

**SREB**

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# Understanding Accessibility: Policy and Implications for State Leaders

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[www.CTDInstitute.org](http://www.CTDInstitute.org)

# Welcome and Introductions



**Tracy Gray**  
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# Poll – Get to know the audience

What level of education do you represent?

- K-12
- Community/Technical College
- University

# Introduction to Accessibility

What do we mean when we're talking about accessibility?

# What Do We Mean When We Talk About Accessibility?

- Equal access and equal opportunity to access content, programs, resources, learning platforms
  - Websites
  - Online learning portals
  - Digital textbooks
  - Student/parent portals (e.g. schedules, billing, parking, notifications)
- Accessible from the start vs retrofitting problematic content
  - “Born Accessible” materials
  - Universal Design for Learning

# Accessible for Whom?

When we're thinking about accessibility of web and digital content, we need to focus on creating content that:

- People with disabilities can navigate, perceive, understand, and interact with
- Considers physical, visual, speech, auditory, neurological, and cognitive disabilities

# What Do We Mean By “Born Accessible”?

- Content that is “digital first” or “born digital” should also be “born accessible” – that is, any digitally created content should be created accessible from the start.
- Emerging technologies make this easier than ever before for content creators. User-friendly tools exist to easily add:
  - Captioning to videos
  - Alt-text to images on websites and in ebooks
  - Standard headers in websites, forms, ebooks and documents
  - Adjust colors and contrast



# Digital is Not Always Accessible

- Though many aspects of digital content are fairly easy to make accessible with readily available tools, challenges remain:
  - STEM content – formulas, charts, graphs can be difficult for screen readers
  - While users can add descriptive text to images, adding the right kind of description takes knowledge, practice and understanding of the content
- Digital content is a great start towards accessibility with options for built-in accessibility features (text to speech, magnification, etc.) but we cannot assume that the work ends there

# Poll – Universal Design for Learning

How familiar are you with the principles of UDL?

- Not at all
- Somewhat
- I could be a UDL trainer

# What is Universal Design for Learning?

- Similar to concept of “Born Accessible” – design learning opportunities from the start to be accessible to a wide range of learners
- Comes from architectural concept of Universal Design or “Inclusive Design”
  - All products and the built environment should be designed to be usable by everyone regardless of ability, age, status, etc.
  - Curb cutouts on sidewalks most famous example
  - Belief that accessible and inclusive design benefits everyone, not just users with disabilities

# Principles of UDL

1. Provide multiple means of representation - *Learners differ in the ways that they perceive and comprehend information that is presented to them.*
2. Provide multiple means of action and expression - *Learners differ in the ways that they navigate a learning environment and express their understanding.*
3. Provide multiple means of engagement - *Learners differ in the ways in which they can be engaged or motivated to learn.*

Visit <http://www.udlcenter.org/>

# Benefits of UDL and Accessibility

- Designing technology-based learning opportunities from a UDL perspective offers benefits for ALL of your students regardless of age or ability
- We all depend on accessibility features every day:
  - Zooming in on websites, documents, images, especially on mobile devices
  - Touch screens on smartphones and kiosks
  - Visual support for auditory information
  - Closed captioning on live television in the doctor's office, or airport
  - Text to speech
  - Voice recognition

# Unexpected Benefits

- Often, products designed to support users with disabilities have unexpected benefits for a wide audience.
- For example, closed captions have been shown to:
  - Improve reading ability, word recognition, vocabulary and comprehension - captioned video has been successfully used to support literacy in both early readers and adults
  - Support language learning – captioned videos have been used successfully to teach English language learners at all levels
- What other benefits would your students receive if all learning opportunities were accessible and universally designed?

# Accessibility Improves SEO

- Many of the best practices for accessibility overlap with best practices for search engine optimization (SEO), improving your site and making your content more findable online:
  - Transcripts and interactive captions make your video and audio content searchable
  - Alt tags on images and charts
  - Use of consistent headers (H1, H2)
  - Clear content structure and organization
  - Meaningful links “click here” vs “Learn more about accessibility in this webinar”

# Poll – Accessibility Policy on Website

Does your institution currently have an accessibility policy displayed on your website?

