U.S. Department of Education

Public Law 115-336, "21st Century Integrated Digital Experience Act"

December 2023 Report to Congress on Modernizing Agency Websites and Digital Services

Contents

Prepared for Congress per the requirements of section 3(b)(2) of Public Law 115-336.

21st Century Integrated Digital Experience Act (IDEA) Report to Congress onModernizing Agency Websites and Digital Services

As required by section 3(b)(2) of Public Law 115-336,1 the 21st Century Integrated Digital Experience Act (21st Century IDEA), this report includes a list of key websites and digital services operated by the Department of Education (ED or the Department) that have been prioritized and targeted for modernization.

Background

The 21st Century IDEA requires each federal executive branch agency to provide a prioritized list of the "most-viewed or ... otherwise important" public websites and digital services in compliance with section 3(a) of the law, and to provide an estimation of the cost and schedule to modernize those sites and services.

In our 2019 and subsequent reports, ED identified four major websites and digital services deemed most viewed or utilized by the public and important for public engagement. Since then, we have developed and begun implementing acomprehensive plan to ensure compliance with the goals and objectives of the 21st Century IDEA.

IDEA Compliance Ongoing Initiatives

The Department's website and digital services modernization and IDEA compliance efforts are centered around upgrading andmodernizing the websites and digital services listed below:

- ED.GOV
- FAFSA.GOV
- STUDENTLOANS.GOV
- STUDENTAID.GOV

After completing an in-depth review of the aforementioned sites and services, the Department initiated a multi-phased plan to meet the eight criteria established by the 21st Century IDEA. The plan includes:

- A comprehensive evaluation and needs assessment of the websites and digital services, to include associated sub domains
- The establishment of an Enterprise Web Governance forum
- A reprioritization of the legacy Website Modernization Plan
- A more definitive cost and schedule estimation for compliance

The Department is in the process of modernizing its main website ED.gov to improve its organizational structure and consolidate a multitude of disparate non-compliant sites onto an enterprise platform that meets the goals and objectives of the 21st Century IDEA. The Department awarded a contract in September 2022 and is currently working on completing the first three phases of a four-phase plan.

The FAFSA.gov and StudentLoans.gov sites were both consolidated into the StudentAid.gov site as part of the Next Gen/Digital Customer Care (DCC) project (StudentLoans.gov was integrated in December 2019 and FAFSA.gov was integrated in September 2021). The Next Gen/Digital Customer Care effort consolidated multiple Federal Student Aid (FSA) websites into a single website, StudentAid.gov. In addition to StudentLoans.gov and FAFSA.gov, the effort consolidated fsaid.ed.gov, nslds.ed.gov, the Borrower Defense website, and the Feedback & Dispute Management System (FDMS) customer portal website. While the content and functionality were integrated within StudentAid.gov, the site was redesigned with a focus on

modernization in alignment with the 21st Century IDEA Act with guiding principles focused on the customer experience and the delivery of value.

In addition, the Department has been focusing on a new Forms Automation Platform solution enabling the collection, cleansing, reporting, and dissemination of data for public facing forms and information collections in compliance with the 21st Century IDEA Act. This will include the digitization of any Department public-facing forms and OMB approved information collections, the implementation of electronic or digital signatures where needed, and/or the redesign of forms in need of improvement. Currently the Department has over 300 approved information collections, 55% of which are digital. The Department has approximately 100 forms that are not digital, and another 45 forms that are submitted in a Word or PDF format that is not machine readable. The Department has approximately 40 forms requiring a signature that do not have an electronic or digital signature capability. Along with 21st Century IDEA, the Forms Automation Platform will support compliance with OMB memo M-22-10.

21st Century IDEA Status

A comprehensive evaluation has been completed on all related websites, digital services, and non-digital services deemed high-traffic and/or important for public engagement to understand the level of effort needed to bring the Department's public sites into compliance. Based on that assessment and its findings the Department has made progress towards achieving compliance with the eight 21st century requirements to ensure their utilization and effectiveness in supporting the Department's mission. The chart below represents the Department's 21st Century IDEA Act compliance status.

21st Century Requirements	FY23 Completion %
Section 508 Compliant?	75%
Consistent in appearance with the Department's main ED.GOV website?	21%
Authoritative instance?	92%
Contain a search function?	76%
Provided through a secure connection?	99%
Designed around user needs with data-driven analysis?	83%
Provides an option for a more customized digital experience?	44%
Mobile-friendly and fully functional/usable on mobile devices?	52%

Enterprise Web Governance

In support of its 21st Century IDEA compliance efforts the Department has taken steps to improve standardization and consistency across its various websites and digital services with the establishment of

an Enterprise Web Governance forum that is codified in policy directive ACSD-OCO-001 ED.gov Web Content Management. The Directive establishes a formal web governance body known as the Digital Council to ensure standardization and ensure commonality across web platforms and services across Federal agencies.

Cost and Schedule

In September 2022 a contract was awarded to begin modernization of the Department's main site, while electing to use Azure Cloud, which the Department already owns rather than the proposed Acquia Cloud, resulting in a cost avoidance of $100K for licenses. Progress has been made on building the new site, and the Department anticipates the Phases 1 & 2 of the new ED.gov website will be delivered by June 2024 and Phase 3 by September 2024. Phase 4 of the project is tentatively scheduled to begin in October 2024 pending funding availability to consolidate 30+ other websites into the new ED.gov website, with a project completion set for September 2025. The total 4 Phase project cost will be approximately $10M.

Next Steps

In preparation for ED.gov migration activities the Department has implemented an agency-wide web governance policy, and content lifecycle management standards. The Department will engage the agency in work that will remove approximately 100,000 URLs from ED.gov in preparation for modernization activities. In addition, the Department has invested in data cleansing activities that will support expedited and effective content migration.

The Department will continue to implement the Next Gen/Digital Customer Care project with a focus on integrating servicing website functionality.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide this status report on the Department of Education's website modernization efforts. If you have any questions, please contact 21CenturyWG@ed.gov.