

Resolution Agreement

Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands Public School System
OCR Reference No. 10161260

The Office for Civil Rights (OCR) of the U.S. Department of Education initiated an investigation into an allegation that the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands Public School System (“CNMI PSS”) violated Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 (“Section 504”) and that statute’s implementing regulations at 34 C.F.R. Part 104, and Title II of the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 (“Title II”) and that statute’s implementing regulations at 28 C.F.R. Part 35. Specifically, the complainant alleges that CNMI PSS’s website contains barriers to access for people with disabilities, thereby denying them an equal opportunity to participate in CNMI PSS’s programs, services, and activities, and denying them effective communication necessary for full participation in CNMI PSS’s programs, services, and activities.

Assurances of Nondiscrimination. CNMI PSS hereby reaffirms its commitment to ensure that people with disabilities have an opportunity equal to that of their nondisabled peers to participate in CNMI PSS’s programs, benefits, and services, including those delivered through electronic and information technology, except where doing so would impose an undue burden or create a fundamental alteration.

Benchmarks for Measuring Accessibility. For the purposes of this Agreement, the accessibility of online content and functionality will be measured according to the W3C’s Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG) 2.0 Level AA and the Web Accessibility Initiative Accessible Rich Internet Applications Suite (WAI-ARIA) 1.0 techniques for web content, which are incorporated by reference.

Adherence to these accessible technology standards is one way to ensure compliance with CNMI PSS’s underlying legal obligations to ensure people with disabilities are able to acquire the same information, engage in the same interactions, and enjoy the same benefits and services within the same timeframe as their nondisabled peers, with substantially equivalent ease of use; that they are not excluded from participation in, denied the benefits of, or otherwise subjected to discrimination in any CNMI PSS programs, services, and activities delivered online, as required by Section 504 and Title II and those statutes’ implementing regulations; and that they can effectively communicate and engage with CNMI PSS’s programs, services, and activities delivered online.

CNMI PSS voluntarily agrees to take the actions set forth below.

1. Undue Burden and Fundamental Alteration. For any technology-related requirement in this agreement for which CNMI PSS asserts an undue burden or fundamental alteration defense, such assertion may only be made by the commissioner of

education, or by an individual designated by the commissioner of education, and who has budgetary authority after considering all resources available for use in the funding and operation of the service, program, or activity. If CNMI PSS asserts either defense, CNMI PSS must provide a written statement of the reasons for reaching that conclusion, including the cost of meeting the requirement, the available funding and other resources, and its plan for providing equally effective alternate access. To provide equally effective alternate access, alternatives are not required to produce the identical result or level of achievement for persons with and without disabilities, but must afford persons with disabilities an equal opportunity to obtain the same result, to gain the same benefit, or to reach the same level of achievement, in the most integrated setting appropriate to the person's needs. The written statement will be certified by the commissioner of education or designee.

2. Policies and Procedures for New Online Content and Functionality. By April 3, 2017, CNMI PSS will submit to OCR for its review and approval proposed policies and procedures ("the Plan for New Content") to ensure that all new, newly added, or modified online content and functionality will be accessible to people with disabilities as measured by conformance to the Benchmarks for Measuring Accessibility set forth above, except where doing so would impose a fundamental alteration or undue burden.

The Plan for New Content must include sufficient quality assurance procedures for full implementation, setting up a system of testing and accountability to maintain the accessibility of all online content and functionality on an ongoing basis, and backed by adequate personnel and financial resources. This requirement also applies to CNMI PSS's online content and functionality developed by, maintained by, or offered through a third-party vendor or through the use of open sources, and includes setting up systems of accountability and verifying claims of accessibility by vendors or open sources.

- a) When fundamental alteration or undue burden defenses apply, the Plan for New Content will require CNMI PSS to provide equally effective alternate access. The Plan for New Content will require CNMI PSS, in providing equally effective alternate access, to take any actions that do not result in a fundamental alteration or undue financial and administrative burdens, but nevertheless ensure that, to the maximum extent possible, individuals with disabilities receive the same benefits or services as their nondisabled peers.
- b) Within 30 calendar days of receiving OCR's approval of the Plan for New Content, CNMI PSS will officially adopt, and fully implement, the amended policies and procedures.

