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Accessible Educational Materials

Getting Unstuck: How a Few Determined Educators Strategically and Serendipitously Advanced Accessible Educational Materials

By AEM Center at CAST

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About the Author
Natalie L. Shaheen: Dr. Shaheen is an assistant professor of Blind and Low Vision Education at Illinois State University. Dr. Shaheen's research focuses on equity and access for disabled students in technology-mediated K-12 education

Introduction

In this paper, I report the findings of the second case from a multiple case study. The study explored how State Education Agencies (SEAs) and Local Education Agencies (LEAs) in two Southern states (i.e., State 1 and State 2) enacted federal and state policies to provide Accessible Educational Materials (AEM) to disabled students[1]. The findings from the first case, State 1, have already been published (see Shaheen & Curry, 2023). Readers may find it helpful to review the previous publication for details about the AEM Center's seven state cohort as well as details about State 1's AEM work.

I use pseudonyms throughout this document to protect the identities of the participating organizations and individuals. Herein, I refer to State 2's SEA as State Department of Education and the LEA as Online Academy. Table 1 lists the participants' pseudonyms, organizational and departmental affiliations, and titles.

Table 1: Participants

Pseudonym	Organization	Department	Title
Jason	State Department of Education	Technology	Chief Technology Officer

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[1] Herein I use identity-first language (i.e., disabled person) as many disabled people prefer this language convention. Moreover, the seventh edition of the Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association supports the use of identity-first language in discussions of disability (see Section 5.4).

Pseudonym	Organization	Department	Title
Susan	State Department of Education	Technology	Digital Accessibility Specialist
April	State Department of Education	Special Education	Consultant for Visual Impairment
Matt	Online Academy	Curriculum and Instruction	Instructional Designer

Below, I begin by retelling the story of the work occurring in State 2, a story four participants at two organizations shared through interviews and artifacts. Next, I report the findings from State 2 and a cross-case analysis comparing the two states. Finally, I disseminate the participants' recommendations. See Appendix A for additional details about the methodology employed in this study.

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State Department of Education

The serendipity began with a call for applications from the AEM Center. Simultaneously two educators in opposite wings of the State Department of Education, who were not yet collaborating, approached their superiors to advocate that the State Department of Education apply for the AEM Cohort.

In the Special Education Division, April's supervisor questioned whether she had the capacity to take on the AEM Cohort. "Well, I feel passionate enough about it that I will find the time. And if I can put together the right team, then we've got the capacity. So, I just need the go ahead" (April). April got the go ahead with the caveat that responsibility for the work must extend beyond the Special Education Division.

When Susan approached her boss in the Technology Division, she asked for permission and connection. Susan wanted to collaborate with someone in the Special Education Division, but she needed help identifying the correct person.

With the assistance of their division directors, April and Susan connected and subsequently submitted an application for the AEM Cohort in 2020, just as the COVID-19 pandemic emerged. Applying for the AEM Cohort marked the beginning of "a wonderful journey" (Susan) and "a beautiful working relationship" (April) between two educators who felt strongly "[t]hat [AEM] isn't a special ed thing. Certainly, it's about serving the needs of students with disabilities, but it's really about… instruction and curriculum conversations in general" (Susan).

When April and Susan applied for the AEM Cohort, they didn't realize they "would be doing the first year of the work during the pandemic" (Susan). Due to the pandemic, April and Susan spent hundreds of hours working together on AEM virtually before they "actually met in person" (Susan).

The pandemic notwithstanding, April and Susan "wanted to come out of the gate and do all the things and do them quickly, and know that by the end of year four, [they] had a smooth, comprehensive, twinkles to wrinkles approach, as April calls it" (Susan).

One of April and Susan's first tasks was to identify LEA partners. Online Academy was one of the LEAs they wanted to partner with "[b]ecause previously [April] had worked with Matt on converting Braille materials. So, there were already a lot of connections, and [the AEM Cohort] opened the door for more supportive, ongoing collaboration" (April).

A few years into doing the AEM work as their "side hat" (Susan), and fiercely protecting some time to advance AEM amidst their numerous other responsibilities, April and Susan were dissatisfied with their progress.

