

Gov. Pritzker Celebrates Increasing Access To Online Learning For Students With Disabilities

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CHICAGO – Today, Governor Pritzker commemorated the signing of legislation ensuring equitable access to learning for students with disabilities, making Illinois a national leader in requiring Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG) compliance for digital education tools in K-12 schools.

The new law requires content available on any third-party online curriculum service used in all public and private K-12 schools to be WCAG 2.1 compliant and readily accessible to individuals with disabilities starting August 1, 2022.

“This legislation truly meets the moment when it comes to giving our students the most fulfilling education possible in an increasingly online world,” said Governor JB Pritzker. “As online educational tools become further integrated into school curriculums, we need to be sure that these tools are properly addressing the needs of all the students and families they’re designed to serve. I am proud to mark another achievement as we pave the way for an education system that meets the challenges of the 21st century.”

WCAG guidelines provide a single, shared standard for web content accessibility and explain how to make web content more accessible to people with disabilities, through features like text-to-speech, captions for videos, text alternatives for non-text content, and color-blind alternatives. With the passage of HB 26, these accessibility features will now be standard for digital tools used to educate our children.

“The COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted the need for accessible online learning, especially for the nearly 18% of students who use an Individualized Education Plan or report having a disability or developmental delay,” said State Senator Cristina Pacione-Zayas (D- Chicago). “Accommodating students with diverse needs is a top priority, and these accessibility guidelines will ensure all students get the necessary access to educational materials online when needed.”

“With online learning becoming more commonly used, we need to make sure curricular systems are equitable and accessible,” said State Representative Theresa Mah (D- Chicago). “This law ensures that all students, no matter their ability, will not be left behind in our digital learning environments. I’d like to thank Governor Pritzker and the many advocates for helping to make our classrooms across the state more inclusive and accessible.”

As more students are returning to classrooms around the state, they will continue using many of the digital education tools utilized during remote learning throughout the pandemic. Many of those tools in use currently pose challenges to students and parents who are disabled, often forcing families to take on out-of-pocket costs to ensure their children get the same education as fellow students.

“This new law is an important step in dismantling barriers to learning for students with visual and other impairments and it will ensure that students, as well as their parents and guardians, can effectively access digital education tools at home and in the classroom,” said Debbie Grossman, Executive Director of the Blind Service Association. “We must do all we can to make sure no student is forced to learn from a disadvantage particularly when so many students are already facing hardships associated with remote learning.”

HB 26 is effective August 1, 2022.