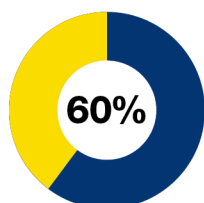


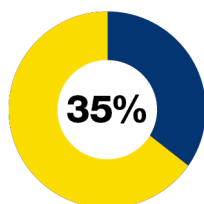
AFB American Foundation[®] for the Blind

Expanding possibilities for people with vision loss

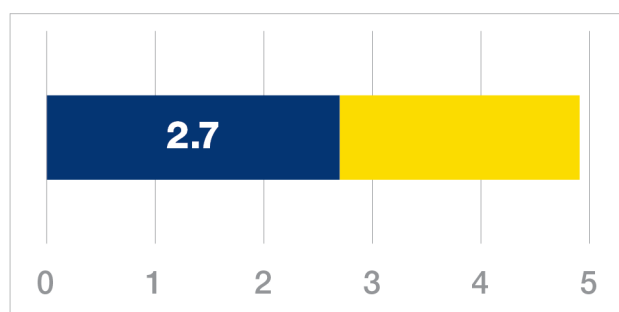
Digital Inclusion for Blind and Low Vision Students



Nearly **60%** of educators reported that their blind and low vision students **could not access at least one classroom digital learning tool.**



35% of educators reported their students **could not access at least two tools.**



Families reported their children used an average of **4.9 different digital tools or programs** during the pandemic. On average, **2.7 were said to be inaccessible.**

What are the consequences of digital learning tools that are not fully accessible?

- Students are unable to complete required assignments.
- Students need continuous support from a family member to complete work.
- Students feel frustrated, discouraged, or excluded because they cannot participate and access lessons like their peers.
- Blind parents cannot fully support their children.
- Teachers have to invest extra resources in creating alternatives.

Data Source: *Three Access and Engagement* studies conducted by the American Foundation for the Blind in Spring 2020, Fall 2020, and Summer/Fall 2021. See www.afb.org/AccessEngagement

In Their Own Words: Experiences of Teachers and Parents

“I’ve become an advocate, it’s my job to make the world accessible until he can do it himself. I’ve developed a great deal of anger, I’m just done. The ADA’s been law for 30 years and some people don’t care.”—*Family member of a 12-year-old blind child with other disabilities*

“Tech sucks. Nearly all of the platforms districts and teachers are using to provide instruction are inaccessible. I’ve reached out to [2 companies], to make them aware of this issue, but all I ever get is an apology and that they are working to make their sites inclusive to everyone. I don’t think they have the slightest clue of where to begin.”—*Educator*

“[One Program] was not set up for a screen reader, had videos that were not audio described. We spoke with their OIT department about accessibility issues but were told they couldn’t implement them.”—*Family member of a 16-18 year-old blind child*

“My son has really struggled with [his learning management system]. I know there are some accessibility features built into [it], but it is not user friendly for children with VI.”
—*Family member of a child with low vision, 13-15 years old*

“It was difficult for me to view my son’s online portal from his school. I struggled with assisting my son and in turn that stressed him out. [...] When he had school through online methods, I had trouble seeing, but his teacher did help me through emails.”—*A parent with a visual impairment*

“My biggest frustration is overall accessibility. Example, the class is assigned an online science simulation on creating circuits that is produced by a curriculum company. The science simulation is visual with no auditory information and the only way to connect the pieces is by using finger gestures. My child can’t see the parts so can’t do the assignment. The common answer for this situation is to exempt my child because it is too visual. Why? [...] Why does my child not have the opportunity to learn ideas and concepts because companies don’t make things accessible, schools buy those inaccessible programs and then don’t provide an alternative way to learn the same information?”—*Family member of a 16-18 year-old child with low vision*



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Tips for Teachers: Inclusive Digital Classrooms for Blind and Low Vision Students

- ✓ Check with your technology coordinator to confirm that all of the technology you are using is accessible to and usable by students with disabilities.
- ✓ Seek out professional development on inclusive and accessible classroom practices, including creating accessible emails, videos, worksheets, and presentations.
- ✓ Set high expectations for achievement and participation. If a digital tool isn't accessible, students should have timely access to a remediated or alternative version, rather than being excused from the activity.
- ✓ Help young students who are blind, have low vision, or are deafblind get early exposure to using computers alongside their peers.
- ✓ Learn about students' experiences with digital learning during the pandemic: **www.AFB.org/AccessEngagement**

Resources for Teachers

Links to resources are available at www.AFB.org/ToolkitResources

Accessibility with Google Docs and Slides

Accessibility with Microsoft Office

Color Contrast Checker

Basic Accessibility Testing for Websites

And more!

