

November 8, 2016

Dr. Brian D. Monahan
Interim Superintendent of Schools
Rye City School District
411 Theodore Fremd Avenue
Suite 100, South Lobby
Rye, New York 10580

Re: Case No. 02-16-1475
Rye City School District

Dear Dr. Monahan:

This is to advise you of the resolution of the above-referenced complaint investigation of the Rye City School District (the District) by the United States Department of Education (Department), Office for Civil Rights (OCR). The complaint, which was received on July 15, 2016, alleged that the District discriminated based on disability because certain pages of the District's website are not accessible to students and adults with disabilities including, but not limited to, those with visual impairments and who are deaf or hard of hearing.

OCR is responsible for enforcing section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, as amended (Section 504), 29 United States Code (U.S.C.) § 794, et seq., and its implementing regulations at 34 Code of Federal Regulations (C.F.R.) Part 104, which prohibit discrimination on the basis of disability in programs and activities of recipients of federal financial assistance. OCR also is responsible for enforcing Title II of the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990, as amended (Title II), 42 U.S.C. § 12131, et seq., and its implementing regulations at 28 C.F.R. Part 35, which prohibit discrimination on the basis of disability in programs, services, and activities of public entities. As a recipient of federal financial assistance from the Department and as a public entity, the District is subject to OCR's jurisdiction under Section 504 and Title II.

This letter summarizes the applicable legal standards, the information gathered during the investigation, and how the investigation was resolved.

Legal Authority:

Section 504 and Title II prohibit people, on the basis of disability, from being excluded from participation in, being denied the benefits of, or otherwise being subjected to discrimination by recipients of federal financial assistance or by public entities. 34 C.F.R. § 104.4 and 28 C.F.R. § 35.130. People with disabilities must have equal access to covered entities' programs, services, or activities unless doing so would fundamentally alter the nature of the programs, services, or activities, or would impose an undue burden. 28 C.F.R. § 35.164. Both Section 504 and Title II prohibit affording individuals with disabilities an opportunity to participate in or benefit from aids, benefits, and services that is unequal to the opportunity afforded others. 34 C.F.R. § 104.4(b)(1)(ii); 28 C.F.R. § 35.130(b)(1)(ii). Similarly, individuals with disabilities must be provided with aids, benefits, or services that provide an equal opportunity to achieve the same result or the same level of achievement as others. 34 C.F.R. § 104.4(b)(2); 28 C.F.R. § 35.130(b)(1)(iii). An individual with a disability, or a class of individuals with disabilities, may be provided with a different or separate aid, benefit, or service only if doing so is necessary to ensure that the aid, benefit, or service is as effective as that provided to others. 34 C.F.R. § 104.4(b)(1)(iv); 28 C.F.R. § 35.130(b)(1)(iv). Title II also requires public entities to take steps to ensure that communications with people with disabilities are as effective as communications with others, subject to the fundamental alteration and undue burden defenses. 28 C.F.R. § 35.160(a)(1). In sum, programs, services, and activities—whether in a “brick and mortar,” on-line, or other “virtual” context—must be operated in ways that comply with Section 504 and Title II.

Investigation To Date:

During the course of the investigation, OCR examined a number of pages on the District's website to determine whether they are accessible to persons with disabilities. These web pages included:

- Homepage (<http://www.ryeschools.org>);
- Special Education
(<http://ryecityschools.schoolfusion.us/modules/cms/pages.phtml?pageid=57152&sessionid=9416914db6b71ac50f140e48e0a6d31c&t>);
- September 2016 Calendar
([http://ryecityschools.schoolfusion.us/modules/calendar/showCalendarMonth.phtml?oc_id\[\]=5420&year=2016&month=09&day=01&sessionid=9416914db6b71ac50f140e48e0a6d31c](http://ryecityschools.schoolfusion.us/modules/calendar/showCalendarMonth.phtml?oc_id[]=5420&year=2016&month=09&day=01&sessionid=9416914db6b71ac50f140e48e0a6d31c));
- Food Service (<http://www.ryecityschoolsfoodservice.org/index.html>);
- English Language Learners
(<http://ryecityschools.schoolfusion.us/modules/cms/pages.phtml?pageid=76355&sessionid=e3501f3593cc4c3b0ec8058ea367e43e&t>);
- Curriculum and Assessments
(<http://ryecityschools.schoolfusion.us/modules/cms/pages.phtml?pageid=57151&sessionid=e3501f3593cc4c3b0ec8058ea367e43e&t>); and

