Guidance for Purchasers

In purchasing learning materials, there are many factors that must be considered. One of the most important points, but sometimes under-considered, is accessibility. Generally, materials are considered accessible if *all* students, despite knowledge, skills, and abilities, are able to use them successfully. Of course, determining if materials will be effective for all students quickly becomes complicated.

Can a student who is blind or visually impaired access the materials? Can a student who has a physical disability use the materials? Can a student who has decoding and/or comprehension problems access the information? In other words, are the materials usable by all students?

Steps you can take:

Below are 3 steps you can take to help ensure you are purchasing accessible learning materials.

1. **Check your current purchasing policies and practices to see if accessibility is addressed. Does your policy—**
   - Establish accessibility criteria for review that all materials are required to meet (*see step 2*)?
   - Require vendors to provide accessible digital materials that meet specific access requirements to the maximum extent possible (*see step 2*)?
   - Bring special education and assistive technology professionals into discussions about instructional materials purchases and adoptions?

2. **Require that all materials purchased from publishers/developers be aligned with the following—**
   - Relevant accessibility standards
     - Section 508 (or Section 508 Refresh once approved)
     - WCAG 2.0 (minimum level AA compliance)
   - Indicators of accessibility
     - Device-agnostic file formats (e.g., accessible HTML, Microsoft Word, PDF, EPUB, etc.)
     - Content represented in multiple ways (e.g., video captions, alt text, live text for audio, digital braille, etc.)
     - Compatibility with screenreader, refreshable braille, text-to-speech, and human-voice reading software

- Compatibility with assistive technology (AT)
- Text image descriptions that can be voiced
- Navigation alternatives (e.g., keyboard shortcuts/mapping or screen gestures, etc.)
- Location supports such as page numbers and/or progress bars
- Mathematical, scientific, and music symbols, formulas, and notations represented in multiple ways (e.g., explained with text alternatives, MathML)
- If writing is required, keyboard entry is supported by alternatives (e.g., word prediction, on-screen keyboards, voice input, etc.)
- Digital rights management (DRM) must not prevent access to built-in accessibility features or necessary assistive technologies
- e-book content can be voiced and navigated with appropriate delivery systems (e.g., iBooks, EPUB, etc.)

3. **If you are entering into contracts, include language about accessibility. For example—**

Vendor represents that the materials delivered under this contract or purchase order [hereinafter "the materials"] conform to, at a minimum, the standards for accessibility as set forth in—

- Section 508 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, as amended (29 U.S.C. § 794d), and its implementing regulations (36 C.F.R. § 1194), or
- Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG) 2.0 (minimum Level AA conformance).

If any portion of the materials does not conform to the aforementioned standards of accessibility, vendor agrees to provide a written explanation of the reason for non-conformance.

Vendor further agrees to provide a written description of compatibility of the materials with commonly used assistive technology products (e.g., JAWS, Window Eyes, ZoomText, MAGic, Dragon Naturally Speaking) and a description of the process used to evaluate such compatibility.

If the materials include textbooks or related core instructional materials, vendor agrees to prepare and submit a NIMAS fileset to the National Instructional Materials Access Center (NIMAC).

What if no accessibility information is made available?

It is expected that accessibility information be readily available from publishers/developers and that their representatives are aware of and can explain it. When this is not the case—

- Specifically request information regarding compliance with accessibility standards
    - For example, ask the publisher/developer to complete WebAIM's [WCAG Checklist](#) or [Section 508 Checklist](#)
- Ask publishers/developers if they produce a similar, but accessible, product
- Examine previous evaluation work from others, such as—:
    - http://aim.cast.org/learn/e-resources/accessibility_resources
    - http://wac.osu.edu/ebook-access-overview/#funct
    - http://www.web2access.org.uk/
    - http://diagramcenter.org/index.php
    - http://webaim.org/
- Consider other materials for purchase

For more information about the PALM Initiative please visit http://aim.cast.org/learn/practice/palm.