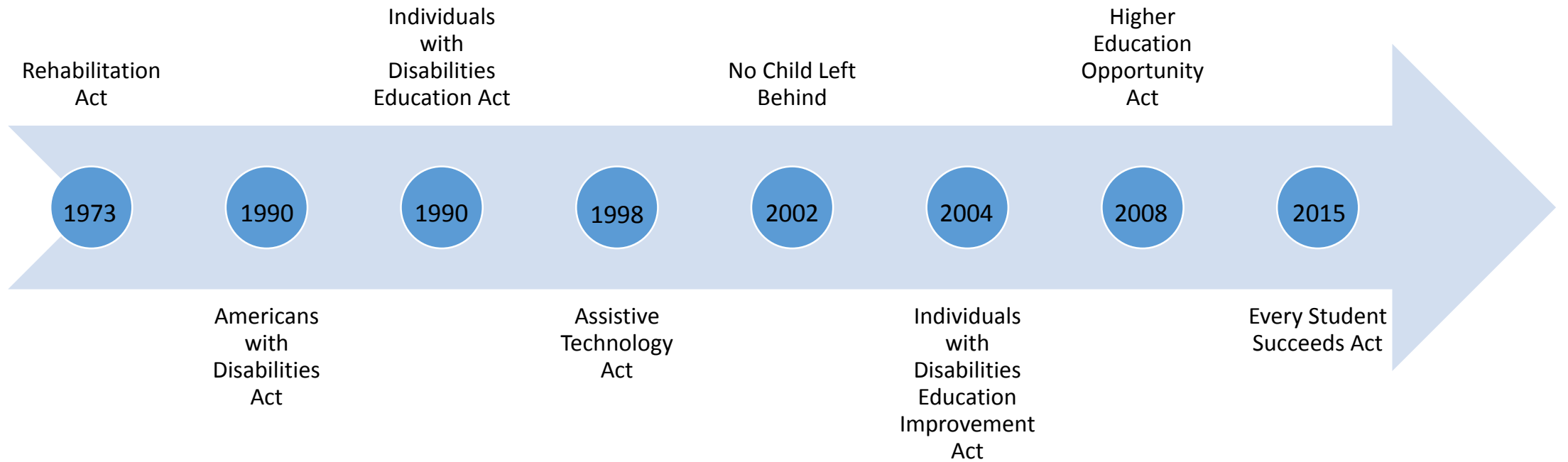
- Yes
- No
- I don't know



# Legal Requirements for Accessibility

What are our legal obligations for providing accessible content?

# Evolution of Legislation



# Federal Disability Law

- Section 508 (Rehab Act)
  - Currently enforces Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG) 1.0
  - New guidelines on the horizon
- Section 504
  - Equal access to all programs, services, and activities – including web-based and digital communications
- Title II (Americans with Disabilities Act)
  - Prohibits disability discrimination by public entities at the local and state level
- Title III (ADA)
  - Prohibits disability discrimination by commercial entities and public accommodations

# Clear Shift to Include Digital Access

- Proposed changes to Section 508 would move to WCAG 2.0 and require compliance at both A and AA level
- Though changes to Section 508 guidelines have been delayed, the U.S. Department of Justice has made their position clear in two statements of interest in federal lawsuits against Harvard and MIT in 2015
  - Argued that existing case law and federal regulations make clear that accessibility is mandatory
  - Stated that even without updated accessibility guidelines, schools, institutions, public accommodations, etc. are required to provide equal access to web-based services, programs, activities
  - ADA explicitly written to keep pace with developing technologies

# What is WCAG 2.0?

- International standard for web accessibility
- 3 tiers of compliance: Levels A, AA, and AAA
  - AAA level is advanced, and not likely to be necessary for most applications
- Proposed changes to Section 508 reference WCAG levels A and AA as new standard for web accessibility in the United States

# Poll – Which standards do you use?

Do you know which accessibility standards your website or digital content meets?

- 508 compliant
- WCAG 1.0
- WCAG 2.0
- I don't know

# What About Emerging Technology?

2010 Joint letter on ebook readers (Kindle DX) provides additional guidance that developing and emerging technologies must be accessible to students with disabilities.

