



# California Community Colleges

Dear Colleagues,

Ensuring educational accessibility is foundational to achieving the *Vision for Success* goal of creating an equitable system of higher education, and is a critical piece of student success and degree completion. Research shows that utilizing universal design principles, which is fundamental to ensuring accessibility, improves student-centered pedagogical practice and student outcomes. In support of the *Vision*, I am fully committed to extending the benefits of universal access throughout the system.

In 1998, the Office of Civil Rights issued a compliance review of the California Community Colleges and identified systemic deficiencies with how we meet the needs of students with disabilities. To remedy the situation, the state legislature and our system made significant investments to provide our districts and colleges with the resources necessary to make information and communication technology and instructional materials accessible. Despite these investments, we need to do more to meet the needs of our students with disabilities. Just last December, the California State Auditor issued an audit of our system's accessibility practices and found numerous instances of colleges and districts not meeting their institutional accessibility obligations.

As a first step in addressing this situation, the California Community Colleges has adopted a new Information and Communication Technology and Instructional Material Accessibility Standard (Standard), which reinforces the requirement that colleges within the system create, purchase, and utilize instructional materials that comply with the accessibility requirements of Section 508 of the Federal Rehabilitation Act of 1973, in accordance with California Government Code §7405, Government Code §11135, Government Code §11546.7, as well as with best practices.

Historically, our system has handled accessibility issues by siloing it in Disabled Student Programs and Services. This is untenable and ignores the fact that accessibility is an institutional responsibility insofar as it touches every aspect of our students' and the public's experiences with our system. Our office is collaborating across divisions to support this work; and I request that you as a system leader advance an effort to bring your campus community together to discuss and implement policies, procedures, and practices that meet your legal obligations and help our students access, persist, and succeed in our colleges.

In the coming year, the Chancellor's Office, through the Digital Innovation and Infrastructure Division and the Institutional Effectiveness and Partnership Initiative, will support local community college districts in implementing the Standard by developing and disseminating Section 508 Guidance, including FAQs, checklists, best practices, institutional support and structures for implementing the Standard, and a variety of online and in-person professional development trainings and workshops.

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I encourage local districts to use these forthcoming resources to improve accessibility on campus, in order to provide equitable higher education for all students. For more information on the Standard and the resources please see

<http://prolearningnetwork.cccco.edu/ask/topic/accessibility>

Please direct comments and questions to Theresa Tena, Executive Vice Chancellor Institutional Effectiveness and Innovation [ttena@cccoco.edu](mailto:ttena@cccoco.edu)