Born Accessible Learning Resources

What State and District Education Leaders Need to Know

"Education stakeholders should develop a born accessible standard of learning resource design to help educators select and evaluate learning resources for accessibility and equity of learning experience… Using the principles and research-base of UD and UDL, this standard would serve as a commonly accepted framework and language around design for accessibility and offer guidance to vendors and third-party technology developers in interactions with states, districts, and institutions of higher education." (2016 National Education Technology Plan)

What is "Born Digital"?

When we talk about materials that are "born digital," we are talking about materials that are created from the start to be presented on a digital platform. This includes websites, webinars, wikis, and online forums. Increasingly, as more content is created only for digital representation, this category also includes web comics, web-only television shows, digital sound recordings, and online newspapers. Born digital or "digital first" content is distinguished from analog content (e.g., printed books, film) that is converted to a digital format. However, digital does not always mean accessible. Although digital resources can facilitate access for users with disabilities, or designed to work with a user's assistive technology to enable access, not all digital materials are accessible. For example, many digital images, videos, games, and graphics are inaccessible to users with print disabilities or visual impairments.

How Do We Get From "Born Digital" to "Born Accessible"?

As technologies have changed, and more content is created digitally, it has become possible to access a variety of content in a wide range of formats from nearly anywhere in the world. With these changes has come a new imperative for publishers to create content that not only is "born digital" but also "born accessible." A shift to "born accessible" thinking pushes publishers, edtech developers, and independent content creators to consider ways to make digital content accessible to all.

What Can State and District Leaders Do?

State and district leaders have a significant role to play in facilitating the development and use of born accessible learning resources. As technology decision makers and purchasers, you can influence vendors and developers to create content that is accessible from the beginning. As education leaders, you can create the professional development, guidance, and support structures necessary to build teacher capacity around accessible learning resources.

- **Let developers and publishers know that you expect digital textbooks, resources, and learning materials to be built according to industry accessibility standards.** These standards

(e.g., W3C, Voluntary Product Accessibility Template, Section 508) establish guidelines for what types of supports must be present for accessibility, such as text descriptions for non-text items (e.g., animations, images, graphics, and other embedded media), use of color and contrast, and the ways in which information is organized and presented.

- **Include accessibility features and concerns in your evaluation of new technologies to guide purchasing decisions.** Learning materials that are inaccessible or lack accessibility features are limited in their ability to support diverse learning needs and students with disabilities.

- **Build teacher capacity around accessibility features and considerations when selecting or developing content.** As many more schools and districts answer the federal call to make use of open educational resources, digital assessments, and online materials, state and district leaders can support teachers in learning about accessibility and provide the training, resources, and tools to choose the right resources for their students.

- **Provide guidance for teacher creators in developing content that is accessible from the start.** New, easy-to-use content creation tools allow teachers to create their own e-books, graphics, videos, games, and online courses. These teachers need resources and information on available accessibility features so they can ensure that their creations are accessible for all their students.

- **Set the expectation that accessibility is mandatory, not a "nice to have" or a checkbox to show compliance.** By increasing awareness of accessibility and the tools educators can use to improve access to content, you can help teachers see how technology and born accessible content can help them personalize instruction to better meet the needs of all of their students.

Additional Resources

Accessibility Standards, Specifications & Guidelines - http://aem.cast.org/creating/accessibility-standards-specifications-guidelines.html#.Vs3st_krLIU

Best Practices for Educators - http://aem.cast.org/creating/best-practices-educators-instructors.html#.Vs3sdvkrLIU

Buy Accessible: What to look for in ebooks - http://benetech.org/our-programs/literacy/born-accessible/accessible-ebooks-what-to-look-for/

SETDA Policy Brief: The Accessibility of Learning Content for All Students, Including Students with Disabilities, Must Be Addressed in the Shift to Digital Instructional Materials - http://www.setda.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/03/SETDA_PolicyBrief_Accessibility_FNL.5.29.pdf

The Foundation of Online Learning for Students with Disabilities - http://centerononlinelearning.org/wp-content/uploads/Foundation_7_2012.pdf

Critical Components of Quality Indicators for AIM - http://aem.cast.org/policies/critical-components-quality-indicators.html#.Vs3t7vkrLIU