Susan felt like they had "been stuck in the mud." "I feel like I'm about to burst. We're just stuck in the mud, and all we need is to be empowered, and for [AEM] to be recognized as a moral imperative… we've got multiple reasons to make [AEM] a priority. And I think it's competing with a lot of other priorities, and those priorities are more public facing, and [AEM] has just taken a back seat" (Susan). April and Susan repeatedly presented the case for AEM to upper leadership, employing compelling stories and revealing data. Upper leadership agreed there was a problem, but their words were not empowering because action never followed.

Luckily, April and Susan received ample support from the AEM Center team up north at CAST. "[O]ur friends at CAST have always been gracious in encouraging us… I'm glad that they purposefully called us back to reflect on how all the little pieces of movement that we've had really do help us gain momentum" (Susan).

While April and Susan continued to do everything in their power to advance AEM "without rocking the boat or stepping on toes" (Susan), Jason was leveraging his role in leadership to strategically make space to prioritize AEM.

Two and a half years earlier, Jason serendipitously found an accessibility ally at a State Department of Education open house. He ran into Susan, who he used to work with at University Institute, and learned that accessibility was her "side hat" (Susan). The timing was perfect. He'd recently started the process of creating a digital accessibility position

on his team. If he could secure funding for the position, perhaps Susan would be interested in the role.

"[G]etting new positions at a state education agency is a challenge" (Jason). Consequently, to bring the digital accessibility position to fruition, Jason had to be patient and strategic. Jason explained, "[T]here wasn't a position available that we could cut to create the [digital accessibility] position. So, we had to kind of wait."

Then serendipity struck. Jason learned there were unused Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief (ESSER) funds available at the same time he had a vacancy on his team that he could not fill. The opportunity Jason had been patiently waiting for just surfaced. Jason recounted his thought process, "[W]e can get a good year out of this [digital accessibility] position on this [ESSER] funding. That'll let us get some wins, show some value, demonstrate the importance, and then we can talk about sustained permanent funding."

At the beginning of data collection in State 2, Susan had just started as the digital accessibility specialist on Jason's team. With ample time to devote to advancing AEM, and support from upper leadership, particularly Jason, Susan no longer felt like the AEM work was "stuck in the mud." Finally, the State Department of Education team could do "all the things"—and they did.

Now that they were unstuck, the team was not going to stop at K-12 education or the state line. They helped develop an accessibility community of practice for employees across State 2 governmental agencies, and they took a road trip to facilitate AEM professional development for K-12 educators in a neighboring Southern state.

Online Academy

A few years earlier, down the digital road at Online Academy, several administrators and educators had attended accessibility training at WebAIM "so they understood the importance and they fully grasped [accessibility]. They just weren't sure how to approach it" (Matt). They were stuck until they hired their first instructional designer, Matt, who had extensive technology accessibility knowledge.

When Matt joined the team, he realized Online Academy did not have a critical policy in place—"an organizational-wide accessibility plan" (Matt). So, Matt took on the responsibility of creating that plan. He "formed three different cross-org teams to figure out a plan to fully address accessibility organization-wide" (Matt). The cross-organization teams conducted an "in-depth assessment" (Matt) to understand the state of accessibility across almost one thousand courses.

The daunting task was like quicksand. Over the next few years, Online Academy tried several different approaches, but nothing was effective for such a large-scale accessibility audit. They were stuck again.

Finally, the team found an automated accessibility auditing tool that was compatible with their learning management system. With that tool in their toolbox, Online Academy was no longer stuck.

Today, accessibility is "built into every aspect" (Matt) of Online Academy's work. Their accessibility plan is extensive and addresses topics such as: the accessibility of all of their instructional technologies, automated and manual testing, professional development for teachers, and the accessibility of their website.

When Online Academy joined the AEM Cohort, their accessibility effort was "a well-oiled machine" (April). Matt brought "a wealth of knowledge and expertise" (Susan) to State 2's AEM Cohort team. Together, April, Susan, and Matt developed a variety of professional development opportunities to support the field at large. Matt led the team's work on developing a public Canvas course to encourage educators to "create and implement accessibility first" (April).

