



Office of the Texas Governor, Greg Abbott

Governor's Committee on People with Disabilities

Planning for the Digital Accessibility Needs of Students with Disabilities as Part of a Campus Mitigation Plan for COVID-19

In response to precautions being taken in relation to COVID-19, the Governor's Committee on People with Disabilities (GCPD) reminds Texas colleges and universities of their legal responsibility to ensure access to curriculum and instruction for students with disabilities.

When planning public health mitigation measures it is vital we include the needs of everyone, including the unique learning needs of students with disabilities. Many colleges and universities are currently transitioning to digital learning as a mitigation measure in response to COVID-19. Their faculty and staff are currently being trained on the use of remote learning platforms. It is important to remember [state](#) and [federal law](#) requires colleges and universities to accommodate students with disabilities—including ensuring digital learning platforms are accessible to all students.

According to Amanda Crawford, Executive Director of the Texas Department of Information Resources (DIR), “[a]s many institutions of higher education across the state are considering moving to distance learning. . . it is vitally important to ensure that the learning environment is inclusive and accessible to individuals with disabilities.” She notes that online learning must comply with Texas Administrative Codes (TAC) [§206](#) and [§213](#) on Electronic and Information Resources (EIR) Accessibility. “Captioning of all video, live or recorded, is essential for our students in the deaf and hard of hearing communities,” she continues. “Additionally, the use of accessibility-compliant collaboration tools is also central to addressing the needs of students who are blind, vision impaired, or have other disabilities. We encourage our institutions to review their compliance with the Administrative Code as quickly as possible to ensure continuity of education. The Texas Department of Information Resources remains available to assist you in these efforts.”

DIR offers a number of [online trainings on a range of accessibility topics](#) at no cost to employees of state-funded institutions of higher education. Additionally, there are [EIR accessibility products and services available through DIR's Cooperative Contracts Program](#). Other information and additional resources on EIR Accessibility can be found at the [EIR Accessibility section of DIR's website](#).

Considerations for Deaf and Hard of Hearing Students

Deaf students who are ordinarily accommodated in the classroom with a qualified sign language interpreter may learn more effectively through digital learning when an interpreter continues to be made available. For many deaf people American Sign Language is their primary language, and captioned English can be less effective. Every effort should be made to maintain these accommodations for students while engaged in digital learning.

Schools can work with remote interpreting services such as [Video Remote Interpreting](#) (VRI) or [Video Relay Service](#) (VRS) to provide interpreters in the class. The Texas Health and Human Services Commission (HHSC) maintains a [list of communication services contractors](#) used throughout the state. This list is not exhaustive, but provides an excellent place to start.

Practical Accessibility Tips and Resources

The [Web Content Accessibility Guidelines \(WCAG\) 2.1 AA](#) are the recognized standard for web accessibility under the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), as well as for state law governing accessibility in higher education. In general, accessible digital learning will:

- ensure keyboard access to all functions of the platform, meaning keyboard commands can be used in lieu of a mouse;
- make sure there are alternative text descriptions of images;
- provide [PDFs with OCR](#) (Optical Character Recognition) for [screen reader access](#);
- caption all video and multimedia content.

If you are unsure whether your documents are accessible, online tools like [Webaim](#) check for accessibility.

By taking these simple steps to guarantee online learning curriculum is accessible for students with disabilities, we ensure no one in our community is left behind.

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