



## Appomattox district makes their digital content accessible for all

**Appomattox County  
Public Schools**  
**Appomattox, VA**  
[www.acpsweb.net](http://www.acpsweb.net)  
**4 schools**

*“Nobody wants to switch a website. But I was dreading it for no reason whatsoever. There wasn’t really any unexpected work for me, and the content migration service was a lifesaver.”*

**April Johnson**  
Information Systems Manager,  
Appomattox County Public  
Schools

Over the last several years, disability community advocates and the U.S. Department of Education have set the expectation that all digital content on school websites must be accessible to people with disabilities. While Appomattox County Public Schools (VA) was happy with Blackboard’s legacy website solution, SchoolFusion, for six years, accessibility compliance was a significant concern. Their motivation to move to Blackboard’s new website solution, Web Community Manager, was to help the school website meet accessibility standards.

For April Johnson, the Information Systems Manager for ACPS, the transition was necessary due to SchoolFusion discontinuing, and changes to accessibility requirements. The district had concerns regarding how their site interacted with those who had a disability. “Once elements of SchoolFusion stopped working, I knew we had to do something,” stated April Johnson.

Then with serendipitous timing, they received an email about Blackboard’s new website and content management system, Web Community Manager, which was built with the latest accessibility standards. April and her team reached out to Blackboard that same day regarding ways the regulations for ADA could be met using the Web Community Manager.

April wanted the site to be accessible on the four accessibility principles based on the Web Content Accessibility Guidelines:

- **Perceivable:** Information and user interface components must be presentable to users in ways they can understand through visual or audio senses with the browser or utilizing assistive technologies.
- **Operable:** Users can apply all interactive elements using either the mouse, keyboard, or an assistive device.
- **Understandable:** Content is clear and limits confusion and ambiguity.
- **Robust:** Content must be robust enough that it can be interpreted reliably by a wide variety of assistive technologies and user tools.

## EVALUATING THE EXISTING WEBSITE

To tackle their website's transformation, ACPS had to reevaluate their website capabilities from an accessibility perspective. April wanted to ensure people with disabilities could perceive, understand, navigate, and interact with the district websites. That meant fixing her website search functionality first. The search function stopped working, and it made it difficult for visitors to find what they needed. "Without an internal search query, the search was one of the things on the SchoolFusion website that had stopped working," April said.

She also mentioned her biggest "I need this" moment was when she saw Web Community Manager's Universal Navigation Bar. This feature gives her the ability to toggle between her Blackboard Mobile Communications App interface, Mass Notifications and the Web Community Manager, enabling her to post items from her notification center onto the website. Having a mobile app was also important for the future of Appomattox's community engagement. The integration of all these components confirmed that Blackboard was the right decision for their future communication needs.

## HAVING A SUPPORTIVE WEBSITE PARTNER

April heard that website content migration could mean doing lots of "copying and pasting." Fortunately, Blackboard's content migration service made the transition much simpler. During content migration, all the data, files, and records from the district's old website were successfully moved and restored on their new website. "Nobody wants to switch a website. But, I was dreading it for no reason whatsoever. There wasn't any unexpected work for me, and the content migration was a lifesaver," April stated.

Right from the beginning of the transition process, Appomattox had a single point of contact from Blackboard to keep the project on point. The project manager helped establish goals, and setup a schedule. At weekly check-ins, the scope of the job and website transition were discussed. April is happy with the support she received from Blackboard, the experience she had, and the seamless transition; she stated, “You usually don’t have a transition where it was all good, and there was not a single bad experience. I’m currently working on a project with another piece of software where I’ve had, three or four different points of contact. It’s confusing as to who knows what, and who has the latest information. Having one point of contact in the website transition process was awesome because if I needed something, I called her. If she needed something, she called me. Having one person from Blackboard was so helpful.”

## A NEW WEBSITE BRINGS COMMUNITY RESPONSES

The district went from having a website with accessibility challenges, to a site where the CMS, template, and content provided equal access to all visitors. April is thrilled to have positive feedback from the community and faculty regarding the new accessible website. Parents like their new mobile experience and being able to visit the district’s website on multiple devices.

Since the new Appomattox County Public Schools website launched, April has completely changed some of the pages. She likes to use Blackboard’s file library app to help recreate page layouts. One of the biggest changes parents and faculty noticed and appreciated was the policy manual page. Before it was hard to read, and now users can seamlessly access the content. April has restructured the entire page to the elation of many stakeholders.

## RECOMMENDATIONS FOR OTHER SCHOOL DISTRICTS

April’s advice to other K-12 districts is, “They need to jump onboard with Blackboard. Use the content migration service. In this world of multitasking most of the day you wear ten hats for one job why do you want to copy and paste every page when you can use content migration, and it does it for you? Anyone not using Blackboard should look at my site and see if you can use it for yourself. It has a lot of the features that you don’t have right now [with SchoolFusion]. I didn’t have them until I went to Blackboard’s Web Community Manager.”

### Blackboard.com/K12

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