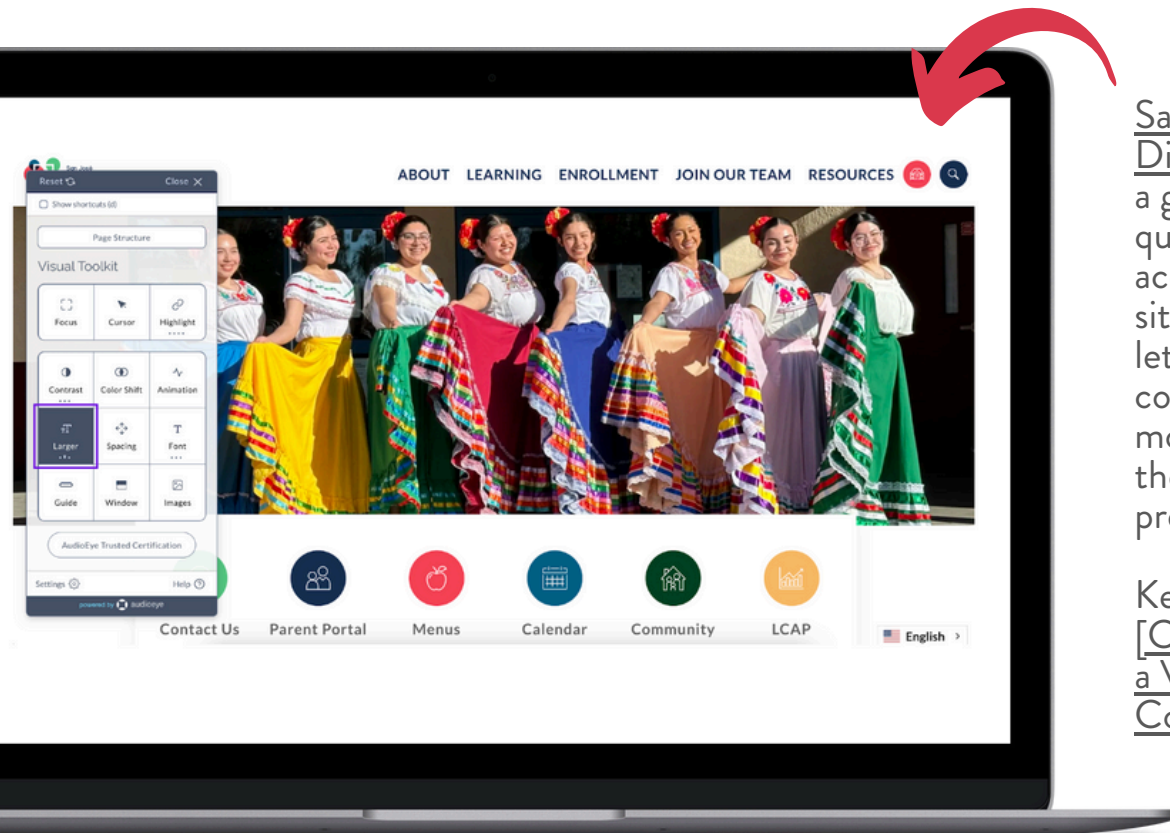
Remediation keeps the content in PDF format, making it accessible within WCAG (Web Content Accessibility Guidelines) standards, which can include:

- Tagging the PDF with proper semantic structure (headings, lists, tables, etc.).
- Adding alt text for images and other non-text elements.
- Ensuring the document’s reading order is logical for screen readers.
- Providing descriptive links and making sure its form fields are accessible.
- Confirming that the document is navigable using assistive technologies.

Next Steps...

Meeting these new requirements might be challenging, but it presents an opportunity to improve content and create a truly inclusive online presence. Here are some steps your school can take:

1. Use an Accessible Website Provider: Select a provider that builds websites with accessibility in mind.
2. Training and Support: Educate website administrators and contributors about the importance of digital accessibility and updates. If you haven't established your school website's accessibility policy, now is the time.
3. Conduct a Digital Accessibility Audit: Start by auditing existing digital content to identify areas not meeting accessibility standards.
4. Monitoring and Evaluation: Once changes are made, schools should regularly monitor their digital content to ensure it remains compliant with ADA standards and make adjustments as needed.
5. Find an Accessibility Partner: Schools that want to keep their websites accessible should consider working with a partner like AudioEye, a cloud-based digital accessibility platform, to monitor your website's accessibility going forward.



San Jose Unified School District uses AudioEye as a guardrail to suggest quick fixes for any non-accessible content on its site. The integration also lets users adjust text size, contrast, line spacing, and more to accommodate their needs and preferences.