- Student Acceptable Use Regulations and Forms (<http://ryecityschools.schoolfusion.us/modules/cms/pages.phtml?pageid=78318&sessionid=e3501f3593cc4c3b0ec8058ea367e43e&t>).

OCR evaluated the above-listed pages and determined that important images were missing text descriptions, called “alt tags,” that describe the images to blind and low-vision users who use special software; some important content of the website could be accessed only by people who can use a computer mouse, which meant that content was not available to those who are blind, many who have low vision, and those with disabilities affecting fine motor control; parts of the website used color combinations that made text difficult or impossible for people with low vision to see; some videos were not accurately captioned, making them inaccessible to people who are deaf; and the website lacked a way for users of special software and those with disabilities affecting fine motor control to skip to the main content of the pages, thereby impeding their ability to efficiently navigate past long headers appearing before the main content. These barriers deny persons with disabilities access to programs, services, and activities offered on the website and may impede the District’s communications with persons with disabilities.

Resolution Agreement:

The District submitted a signed resolution agreement (Agreement) to OCR on October 31, 2016. The District committed to take actions such as:

- Selecting an auditor who has the requisite knowledge and experience to identify barriers to access on the District’s website and conducting a thorough audit of existing online content and functionality;
- Making all new website content and functionality accessible to people with disabilities;
- Developing a corrective action plan to prioritize the removal of online barriers over an 18-month period;
- Posting a notice to persons with disabilities about how to request access to online information or functionality that is currently inaccessible; and
- Providing website accessibility training to all appropriate personnel.

This concludes OCR’s investigation of the complaint. These findings should not be interpreted to address the District’s compliance with any other regulatory provision or to address any issues other than those addressed in this letter. OCR will monitor the District’s implementation of the Agreement. When OCR concludes the District has fully implemented the terms of the Agreement and is in compliance with the statutes and regulations at issue in the case, OCR will terminate its monitoring and close the case. If the District fails to implement the Agreement, OCR may seek compliance with the federal civil rights laws through any means authorized by law, including to enforce the specific terms of the Agreement.

This letter sets forth OCR’s determination in an individual OCR case. This letter is not a formal statement of OCR policy and should not be relied upon, cited, or construed as such. OCR’s formal policy statements are approved by a duly authorized OCR official and made available to

the public. The complainant may have the right to file a private suit in federal court whether or not OCR finds a violation.

Please be advised that the District may not harass, coerce, intimidate, discriminate or otherwise retaliate against any individual because he or she asserted a right or privilege under a law enforced by OCR or filed a complaint, testified, or participated in the complaint resolution process. If this happens, the individual may file a retaliation complaint with OCR.

Under the Freedom of Information Act, it may be necessary to release this document and related correspondence and records upon request. In the event that OCR receives such a request, OCR will seek to protect, to the extent provided by law, personally identifiable information that could reasonably be expected to constitute an unwarranted invasion of personal privacy if released.

If you have any questions about OCR's determination, please contact Sandeep Amy Randhawa, Compliance Team Attorney, at (646) 428-3781 or sandeep.randhawa@ed.gov; Jessica Daye, Compliance Team Investigator, at (646) 428-3812 or jessica.daye@ed.gov; or Félice Bowen, Compliance Team Leader, at (646) 428-3806 or felice.bowen@ed.gov.

Sincerely,

/s/

Timothy C.J. Blanchard

Encl.

Cc: XXXXX XXXXX, Esq.