

ADA AND ACCESSIBILITY

FOR WEBSITES AND ONLINE RESOURCES

WHAT IS WEB ACCESSIBILITY?

“Simply put, web accessibility means that anyone with disabilities should be able to perceive, comprehend, navigate and interact with your website – students, parents, staff, community members at large. Web accessibility is important for it provides equal access and opportunity for everyone in your school community to participate in the education experience. It’s for the learning-disabled student, paraplegic parent, for the ageing grandmother. Web accessibility is for the **one-in-five** of the U.S. population that suffers from one sort of disability or another, and the four who don’t. By identifying and knocking down the communication barriers that exist on your website, you can maximize the delivery of content and interaction with your entire school community, and help meet your school’s mission.”

Source: Campus Suite School Website ADA Compliance and Accessibility Guide

FOUR MAJOR CATEGORIES OF DISABILITIES

VISUAL

Blind, low-vision, color blindness

Variations in type fonts and sizes, color schemes, images, contrasts and other visual elements to convey messages are lost on the visually impaired.

MOTOR

Impairments to any physical movement

The wide range of congenital conditions and even temporary mobility impairments may preclude users from using a mouse or keyboard.

HEARING

Partial, or total hearing impairment

The increasing use of video, audio, slideware, and multimedia on websites doesn't register with someone suffering from hearing loss.

COGNITIVE

Learning disorders

Problem-solving, memory, ADD, Down's, traumatic brain injuries and other learning disorders each present unique corresponding web access challenges.

Source: Campus Suite School Website ADA Compliance and Accessibility Guide

BARTON'S ACCESSIBILITY STATEMENT

Barton Community College is committed to achieving meaningful online accessibility for all users, including users with disabilities. Barton follows accessibility standards used by the Federal government for technology accessibility for people with disabilities, and web content accessibility guidelines developed by the [Worldwide Web Consortium \(W3C\)](#). We are currently working to increase accessibility and usability of all Barton websites to meet or exceed the requirements of Section 508 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1991 and Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG) 2.0 through testing for accessibility using a multitude of web tools.

bartonccc.edu/accessibility

DEFINITIONS AND HISTORY

Americans with Disabilities Act – a law introduced in 1990, it is “a civil rights law that prohibits discrimination against individuals with disabilities in all areas of public life, including jobs, schools, transportation, and all public and private places that are open to the general public. The purpose of the law is to make sure that people with disabilities have the same rights and opportunities as everyone else” ([Americans with Disabilities Act](#))

Section 508 – an amendment to the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 signed by President Bill Clinton in 1998 that “requires access to electronic and information technology provided by the Federal government. The law applies to all Federal agencies when they develop, procure, maintain, or use electronic and information technology.” ([Section 508](#))

W3C – World Wide Web Consortium: “an international community that develops open standards to ensure the long-term growth of the Web.” Guidelines developed by W3C are widely accepted across the world as well as the United States. ([W3C](#))

WCAG – Web Content Accessibility Guidelines: set of rules developed by W3C to determine accessibility compliance organized into three tiers. ([WCAG 2.1](#))

WCAG 2.1 LEVELS OF COMPLIANCE

Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG) include three levels of compliance, each level with an increasingly higher standard of accessibility. Resource: [WebAIM Color Contrast Checker](#)

LEVEL A

Level A is the lowest and most basic level of compliance. Many of the same compliance issues are addressed in tiers, i.e. color contrast, in accordance of what is acceptable in each level. Businesses should not settle on Level A compliance as it still excludes many individuals with disabilities.

LEVEL AA

Level AA is the most common goal for web compliance as it is attainable as well as inclusive for most individuals with disabilities. Barton’s website and online resources are required to achieve Level AA compliance at a minimum.

LEVEL AAA

Level AAA is the highest and most strict set of compliance requirements. While many institutions strive for Level AAA compliance, it is not entirely achievable. Many requirements between Level A-AAA have minimal differences in compliance while others have a wider gap, i.e. color contrast.

INCORPORATING COMPLIANCE

The first step in developing compliant material used on webpages, courses, documents, etc. is understanding the most common issues in accessibility compliance. The following issues are frequently found in online resources but are only a small sample of the entire list of issues:

Color Contrast | Text Size and Styling | Alt Text | Keyboard Navigation | Semantic Structure

Reviewing the items above as well as general Level A and AA issues is a great place to start. Campus Suite provides a [School Website ADA Compliance and Accessibility Guide](#) along with links and resources to remediating issues.

LIABILITY IN EDUCATION

A common concern in addition to lack of access for individuals with disabilities for educational institutions is the issue of liability. The University of Minnesota-Deluth compiled a list of [Higher Ed Accessibility Lawsuits, Complaints and Settlements](#) that include some of the major lawsuits in the industry recently; most notably, the University of California Berkeley case surrounding online education in 2016.

In the case of UC-Berkeley, multiple issues brought forth lawsuits by individuals including providing accessibility resources on campus and online education. With a major shift to online platforms in education, the findings in the UC-Berkeley case were crucial in impacting several other lawsuits regarding online education due to the extensive lack of accessibility. Most notably, the DOJ found that "large swaths of [UC-Berkeley's] online content are not accessible for those with hearing, vision or manual disabilities" meaning that students with disabilities could not complete their online course work without substantial challenges. ([DOJ vs. UC Berkeley: Forcing Online Content to Be Accessible](#))

While many lawsuits are brought on by private law firms in search of manipulating educational institutions into paying them out of fear of a larger lawsuit, ADA activists actually disapprove of these tactics. They would much rather institutions seek out accessibility compliance autonomously out of concern for their constituents with disabilities. These types of lawsuits are avoidable with simple proof of recent improvements on web accessibility. In the instances of individuals with disabilities and/or organizations like the National Federation of the Blind filing lawsuits against educational institutions, however, the Department of Justice is likely to investigate and enforce resolution on violations found.

TOOLS AND RESOURCES

Barton currently uses the SiteImprove platform to check for web accessibility, however there are many tools and resources available. W3 (Web Accessibility Initiative) has compiled a comprehensive [Web Accessibility Evaluation Tools List](#) or you can visit the Barton Accessibility webpage at bartonccc.edu/accessibility to check out tools and resources available to Barton's students and constituents.

Commonly used resources include [Color Contrast Checkers](#), [WebAIM Training and Assistance](#) and [Adobe PDF Accessibility Verification](#), but the most important resource is YOU! Since many issues must be manually reviewed, there is no one-tool-fits-all solution to resolving Accessibility issues.

NEXT STEPS...

An ADA 5-year plan will be proposed to the ADA Committee this coming week.

Professional development is a part of this plan and more training on Canvas, new software, and ADA compliance will be coming.