Keep Reading:
[Checklist] How to Select a Vendor for an ADA-Compliant Website

Digital Accessibility Checklist

Everyone, from your students and their families to your faculty and staff, deserves equal access to online learning resources. Here are a few of the accessibility features your online learning materials should have:

01 **IMAGES, GRAPHS, TABLES, AND OTHER NON-TEXT CONTENT INCLUDE ALT TEXT** **YES** **NO**

Accessibility Check: Users can access and navigate online documents through assistive technologies or keyboard commands; my documents follow the same accessibility standards as web pages (e.g., have good color contrast, descriptive links, proper heading structure, etc.)

02 **DIGITAL CONTENT, FORMS, AND INTERACTIVE ELEMENTS ARE ACCESSIBLE & NAVIGABLE BY ASSISTIVE TECHNOLOGIES OR KEYBOARD COMMANDS ALONE** **YES** **NO**

Accessibility Check: I've tested my digital content using a screen reader plugin and used keyboard commands and shortcuts to navigate various pages. All forms, buttons, and interactive elements are labeled and accessible via keyboard and assistive technologies. Labels or instructions are included within form fields, and error messages are clear and easy to understand.

03 **MY SITE'S COLORS AND CONTENT HAVE A GOOD COLOR-CONTRAST RATIO** **YES** **NO**

Accessibility Check: Text has a minimum color contrast ratio of 4.5:1 to ensure users with visual impairments can distinguish between elements.

04 **HEADINGS FOLLOW A LOGICAL SEQUENCE ORDER (E.G., H1, H2, H3, ETC)** **YES** **NO**

Accessibility Check: Headings move from H1 to H2 and H3 to help assistive technology users easily navigate through content and find relevant information.

05

DESCRIPTIVE AND UNIQUE HYPERLINKS ARE INCLUDED THROUGHOUT MY CONTENT

YES

NO

Accessibility Check: Users can tell where a link is going to take them through text alone, reducing confusion or taking users somewhere they don't want to go.

06

ONLINE DOCUMENTS, INCLUDING PDFS AND WORD DOCUMENTS, ARE ACCESSIBLE

YES

NO

Accessibility Check: Users can access and navigate online documents through assistive technologies or keyboard commands; my documents follow the same accessibility standards as web pages (e.g., have good color contrast, descriptive links, proper heading structure, etc.)

07

VIDEOS INCLUDE TRANSCRIPTS, CAPTIONS, OR AUDIO DESCRIPTIONS

YES

NO

Accessibility Check: Each of my videos has accurate captions that allow users with auditory disabilities or impairments to interact with audio content.

08

ENSURE ACCESSIBILITY OF THIRD-PARTY CONTENT AND TOOLS

YES

NO

Accessibility Check: Any third-party content, plugins, or tools integrated into my site have been checked for accessibility compliance to ensure they don't introduce barriers for users.

09

RESPONSIVE DESIGN FOR ALL DEVICES

YES

NO

Accessibility Check: My website content is accessible on various screen sizes and devices, ensuring that users with disabilities can access the content whether they are using a desktop, tablet, or mobile device.

Key Takeaway

The recent DOJ Title II updates to the ADA will soon become a requirement, but it's also an opportunity for K-12 schools to enhance their digital presence. By making your school's website, mobile apps, and social media content accessible to everyone, you're not only meeting legal standards but also significantly improving the user experience for all users.

Embracing accessibility best practices is your chance to create a more inclusive, welcoming, and effective digital environment that truly serves all members of your school community.

FINALSITE

About Finalsite

Finalsite is the first community relationship management platform for K-12 schools, transforming how schools attract students, engage families, build community — and thrive. Trusted by over 4,000 districts, our integrated platform includes websites, communications, mobile apps, enrollment, and marketing services. Districts choose Finalsite for our commitment to innovation, client support, and partnership in managing the complex requirements around data privacy, accessibility, hosting, and security.

audioeye

About Audioeye

AudioEye exists to ensure the digital future we build is inclusive. By combining the latest AI automation technology with guidance from certified experts and direct input from the disability community, AudioEye helps ensure businesses of all sizes — including over 119,000 customers like Samsung, Calvin Klein, and Samsonite — are accessible and usable. Holding 23 US patents, AudioEye helps companies solve every aspect of digital accessibility with flexible approaches that best meet their needs. The comprehensive solution includes 24/7 accessibility monitoring, automated accessibility fixes, expert testing, developer tools, and industry-leading legal protection.