Email AFB: research@afb.org



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Getting Started with Digital Accessibility in the Classroom

- 1. Check accessibility before assigning any materials or technology.**
- 2. Add image descriptions to all images and graphics.**
 - Use built-in alt text tools to convey the meaning or content.
 - Avoid images with lots of text.
 - If a graphic is complex, provide a textual version.
 - If an image is purely decorative, mark it as such.
- 3. Make sure videos have audio descriptions and captions.**
 - Have speakers in a video describe key visual information.
 - Add descriptions to YouTube videos with YouDescribe.org
 - Use accessible videos from the Described and Captioned Media Program: dcmp.org
- 4. Give documents and files meaningful titles and file names.**
- 5. Use built-in headers, styles, and lists to create structure in documents.**
- 6. Use descriptive links. Avoid “click here.”**
- 7. Ensure tables have headings and labels.**
- 8. Make sure forms have proper labels and can be used with a keyboard.**
- 9. Avoid using only color to convey information. Use high color contrast.**
- 10. Use good meeting practices during online calls.**
 - Have everyone identify themselves before speakers.
 - Limit cross-talk.
 - Avoid overusing the chat function. Screen reader software can announce anything put in chat, making it hard to hear the speaker.
- 11. Share materials and slides in advance, so students can follow along.**

Digital Access in the In-Person Environment

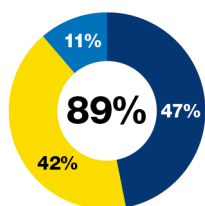
As activities transition back to in person, it's important that the lessons learned in the pandemic inform the next steps. Having many activities take place virtually illuminated the need for information to be accessible. However, information, documents, and resources need to continue to be accessible throughout in-person settings as well, so that students who are blind or have low vision will have access to the curriculum.

- Set high expectations for students.
- Provide students early access to accessible materials.
 - Projections may need to be previewed in advance, as well as followed on a personal device.
 - At-A-Glance style information takes much longer to perceive and interpret tactually or auditorily.
 - Videos need audio description & captioning. Live presentations, demonstrations, or teacher-led modelling often benefit from audio description as well.
- Provide vision professionals materials with enough lead time to prepare braille, large print, or alternative accessible media, usually weeks.
- Leverage universal design for learning principles, such as multiple modes of engagement, representation, and expression, to make sure all students can be active in the learning process.
 - Have a plan for making information produced by students accessible to their peers in real time.

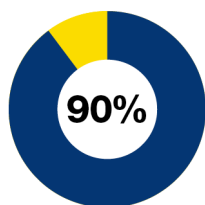
Excusing a child from an assignment may give them access to the same grade in the class, but it doesn't give them access to the same learning. Providing paths for participation, engagement, and inclusion should always be part of the plan.

Find resource links at www.AFB.org/ToolkitResources

Social and Emotional Resilience



47% of the educators indicated that 1%–25% of their students experienced social or emotional challenges, and **42%** reported challenges for more than 25% of their students.



90% of the educators surveyed agreed or strongly agreed that the 2020–2021 **school year was more emotionally challenging for them than previous years.**

Emotional Impacts of the COVID-19 Pandemic

- Loneliness and isolation resulted from cancellation of scheduled in-person activities.
- Fear and anxiety around COVID were common in children and families.
- Social reluctance increased for some children, especially those who were in key developmental stages.
- Familial stress increased, due to uncertainty in schedules, resources, education, economic situations, etc. This may be more pronounced for families with children with multiple disabilities or complex needs.
- Some children found social groups in virtual spaces as a result of exploring their interests during the pandemic.
- Some online environments eliminated typical barriers associated with blindness, such as transportation issues and social stigma.

Ways to support post-pandemic adjustment

- ✓ Acknowledge and validate the stresses
- ✓ Ensure collaboration to provide holistic support to students and families now and moving forward
- ✓ Social groups
- ✓ Access to counselors

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Resources for social and emotional connection post pandemic

Each of the following organizations offers a way to connect with other youth who are blind or have low vision, their parents, and adults who are blind or have low vision.

Find resource links at **www.AFB.org/ToolkitResources**

Crisis Lines Available

Call 988 if you, or someone you care about, is experiencing a mental health crisis.

You can also text 988, or chat using an online service at 988lifeline.org/chat.