Findings

In this section, I report the ways in which the Quality Indicators with Critical Components for Providing AEM (National Center on AEM, 2020) show up in the data. First, I discuss the data from State 2. Then, I provide a brief cross-case analysis between State 2 and State 1.

Quality Indicators and Critical Components in State 2

There are 7 Quality Indicators that are further broken down into 28 Critical Components (National Center on Accessible Educational Materials, 2020). I analyzed the data from State 2 through the lens of the Quality Indicators and Critical Components and found that all 7 Quality Indicators as well as 13 of the Critical Components were addressed. Appendix B offers exemplars of how the Quality Indicators showed up in the corpus, and Table 2 provides an overview.

Table 2: Quality Indicators and Critical Components in State 2

Quality Indicator (QI)/Critical Component (CC)	State Department of Education	Online Academy
QI 1	✓	✓
CC 1.1	✓	
CC 1.2	✓	✓
CC 1.3	✓	✓
QI 2	✓	✓
CC 2.1		
CC 2.2	✓	✓
CC 2.3		
QI 3	✓	✓
CC 3.1		✓
CC 3.2	✓	✓
CC 3.3		✓
CC 3.4		✓
CC 3.5		
QI 4	✓	✓
CC 4.1	✓	✓
CC 4.2	✓	✓
CC 4.3	✓	✓
QI 5	✓	
CC 5.1		
CC 5.2	✓	
CC 5.3		
CC 5.4		
QI 6	✓	
CC 6.1		
CC 6.2		
CC 6.3		
CC 6.4		
CC 6.5		
CC 6.6		
CC 6.7		
CC 6.8		
QI 7	✓	
CC 7.1	✓	
CC 7.2		

Quality Indicator 4 (Learning Opportunities and Technical Assistance), Quality Indicator 1 (Coordinated System), and Quality Indicator 3 (Written Guidelines) are by far the most commonly discussed Quality Indicators in the State 2 data. All three Quality Indicators are discussed by both organizations. Quality Indicator 5 (Data Collection) and 6 (Data Use) are barely discussed in the data and only by the State Department of Education.

Across the interviews and artifacts, Critical Component 1.2, which pertains to ensuring digital educational materials are accessible at the point of creation or acquisition, and Critical Component 4.3, regarding using government funded high-quality resources, were the most discussed. Critical Components 3.4 (guidelines that delineate roles and responsibilities at all levels) and 4.1 (content that is targeted at the differentiated roles and responsibilities of all stakeholders) are also pronounced in the data. Given Quality Indicators 1, 3, and 4 were the most heavily discussed, it follows that the most discussed Critical Components are subordinate to those Quality Indicators.

It is possible that this study did not capture the entire breadth of the SEA and LEA's work to provide AEM. The two organizations might, for example, be more heavily engaged in work that aligns with Quality Indicators 5-7 than the data indicates. Moreover, the AEM work in both States 1 and 2 continued beyond the data collection period and is ongoing as of this writing.

Comparing State 2 and State 1

Looking across the data from both states, it is apparent that Quality Indicators 1 (A Coordinated System) and 4 (Learning Opportunities and Technical Assistance) were central to all five organizations' AEM work. However, in State 2 the work was more focused on Quality Indicator 4, and in State 1 the work was more focused on Quality Indicator 1. Additionally, in State 2, Quality Indicator 3 (Written Guidelines) was a tertiary focus. Work around Quality Indicator 3 is also evident in the data from State 1, but it is not a focus. Table 3 compares the focus of the AEM work in the two states by Quality Indicator.

Table 3: Comparing the Focus of AEM Work Across States

Level of Focus	State 2 (2023-2024)	State 1 (2021-2022)
Primary	Quality Indicator 4	Quality Indicator 1
Secondary	Quality Indicator 1	Quality Indicator 4
Tertiary	Quality Indicator 3	none

Below, I zoom in to provide a more detailed comparison of the work occurring around Quality Indicators 1, 3, and 4 in both states.

