eLearning Project: Web Accessibility

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MEDT 7492: Leadership and Administration of Online Learning

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October 4, 2020

Table of Contents

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Overview of project

As schools began to close due to COVID-19 outbreaks, schools embarked upon the herculean task of quickly implementing distance learning. All told, schools and educators rose to the challenge admirably as millions of U.S. students logged in for their lessons. Conversations about accessibility centered around availability of technology and internet access for both students and teachers. However, just because a student has a computer and the internet does not mean that material and online classes are accessible. At the start of the closures in March 2020, the U.S. Department of Education's Office of Civil Rights released a webinar and fact sheet reminding schools of their legal responsibility of ensuring that distance education and online learning tools are accessible to those with disabilities (U.S. Department of Education, 2020).

Faced with this mandate, the focus of this project will be the plan to increase online learning accessibility for students with disabilities for the Griffin-Spalding County School (GSCS) district. This will entail several steps, beginning with the formation of an accessibility committee and the hiring of a full time web accessibility coordinator (WAC). Working with IT, the WAC will perform a comprehensive accessibility audit of school webpages to ensure they are meeting the Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG) to the recommended level of AA. The WAC will work with the two existing educational technology specialists to roll-out and deliver mini professional development sessions about the online accessibility tools available for Google and Google Classrooms. Finally, the WAC will offer professional development to teacher leaders in the district on accessibility best practices, which the teachers will then redeliver at their individual schools, and continue to be a resource to assist teachers and staff in their accessibility needs.

Executive Summary of Project Plan

The entire web accessibility plan is broken up into five main tasks and should take about five months until reaching sustainability. First the district should establish a committee of various stakeholders, including members from instructional technology, information technology, board members, the special education director, teachers, and staff involved with creating the district's strategic plan. After assembling the committee, they should decide on the overall accessibility policy for the district, determine a budget and identify potential available resources, and reach out to stakeholders to drum up enthusiasm and communicate information about the new initiative (W3C Web Accessibility Initiative, 2020b). The second step will be the actual hiring of a full-time WAC. Using the goals outlined in the policy and knowing the resources/budget available, the committee will draft a job posting and potentially seek the assistance of a recruiter. Sample job postings and sample accessibility policies are included in the appendix. From the formation of the committee to the hiring of the WAC should take about two months.

The third main task will be a comprehensive audit of the main district website and individual school websites. The district does use a standard template for web pages, so an outside audit could potentially cost around $2,500 (Rivenburgh, 2020); however, the WAC should be able to perform this as part of her standard job duties and thus would be covered by her salary, unless the district would prefer a second opinion as well. After the completion of the audit, which should take about a month, the WAC will prepare and deliver a comprehensive report and identify any areas that require remediation. If there is any required remediation of issues, these tasks should be assigned to IT staff to allow the WAC to begin coordinating with the district's two educational technology specialists to identify and test the accessibility attributes of the district's LMS of choice, Google Classroom. For example, Google Meets do offer live

captioning, but these captions are not saved in the recorded videos. Videos could be uploaded to YouTube to take advantage of the built in captioning that YouTube offers, or the district might elect to purchase captioning software. The Education Technology Specialists should be able to roll out their PD in three weeks or less.

Finally, the WAC will develop and deliver professional development to teachers and staff about how to make their online classes as accessible as possible. Due to the budget (which, in Georgia, was cut this year due to COVID related economic declines), this current project does not include the development of eLearning modules and would instead depend on training that could be offered in-person (W3C Web Accessibility Initiative, 2020a) or hosted on a Google Classroom. In order to be more cost-efficient, the WAC can first focus on teacher leaders who can later go and redeliver content to their co-workers. Furthermore, hiring preference may be given to candidates who already have a long history of developing professional development material and may already have materials available. The WAC can continue to offer guidance and assistance to teachers and staff even beyond the lifespan of this project.

A link to the overall project management plan is included in the appendix.

Resources Required

The main resource required for this project will be man-hours from the members of the committee, the WAC, IT staff, Educational Technology Specialists, and teacher leaders, with roles being assigned in the project management plan. Education is notorious for asking employees to take on more job duties without extra compensation, so these additional man-hours do not necessarily translate into extra financial burdens, with the exception of the salary for the WAC.

