Center on Technology and Disability

State Spotlight: Utah

CHALLENGE: Strengthening Our SEA Infrastructure to Support the Delivery of Accessible Digital Materials for All Students and Stakeholders

State Strategies to Address Digital Accessibility

With the ever increasing use of online platforms to deliver educational materials and communicate with families, leaders at the state and local level need to ensure that materials are accessible to all audiences, including students, teachers, parents, and the community at large. Until all materials are accessible, state and local agencies will fail to achieve their goals, meet the needs of the community, and comply with federal law. To make accessibility a key factor in the planning and delivery of quality materials, leaders need to build awareness of digital accessibility and develop the capacity across education and technology departments to evaluate, select, and develop accessible digital materials among state, local, and school-based staff.

Read how Utah's State Board of Education (USBE) staff are increasing their capacity to meet the needs of all stakeholders by developing a systemwide digital accessibility plan through authentic engagement of stakeholders across multiple education departments.

The State of Utah: Setting the Stage

In 2016, USBE developed an accessibility plan to bring its website into compliance with Americans With Disabilities Act requirements. Later that same year, USBE entered into a resolution agreement with the U.S. Department of Education, Office of Civil Rights (OCR), in response to public comment on the accessibility of the USBE website.

The USBE Information Technology (IT) department initiated the development of Utah's plan which was accepted by OCR. The goals of the plan are to enhance the capacity of SEA infrastructure to support selection and development of accessible digital materials and to support LEAs in building staff expertise and capacity on digital accessibility. Core team members include Patty Norman (assistant superintendent), Brent Page (IT director), Sean Loth (IT manager), Anita Sorensen (IT supervisor), Michelle Millar (IT Web team member), Kellie Tyrrell (IT administrative secretary), and Rebecca Peterson (education specialist). The primary tasks of the team are to ensure that the USBE website is accessible, including all documents and media used to communicate with stakeholders, and that policies and trainings are developed to sustain the implementation of accessibility guidelines.

> **PUBLIC SCHOOL FACTS: UTAH**
> Districts: 42
> Charter Schools: 155
> Schools: 1,085
> Students: 633,896

Strategies for Success

To foster systemwide capacity regarding digital accessibility, the core team has focused on building SEA and LEA engagement through the following strategies:

Increasing knowledge and disseminating information

- *Building expertise and familiarity with digital accessibility* through existing communication channels within the SEA to share accessibility tips, training resources, and guidance, as well as to insert accessibility guidelines and language into state documents (requests for conference proposals, etc.)

- *Fostering widespread awareness* by including information about digital accessibility in monthly newsletters for state special education directors to create awareness in districts throughout the state

- *Using electronic workspaces* to disseminate documents that illustrate key points to consider when creating accessible content, "how-to" guides, training workshops on accessibility topics, and training videos

- *Convening meetings and trainings* on accessibility requirements for USBE and LEA staff across general education and special education departments to develop SEA and LEA specialists in accessibility issues

Collaborating to build capacity

- *Facilitating communities of practice* to extend training workshops and provide participants with opportunities to collaborate and address accessibility issues

- *Providing coaching supports* to staff through one-on-one coaching and weekly accessibility tips through departmental e-mail: As staff capacity continues to grow, departmental Web stagers and editors will serve as coaches.

- *Interspersing knowledge and leadership* by building capacity around accessibility issues through multiple departments within the SEA: Special education staff joined IT staff to spread information and engage SEA staff.

Collecting feedback and monitoring progress

- *Measuring progress and continuous improvement* through administration of surveys to gauge baseline knowledge, measure growth, and identify future topics for trainings and workshops on accessibility issues and techniques

- *Auditing department pages* on the USBE website to ensure that site updates meet accessibility requirements: USBE developed a system for conducting regular audits of new Web pages and providing on-the-spot training if accessibility errors are identified. If the Web team identifies a pattern of errors, it will provide more in-depth training to the department team during monthly meetings.

Recommendations for States Facing Similar Challenges

- **Provide one-time introductory training for all staff, regardless of assigned role.** It is important that all staff, from administrative staff to superintendent, understand the process and time involved in creating accessible materials.

- **Start simple!** Do not try to provide too much detail or training all at once because you risk overwhelming your staff. Put information into usable "how to" guides and forms.

- **Start training long before any deadlines.** Getting people trained and implementing new guidelines takes time. Ensure that support/administrative staff are in the first training sessions because they are often affected the most.

- **Build capacity through ongoing trainings and coaching.** Ongoing trainings and coaching can be in the form of face-to-face or video trainings. Designate a main contact person—a guideline expert—who staff can contact. This can be one person from a specific department or multiple contact experts.

- **Create a public workspace to post resources, training videos, and shared information** to provide staff with "anytime, anywhere access" to tools and resources to support their accessibility efforts.

- **Establish ongoing accessibility communities of practice, which staff can access as needed.** Utah uses small drop-in work groups, which staff can attend to discuss questions or issues and receive coaching support.

- **Reach out to staff doing the work.** Create a way to receive feedback (e.g., surveys, focus groups) to keep abreast of concerns and identify potential roadblocks.

- **Work strategically to involve stakeholders from multiple departments and areas of expertise.** Whenever opportunities for training or accessibility planning arise, be sure to include relevant staff from other departments.

- **Create a pacing plan and guide for developing training and building authentic engagement in the process.** Include a plan for how to transfer this information to LEAs and provide support.

Additional Resources

- Digital Accessibility Toolkit: What Education Leaders Need to Know

- 5 Things to Know About Your Role in Ensuring Accessibility

- Contact an AT specialist at the Center for Technology and Disability for support at CTDInstitute@air.org.

About This Resource

This resource was developed by members of the Center for Technology and Disability at American Institutes for Research, including Kristin Ruedel, Alise Crossland, Devon Wellington, and Tracy Gray, in collaboration with Anita Sorensen (IT supervisor), Kellie Tyrrell (IT administrative secretary), and Rebecca Peterson (education specialist) at the Utah Department of Education. The content was developed under cooperative agreement number #H327F130003 from the U.S. Department of Education, Office of Special Education Programs. Opinions expressed herein do not necessarily represent the policy of the U.S. Department of Education, and you should not assume endorsement by the federal government.