Quality Indicator 1: A Coordinated System

During the 2023-2024 academic year the SEA in State 2 was beginning to develop a coordinated system, with a particular focus on creating strategic partnerships within the SEA. The LEA in State 2 had a robust system for the provision of AEM for their students, which was documented in written guidelines (see Quality Indicator 3).

During the 2021-2022 academic year, State 1 was actively revamping its coordinated system for the provision of AEM, partially in response to changes in the state's educational material adoption laws. A few years earlier, a new law shifted the responsibility for procurement from the SEA down to LEAs. During this study, the two LEAs in State 1 were developing and refining their procurement processes to ensure new educational materials were accessible to disabled students. Simultaneously, the SEA was refining its approach to ensure the coordinated system was meeting the needs of LEAs with a wide-range of knowledge about accessibility.

Quality Indicator 3: Written Guidelines

In State 2, during the 2023-2024 academic year, the LEA had thorough guidelines in place for procuring, authoring, and using accessible materials and technologies. The SEA was planning to develop accessibility guidelines, leveraging its recent experience implementing data privacy guidelines, but that work had not yet begun.

In contrast, in State 1, both LEAs were writing accessibility guidelines throughout the 2021-2022 academic year, and the SEA was providing technical assistance. However, guidelines were not in place in any of the State 1 organizations during the 2021-2022 academic year.

Quality Indicator 4: Learning Opportunities and Technical Assistance

In State 2 the SEA and LEA collaboratively developed a plethora of learning opportunities for educators in their state and around the country. They developed a multi-day train-the-trainers workshop for LEA teams and subsequently published all of the materials for that workshop in a peer-reviewed journal. The State 2 team also took the workshop on the road to a neighboring state. During this study, the team was preparing synchronous (i.e., conference presentations) and asynchronous (i.e., a Canvas course) professional development for educators around the country. In addition, Susan pushed accessibility professional development into meetings across the State Department of Education.

In State 1, the SEA did not conduct synchronous professional development for LEAs because the LEAs said they did not need that support. Instead, the SEA developed a toolkit of just-in-time resources about determining who qualifies for AEM. The LEAs used those resources, as well as resources from the AEM Center, to conduct primarily

building-level professional development. Additionally, both LEAs were beginning to think about how to support teachers in creating their own AEM.

Context is Key

Previous research has indicated that context mediates technology accessibility policy enactment in K-12 (Shaheen, 2022). The data from this case study supports that finding. The SEAs and LEAs in these two states addressed the Quality Indicators and Critical Components in a sequence that made sense in their context, as discussed above.

Though States 1 and 2 are both in the South and were both involved in the AEM Center Cohort, their contexts were not the same during this study. Four key differences are worth noting. First, data collection occurred in two different academic years (State 1 2021-2022; State 2 2023-2024). The 2021-2022 academic year was the second year of the four-year National Center on AEM Cohort, and the 2023-2024 academic year was the fourth year. Second, impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic were greater during the 2021-2022 academic year than in the 2023-2024 academic year. Third, the two states have different educational material acquisition approaches. State 1 uses an open territory approach, and State 2 uses a state adoption approach. Finally, the core team of educators in the two states had different types and levels of prior knowledge related to AEM.

Recommendations

The participants in State 2 had seven key pieces of advice for other practitioners who want to advance AEM in their SEA or LEA:

1. "You've got to start where you are" (April). That might not be where you would like to be, but remember "that your starting point is not your finish line" (April).
2. "[D]on't do it alone" (Susan). Build a cross-organization team that includes people in and outside of special education—because AEM "isn't a special ed thing" (Susan).
3. You need a plan to guide your work, but your plan has to be flexible so you can take advantage of serendipity and changes in your context. Moreover, make sure your plan includes time for reflection so you can "recognize the small steps you have been able to make" (Susan).
4. "[T]ry to focus on little things that have big wins. It is easy to get overwhelmed by the number of things you have to do for accessibility, but there are little things you can do. Make sure your videos are captioned. Make sure you are semantically styling your documents. Make sure you are using clear, concise language and providing detailed instructions. Things like that yield high returns" (Jason).