In regards to technology, the WAC will require some accessibility software such as the JAWS screen reader, Colour Contrast Analyser, Dynomapper, and a captioning software if the district wishes to host videos on its own platform instead of YouTube, However, due to budget constraints, the district will probably first try transcripts that can be saved with the videos instead of embedded captions. Minimal amounts of office supplies (such as color copies, printouts, pens) might be required for in-person professional development, but most material should, preferably, be hosted in a Google Classroom. The Google Suite of tools are also necessary resources, but they have already been accounted for in the fiscal budget for the year.

Financial Budget

The greatest expenditure for this project will be the salary for the WAC, estimated to be $53,000 a year, which comes to $13,250 for the three months of work the WAC will be completing for this project. Hiring someone full-time to work in-house eliminates the need for outside contractors to perform the accessibility audit and offer training to staff.

There are several free accessibility checker tools, such as Colour Contrast Analyser, but the JAWS screen reader costs $1,500 for a lifetime license and Dynomapper is a little over $3,000 for a yearly plus plan. Closed captioning could potentially be a huge fiscal liability, but for the purposes of this project, the WAC will start with YouTube and use a Chrome extension called Tactiq which creates a transcript of live captions in Google Meets.

A link to the financial spreadsheet is included in the appendix.

Reflection

Accessibility has always been an interest of mine -- I'm the teacher constantly preaching about making sure captions are enabled -- and I try to champion online accessibility, so this project seemed to be a logical extension. I'm also the webmaster for my school. I already knew

some of the basics about best practices and what should be done to make sure material is accessible, but I enjoyed learning more, especially in terms of what goes into a comprehensive audit and all of the different standards involved. I tried to keep my budget and resources reasonable in terms of what I have experienced working for the GSCS district, even though they may seem simplistic. I have never once seen a video created by the district be captioned or have a transcript provided, so I have always uploaded them to YouTube and then linked to YouTube on my school's website so that viewers can have the option of watching the video with captions generated by YouTube. I can genuinely see the district using this for the majority of videos that feature only adults, but the laws become tricker with students, especially special education students. For this case, I think it is reasonable to ask educators to turn on live captioning during Google Meets and use the Tactiq extension to generate a transcript that can be saved, along with the video, on the school's Google Drive. Similarly, most of the district PD I received this year was housed within Google Classrooms and relied heavily on Google Suite tools, so I think it is reasonable to decide that my fictional WAC would not develop interactive eLearning modules complete with graphic designers and videographers, and would instead use the Google Suite tools.

References

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https://krisrivenburgh.com/cost-website-accessibility-wcag-2-1-aa-audit-ada-compliance/

U.S. Department of Education. (2020). *U.S. Department of Education Releases Webinar, Fact*

Sheet for Protecting Students' Civil Rights During COVID-19 Response.

https://www.ed.gov/news/press-releases/us-department-education-releases-webinar-fact-

sheet-protecting-students-civil-rights-during-covid-19-response

W3C Web Accessibility Initiative. (2020a). *Developing Web Accessibility Presentations and*

Training: Overview. https://www.w3.org/WAI/teach-advocate/accessibility-training/

W3C Web Accessibility Initiative. (2020b). *Plan.*

https://www.w3.org/WAI/planning-and-managing/plan/

Appendix

Project management plan

https://trello.com/invite/b/R70qXRp3/204d2bf4bbca20c2997847c6c7c43630/web-accessibility-project

Examples of Web Accessibility Policies

https://wmich.edu/policies/web-accessibility

https://www.jewell.edu/web-accessibility/website-accessibility-policy

https://www.rrcc.edu/sites/default/files/RRCC-web-accessibility-implementation-plan.pdf

Examples of job postings

https://hrd.aps.edu/workspace/wSpace.exe?Action=wsJobsDetail&JobPosting=00039572

https://www.dice.com/jobs/detail/Accessibility-Specialist-Mindbank-Consulting-Group-Rockville-MD-20847/mbank/6689930

Budget

https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/10mQdY1nBFN73R9Ew08CXMXPhJIyfTFF1Zo1F_ROKGTo/edit?usp=sharing