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Why Buy Accessible?

Far too frequently those who are charged with purchasing instructional materials and content delivery systems for schools mistakenly assume that a digital purchase is an accessible purchase. The question arises, does “digital” equal “accessible for all students?”

Although digital content has the potential to benefit all students’ learning, it also has the potential to deny students with disabilities full participation in the education process. Despite advances in technology, many instructional materials are inaccessible and this has significant implications for purchasing in education. Every school should ensure that both the content and the delivery systems they are purchasing are accessible from the start. There are multiple reasons why this is important.

Department of Justice: “The current transition away from printed materials to digital materials creates incredible opportunity for people with print disabilities to finally utilize the same products as their peers who do not have disabilities. It promises a truly revolutionary kind of change for students with disabilities, allowing them to integrate fully with their non-disabled peers in terms of access to materials and class participation.” (Hill, 2012)

Benefits of purchasing digital materials that are accessible from the start:

- **Supports inclusion:** Purchasing accessible materials provides all students access to the same instructional materials at the same time.
- **Benefits all students’ learning:** All students can benefit from many of the supportive features and scaffolds of accessible materials.
- **Benefits teachers:** It is easier to teach when all students use the same materials rather than having pockets of students using different materials or the same materials in different formats.
- **Reduces complexity:** When all students can use the same materials from the start, complex questions around the NIMAS and student eligibility are reduced.
- **Reduces additional costs:** Accommodations for inaccessible materials consume valuable fiscal, human, and infrastructural resources.

Additional resources:

DOJ/OCR Guidance: <http://aim.cast.org/learn/policy/federal/ocr>
NIMAS: <http://aim.cast.org/learn/policy/federal/idea2004>
http://aim.cast.org/learn/policy/federal/what_is_nimas

References:

The Promise of Accessible Technology: Challenges and Opportunities, HELP Committee Testimony by Eve Hill, Senior Counselor to the Assistant Attorney General, Civil Rights Division, Department of Justice, Washington, DC., February 7, 2012.
<http://www.help.senate.gov/hearings/hearing/?id=15eea6a0-5056-9502-5d55-b899d73ef5f9>