5. "Sit down with them [disabled students] and have a conversation, and start there. After that conversation, if you're not moved to make a change, I don't know that you're in the right spot" (Matt).
6. Choose accessible curriculums, technologies, and open educational resources. They exist today, and procuring accessible materials and technologies takes care of a significant portion of the work.
7. "Build champions" (Susan). "If someone is interested in hearing more about it [accessibility], jump on it." Take advantage of any opportunity you can find to talk about AEM.

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Appendix A: Methodology

The purpose of this study was to gain a deeper understanding of how K-12 SEAs and LEAs enacted technology accessibility policies, particularly when they had the support of the AEM Center. The study followed a multiple case (embedded) design (Yin, 2014). As depicted in Table 4, there were two cases (State 1 and State 2) in this study, and each case had two or three embedded units of analysis (i.e., the SEAs and LEAs). This paper presents the findings from State 2 and a brief cross-case analysis. The findings from the first case, State 1, were published in 2023 (see Shaheen & Curry, 2023).

Table 4: Case Study Design

Case	Embedded Units of Analysis
State 1	State Department of Education (SEA), Gibson School District (LEA), and Hawthorn Public Schools (LEA)
State 2	State Department of Education (SEA) and Online Academy (LEA)

In State 2, I conducted four semi-structured interviews, which ranged in length from 50-88 minutes. Table 1 lists the State 2 participants, their organizational affiliation, their department, and their title. None of the participants identified as Deaf or disabled. Three of the four participants identified as white, and one identified as Native American and Caucasian. Two participants identified as women, and two as men. In addition to the interviews, I analyzed four artifacts, which ranged in length from 429-15,322 words. The artifacts included professional development materials, draft procurement contract language, and accessibility policies.

I analyzed the data via several rounds of coding. In the first several rounds of coding I used emergent approaches. In the final round of coding, I used a priori codes (i.e., Quality Indicators and Critical Components). This research was approved by the CAST Institutional Review Board.

Appendix B: Data Exemplars of the Quality Indicators

Quality Indicator 1: A Coordinated System

"One of the things that I've noticed has worked well for us is leveraging strategic partnerships, building relationships with people, and jumping on opportunities when they land in your lap, even if that means we take a hard right turn from what we thought we were going to get done this year. For example, we have a project manager who somehow found out that April and I were engaged in accessibility. He felt a personal call to start really elevating the topic of accessibility. He gave us a call and said, 'I'm working on procurement, and I heard you all are working on accessibility. I would love to get you engaged and work together to talk about what we're doing right, what we need to do, and maybe work together on a first iteration of some procurement language that we need to improve.' And we weren't even thinking about procurement, because we hadn't even told the story yet. We were still just trying to build some champions. And when he came to us with that, we jumped all over it, because it was an opportunity" (Susan).

"… How do we build capacity? Because let's say that my position does go away next September. What am I leaving behind? A legacy of, well, the day Susan left, nothing else happened with procurement. It's got to be about building capacity and helping folks understand what they need to be looking for, and that it needs to begin at the point of inception for projects, not just after the bids come in" (Susan).

"A year ago, out of an OCR complaint, emerged a task force to look at accessibility across the agency that I was charged with leading. It became pretty clear that we need training. Okay, fine. Who's going to do it, right? Okay, we need somebody to help with documents. Okay, fine. Who's going to do it? We need somebody to help with procurement. Okay, fine. Who's going to do it? Right? So, it became pretty clear that nothing we would do on that committee really would matter unless it was somebody's job to execute. And so there was a lot of support from leadership to make it happen. It was just the logistics. I never had to work to justify the position" (Jason).

"[S]o they [Online Academy] have a template. They have a strict vetting process to ensure that all of their material is accessible… they're actually working with some of our separate public schools for the blind and deaf to use their [Online Academy's] courses because they are already accessible" (April).

"The one thing I'll share in closing that I try to emphasize all over the place is this has to be a team effort… That's the only way everything I've talked to you about today works, is when there's a team of people willing to work together to do it. If you try to handle it

individually and you work against each other, you're not going to ever make it anywhere" (Matt).