- c) Reporting: Within 45 calendar days of receiving OCR's approval, CNMI PSS will submit to OCR the approved policies and procedures, evidence of their adoption and distribution, and a description of how they are being implemented.
3. Designation of Auditor. By February 6, 2017, CNMI PSS will propose for OCR's review and approval the identity and bona fides of an Auditor (corporation or individual) to audit all existing content and functionality on its website and to identify any online content or functionality that is inaccessible to persons with disabilities. The Auditor will have sufficient knowledge and experience in website accessibility to carry out all related tasks, including development of a proposed Corrective Action Plan. OCR will evaluate whether the proposed Auditor has the requisite experience and knowledge to carry out an appropriate Audit and to develop a proposed Corrective Action Plan.
 - a) Reporting: Within 7 calendar days of receiving OCR's approval of the proposed Auditor, CNMI PSS will submit to OCR documentation that it has assigned or retained the Auditor approved by OCR to conduct the Audit of existing content and functionality.
4. Audit of All Existing Content and Functionality. The Auditor approved by OCR will audit all content and functionality on CNMI PSS's website, including, but not limited to, the home page, all subordinate pages, and CNMI PSS's intranet pages and sites, and to identify any online content or functionality that is inaccessible to persons with disabilities, including online content and functionality developed by, maintained by, or offered through a third-party vendor or an open source. The Audit will be conducted using the Benchmarks for Measuring Accessibility set out above, unless CNMI PSS receives prior permission from OCR to use a different standard as a benchmark. During the Audit, CNMI PSS will seek input regarding the accessibility of its website from persons knowledgeable about website accessibility, including employees, parents, students, and members of the public with disabilities.
 - a) Reporting: Within 90 calendar days of receiving OCR's approval of the proposed Auditor, CNMI PSS will submit to OCR documentation of the steps taken by the Auditor during the Audit, a description of the outreach it undertook and the input it received, and a detailed accounting of the results of the Audit.
5. Proposed Corrective Action Plan. Simultaneously with the submission of the Audit, CNMI PSS will submit to OCR for its review and approval a proposed Corrective Action Plan to address all inaccessible content and functionality identified during CNMI PSS's Audit. The proposed Corrective Action Plan will set out a detailed schedule for addressing problems, taking into account identified priorities, with all corrective actions to be completed within 18 months of the date OCR approved the Corrective Action Plan.

- a) In its Corrective Action Plan, CNMI PSS will acknowledge that if all inaccessible content and functionality identified during the Audit is not removed or made accessible on a timely basis, CNMI PSS will be in violation of this agreement, Section 504, and Title II, and OCR may initiate administrative enforcement or judicial proceedings to enforce the specific terms and obligations of this agreement.
 - b) Within 30 calendar days of receiving OCR's approval of the proposed Corrective Action Plan, CNMI PSS will officially adopt and implement the Corrective Action Plan.
 - c) Reporting: Within 45 calendar days of receiving OCR's approval of the proposed Corrective Action Plan, CNMI PSS will submit to OCR the approved Corrective Action Plan, and documentation establishing that the approved Corrective Action Plan is being implemented according to the approved schedule. Reports will be due every six months thereafter until the Corrective Action Plan has been completed.
6. Notice. Within 30 calendar days of the date of this agreement, CNMI PSS will submit to OCR for review and approval a proposed Notice for its website to persons with disabilities regarding how to request the webmaster or other appropriate person to provide access to (or notify CNMI PSS regarding) online information or functionality that is currently inaccessible. The proposed Notice will also include information about, or an accessible link to information about, how to file a formal grievance with CNMI PSS pursuant to the requirements of Section 504 and Title II. Within 10 calendar days of receiving OCR's approval of the proposed Notice, CNMI PSS will officially adopt and publish the approved Notice by prominently posting the approved Notice on its home page and throughout its website (including all subordinate pages and intranet pages and sites).
- a) Reporting. Within 15 calendar days of receiving OCR's approval of CNMI PSS's proposed Notice, CNMI PSS will provide documentation to OCR regarding the locations and content of its published Notice.

7. Training. Starting no later than 90 calendar days from the date of this agreement, and annually thereafter, CNMI PSS will deliver website accessibility training to all appropriate personnel, including, but not limited to: content developers, webmasters, procurement officials, and all others responsible for developing, loading, maintaining, or auditing web content and functionality. The training will include information about how to comply with the Benchmarks for Measuring Accessibility set forth above.
 - a) Reporting: Within 90 calendar days of conducting each training session required by this agreement, until such time as OCR closes its monitoring of this agreement, CNMI PSS will submit to OCR documentation that the training has been delivered. The documentation will include a list of invitees and attendees and their position titles, a description of the delivered training content, and the presenters' credentials for providing such training.
8. CNMI PSS understands that OCR will not close the monitoring of this agreement until OCR determines that CNMI PSS has fulfilled the terms of this agreement and is in compliance with the regulations implementing Section 504 at 34 C.F.R. 104.4 and the regulations implementing Title II at 28 C.F.R. 35.130 and 35.160(a), which were at issue in this case.
9. CNMI PSS also understands that by signing this agreement, it agrees to provide data and other information in a timely manner in accordance with the reporting requirements of this agreement. Further, CNMI PSS understands that during the monitoring of this agreement, if necessary, OCR may visit CNMI PSS, interview staff members, and request such additional reports or data, including simulated website accounts and passwords, as are necessary for OCR to determine whether CNMI PSS has fulfilled the terms of this agreement and is in compliance with the regulations implementing Section 504 at 34 C.F.R. 104.4 and the regulations implementing Title II at 28 C.F.R. 35.130 and 35.160(a), which are at issue in this case.
10. CNMI PSS understands and acknowledges that OCR may initiate administrative enforcement or judicial proceedings to enforce the specific terms and obligations of this agreement. Before initiating administrative enforcement (34 C.F.R. 100.9 and 100.10), or judicial proceedings to enforce this agreement, OCR shall give CNMI PSS written notice of the alleged breach and 60 calendar days to cure the alleged breach.

/s/

November 18, 2016

Commissioner of Education

Date

Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands Public School System