***“It is unacceptable for universities to use emerging technology without insisting that this technology be accessible to all students.”***

(U.S. Department of Justice, U.S. Department of Education, 2010)

# Key Elements of Accessibility Legislation

- Instructional materials must be accessible to students with disabilities
- Students with disabilities must receive their accessible materials at the same time as their non-disabled peers
- Online resources and virtual courses have the same requirements for accessibility
- Websites must be accessible to users with disabilities – this includes 3<sup>rd</sup> party applications (e.g. paying for parking, school lunch systems, scheduling systems)



# UDL a National Priority

- 2016 National Education Technology Plan
- 2015 ESSA (K-12)
- 2015 EdTech Developers Guide
- 2010 National Education Technology Plan
- 2008 Higher Education Opportunity Act

\* The 2015 ESSA represents the first time that federal education law for K-12 general education includes an endorsement of UDL

# UDL in the Legislation

“Universal Design for Learning (UDL) means a scientifically valid framework for guiding educational practice that — (A) provides flexibility in the ways information is presented, in the ways students respond or demonstrate knowledge and skills, and in the ways students are engaged; and (B) reduces barriers in instruction, provides appropriate accommodations, supports, and challenges, and maintains high achievement expectations for all students, including students with disabilities and students who are limited English proficient.”

Higher Education Opportunity Act of 2008; ESSA 2015

# Implications for State Leaders

What does this mean for you?

# Who is Responsible for Accessibility?

- Everyone!
- Ensuring equal access to learning opportunities and programs is a system-wide (school, district, institution, agency/board) responsibility; commitment, vision, and leadership is critical
- Accessibility considerations must be a priority at all levels, not just thought about when problems arise or special educators must make accommodations
  - Teachers/Professors
  - Web developers
  - Content creators
  - Administrators
  - Technology coordinators

# How Can UDL Principles Help?

- Designing for accessibility first, rather than waiting to accommodate later, saves time and money
- UDL perspective encourages educators and content creators to think about how to present information in multiple ways, accessible to a wide variety of learners
- Thinking of accessibility first in purchasing and content development:
  - Hardware
  - Software
  - Documents and videos
  - Websites

# How Do We Get to Compliance?

- Be proactive in addressing accessibility, not reactive when a problem arises
- Work together to create state-, district-, school-, and institution-wide systems for addressing accessibility involving:
  - Educators
  - Stakeholders in the community
  - Students
  - Partnerships with disability and accessibility organizations
  - Content creators
  - Web developers

# Steps to Get Started

- Understand accessibility legislation at state and federal level
- Use checklists and guides online (ex: WCAG 2.0 checklist) to perform an accessibility audit of your website, instructional materials, etc. and to review existing accessibility policies
- Request VPAT (Voluntary Product Accessibility Template) statement in all contracts and purchases for electronic content
- Review accessibility policies at other districts, schools, universities
- Develop and communicate institution-wide vision of accessibility for all and commitment to Universal Design for Learning
- Set goals and benchmarks with clear timelines for success
- Carry out regular accessibility audits and solicit feedback from students and stakeholders

# Suggested Resources

- Examples of accessibility policies in higher education:  
<http://www.washington.edu/accessibility/requirements/example-policies/>
- How to Meet WCAG 2.0: <https://www.w3.org/WAI/WCAG20/quickref/>
- The PALM (Purchasing Accessible Learning Materials) Initiative:  
<http://aem.cast.org/navigating/palm.html>
- National Center on Accessible Instructional Materials:  
<http://aim.cast.org/>
- Temple University Guide to Accessible Purchasing:  
<https://accessibility.temple.edu/guide-accessible-purchasing>



# Suggested Resources

- National Center on Online Learning for Students with Disabilities:  
<http://centeronlinelearning.org/>
- CANnect: <http://www.cannect.org/accessibility-tips.html>
- Making Accessible Documents:  
<http://www.doe.mass.edu/odl/videos/MakingAccessibleDocs/story.html>
- Accessible Distance Learning:  
<http://www.catea.gatech.edu/grade/index.php>
- FAQ on 2010 Dear Colleague Letter on eBook Readers:  
<http://www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ocr/docs/dcl-ebook-faq-201105.pdf>

# What's Next?

- Contact Alise ([acrossland@air.org](mailto:acrossland@air.org)) or Tracy ([tgray@air.org](mailto:tgray@air.org)) with questions or to request specific resources or additional webinars for your state
- Attend session at SREB fall conference
- Join us for a community of practice on these issues
- CTD will be releasing a series of resources on addressing website accessibility in the fall



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