Quality Indicator 2: Provision in a Timely Manner

"State 2 has a definition for 'timely manner' for the state; Some data exists that can be pulled together from resources like Bookshare, Greenbook, etc. Gap in data is determining elapsed time between identified need and provision of AEM. Action Steps: (1) Develop and distribute surveys to stakeholders; (2) Collect and analyze data; (3) Identify available data for AT device provision and distribution; (4) Review NIMAC data for VI students" (State Department of Education Artifact 1).

"The final resource presented was the state created AEM planning tool. The AEM planning tool is good to share with all the teachers on a student's team to ensure all accessible formats that are required are being requested in a timely manner. Depending on the AMP [Accessible Materials Producer], it could take days or even 6+ months to secure the needed format, so pre-planning is essential. The planning tool can be shared electronically with all teachers on a student's schedule at any time, but it is recommended to share 3-6 months prior to a new semester starting. This tool can assist teams with ensuring that all teachers have input in securing accessible formats for the content they are charged with teaching" (State Department of Education Artifact 2).

"Or telling them that, for example, we've got students who have been waiting up to three months to get an adapted format of a real version of a textbook. That's not timely manner. So, telling these stories and making the case to leadership" (April).

Quality Indicator 3: Written Guidelines

"In 2019, Online Academy leadership established a commitment to digital accessibility with the formation of an accessibility team. The mission of the team is to ensure digital accessibility by creating and implementing a set of accessibility procedures. This team will ensure continuous improvement by meeting throughout the year as technology updates warrant and will reconvene annually to assess and evaluate the following departmental guidelines" (Online Academy Artifact 1).

"If you're doing this kind of business, you should meet these standards. I want to do that for accessibility too. I want to make sure schools have the tools they need to put language in contracts to say, 'We will be producing accessible content, and we will maintain accessible content.' And for schools to start putting that into contracts. And then same thing here [at State Department of Education] with the stuff that we're buying, that we have good consistent language in our contracts… a lot of what we do is

contracting, and that's the vehicle we have to move things. We can't tell school districts that they must do anything, but we can say, 'Here's some language. Anything we buy, anything we buy for you, anything you buy, here's some language you should use'" (Jason).

"State 2 landscape 1: Not started; No state guidelines on the provision and use of AEM and AT. Action Steps: Draft guidelines; Include references to relevant laws and policies" (State Department of Education Artifact 1).

"What are vendors capable of delivering? Because… if you go too soft, you haven't done anything. But if you go too far, nobody's going to meet them, and nobody is going to want to do business in State 2" (Jason).

"And then figure out a way that can be done such that it would be accessible to the districts, and that the districts would know how to evaluate it. And that's another lesson learned from security is that most of our school districts have really, really awesome technical staff, but a lot of them have never had to read a third party audit to look for evidence of compliance and the standards. So, the same thing with accessibility, they can't look at an Accessibility Conformance Report (ACR) and say, yep, this is good, or not. So, what is that kind of digestible guidance? Is it just that you should have a conformance report? Is that good enough? Or look at these five things? What are the things that we can give to the schools that are digestible and not onerous around supporting materials" (Jason).

Quality Indicator 4: Learning Opportunities and Technical Assistance

"Online Academy has developed and shared comprehensive information and resources with our teachers and teachers in training. An accessibility training plan for teachers was developed in 2020 and has been implemented" (Online Academy Artifact 1).

"We've had several conferences that were more geared toward the special education side. Susan took it to the digital teaching and learning side, and I think she did eight presentations statewide that were in-person, all-day trainings" (April).

"[A] lot of our work with our other LEAs has been more individualized and technical. One of our larger LEAs was having difficulty trying to make their PDFs and workbooks accessible to students. And so, we had to work more directly with them on that, while another was having more difficulty with some of their assessments that they had purchased because it's local authority. They had purchased some assessments… But they were not accessible to electronic Braille readers and electronic Braille notetakers. We used one of them as a case to find the shining light if there's an OCR complaint.

Because you can learn from your mistakes, and you can help others not to have the same mistakes. And in the end, if you learn and grow from it, then you're making it better for everybody else. So, we were able to have teachable moments for some of our LEAs" (April).

"[A]s far as supporting [Online Academy's] work, I don't know that we're really supporting them as much, or that they would need as much support. Because they are a well-oiled machine. One thing that we are doing to try to support the field with them is we're putting together a Canvas course, so that it will be online and you can work at your own pace… we're trying to build courses so people can create and implement accessibility first. So, I guess supporting [Online Academy]? No, we're really not doing too much. They're supporting us a lot. But supporting the field, we're working in collaboration" (April).

"[O]ne whole module of that [Teacher In Training program] is on accessibility… So every incoming teacher, regardless of experience with us, now as a result of all this, has to go through accessibility training" (Matt).

"So [Susan's] been working with our state IT department and they've stood up a multi-agency accessibility community of practice" (Jason).

"So for example, one of the inroads I feel like I've had is that my supervisor, I said, is there any way I could do an accessibility, I call them my digital accessibility nuggets? A nugget of information at our biweekly tech director meetings… And I do literally no more than five minutes. That's my own personal guideline, no more than five minutes. But it's just a nugget… It might be that I'm teaching them about how to add alt text to a functional image, whatever it is. And so I've really leveraged that. I think for folks who are just starting out on this path, it's about just thinking about ways that you can plug into existing systems and processes. So I just pushed in a little bit and was able to carve out five minutes at each of those meetings" (Susan).

Quality Indicator 5: Data Collection

"Initial State 2 landscape 3: Collected data from several sources; We have various sources of data (APH; Greenbook; Bookshare; Learning Ally); Not organized to effectively inform AEM/AT provision/use. Action Steps: Identify and gather available data; Identify gaps in data; Establish data collection methods to address gaps" (State Department of Education Artifact 1).

"We had to gather a lot of information. We had to get the data, we had to get the current landscape. You have to know where you are to be able to know where you want to go.

And so, we had a lot of, 'What data do we have?' We have splinter data. We have broken data. We have more data in this resource, in this field, than we do others. Where do we need to get more data? And so that was a lot of it because we weren't going to be able to see change, we weren't going to be able to implement change if we didn't know what we had, where we were coming from, so we could predict where we needed to go and how fast" (April).

"We've done an initial automated evaluation of all the school district's homepages for their websites, and gathered data and said, 'Here we go. Consistently every single one of them has errors, every single one'" (Susan).

"I would encourage any other state to obviously get as much data as you can find, and as you have, around the current landscape, because that definitely helps you tell the story and will absolutely be an advocacy point for you. Because I know you're going to find data. You're going to have a wealth of data that shows, 'Wow, this is something we need to work on.'"

Quality Indicator 6: Data Use

"Initial State 2 landscape 1: Not started; Limited data collection and availability inhibits effective data use; Not using data to identify AEM/AT provision/use; Not using data to monitor timely manner. Action Steps: Identify population (e.g., students who are Braille readers) and collect and analyze related data; Use experience to inform broader data collection and data use efforts" (State Department of Education Artifact 1).

"Moving forward, we've got to leverage those success stories, professional development feedback, and the data to say, 'This is the current landscape.' Those who have listened and heard about accessibility are jumping on it and moving forward" (Susan).

Quality Indicator 7: Resource Allocation

"Initial State 2 landscape 2: Under development; Limited and inequitable resources allocated; Resources not sufficient to ensure the delivery and sustainability of quality services for students who need AEM/AT in a timely manner; Resources not sufficient to implement a comprehensive system for AEM/AT. Action Steps: Analyze the fiscal, human, and infrastructure resources available; Complete a needs assessment; Complete a risk assessment" (State Department of Education Artifact 1).

"We were able to use federal ESSER funding to jumpstart it [accessibility specialist position], and then the goal is to get continuing funding longterm to support the position. So right now, the position's time-limited, but we'll get funding to continue" (Jason).

"I'm absolutely thrilled that there's a leader in the agency [Jason] who has pushed and pushed and pushed. It has been in the works for two and a half years to get this accessibility position, and it finally came to fruition" (Susan).