



ABOUT TCSS

Public School District

19,100 PreK-12 students

1 Full-Time
Communications
Professional + 1 Part-Time
Support Staff Member



Websites That Work for Everyone

Reimagining the Online Experience in TCSS

NSPRA GOLD MEDALLION SUBMISSION:
SPECIAL COMMUNICATION PROJECT/CAMPAIGN

Terri Brewer, Director of Public Relations
Tuscaloosa County School System

1118 Greensboro Avenue, Tuscaloosa, Alabama 35401
(202) 342-2886 | tbrewer@tcss.net

Eric Hagemann, Founder and Strategist
Leif Media & PR

10742 Rhode Island Avenue North, Minneapolis, Minnesota 55445
(763) 232-0656 | eric@leifpr.com



Synopsis

For the Tuscaloosa County School System (TCSS), a web accessibility complaint filed with the Office of Civil Rights (OCR) proved to be a catalyst for positive change that no one saw coming.

That's because the complaint was the impetus for the district to expedite a comprehensive website redesign—an initiative that not only prioritized accessibility, but also vastly improved the experience for internal and external stakeholders alike.

Though there are various approaches to web design, one universal truth stands out: Public school districts have a responsibility to ensure their websites are functional and accessible to *all* users, regardless of abilities. When TCSS Director of Public Relations Terri Brewer joined the district in 2018, she inherited a collection of 36 school websites designed by 36 different people. The sites were complicated and structurally unsound, lacking uniformity and a brand identity. Most concerning, however, were accessibility issues that created significant barriers for users. A cosmetic redesign in 2019 helped but did not address the underlying issues.

The four years that followed brought the situation into focus, highlighted by the COVID-19 pandemic—which exposed the need for equal access to technology—and the OCR complaint. In 2023, district leaders knew a change was needed.

What may seem like a straightforward website overhaul is far more nuanced. With a dual focus on accessibility and improving the user experience, TCSS staff and school communications partner Leif Media & PR embarked on a seven-month effort to create mobile-first websites that are as visually appealing as they are accessible. This intensive work also required a mindset shift for district staff. Accessibility can be difficult to grasp for even the savviest communications professionals, but more challenging is the task of relaying this concept to individuals who are not engaged in this work on a regular basis.



With a dual focus on accessibility and improving the user experience, TCSS staff and school communications partner Leif Media & PR embarked on a seven-month effort to create mobile-first websites that are as visually appealing as they are accessible.

With inclusivity, consistency and ease of navigation as guiding principles, TCSS strategically reimagined 38 district and school websites to shine as accessible, functional communication vehicles. Through thoughtful planning and design—plus buy-in from district leaders and continuing education for school webmasters—the Tuscaloosa County School System now boasts an online presence that models accessibility and user-centric design.

Research

As the web redesign project launched, the team conducted both primary and secondary research that would shape the goals and objectives of the plan. Research included quantitative and qualitative measures. All research was non-scientific.

TCSS Staff & Caregiver Focus Group

The team consulted with 12 individuals to elicit feedback on the existing district and school websites. With a focus on creating websites that work for everyone, this group included district and school staff members and parents/caregivers of TCSS students. Participants widely noted the need for consistent navigation and structure across all sites. Participants also said it took too many clicks on the existing sites to reach the information they were seeking, if they could find it at all. Finally, **75 percent** of focus group members said they use their smartphone to visit the district and school websites.



Mobile-First Design Statistics

- Globally, more than **50 percent** of users access websites on mobile devices. This number continues to rise and is higher in some situations and populations. (*GS StatCounter, 2022*)
- **Eighty-five percent** of users report that the mobile version of a website should perform as good or better than the desktop version. (*Inside Design and WebsiteBuilder, 2022*)
- In September 2023, **98 percent** of U.S. adults, aged 18-49, owned a smartphone. (*Pew Research, 2023*)
- The average user spends **54 seconds** visiting a website. (*Contentsquare, 2021*)
- In 2022-2023, approximately **60 percent** of the district's stakeholders (families, faculty and staff) accessed district newsletters on mobile devices. (*Smore analytics*)
- In 2022, TCSS launched a **one-to-one device initiative**, in which every student is assigned an iPad for take-home educational use. This reinforced the notion that TCSS websites, which students visit on their devices to access educational resources, should be designed to work well on tablet-sized screens.



OCR Complaint Details

In September 2023, the web accessibility complaint from OCR identified areas of the TCSS district and school sites that presented barriers for users with visual impairments and who use assistive technology. These included:

- PDFs that displayed district lunch menus
- PDFs of Board of Education meeting minutes
- Board of Education policies listed in the TCSS Policy Manual PDF
- 2023-2024 TCSS Middle School Handbook PDF

WCAG 2.1 AA Requirements

The team reviewed current accessibility guidelines relevant to public school websites. The Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG) Version 2.1, Level AA is the technical standard for state and local governments' web content and mobile apps. This rule sets a specific technical standard that state and local governments must follow to meet their existing obligations under Title II of the ADA for web and mobile app accessibility. All content on TCSS district and school sites should conform to this standard.

Research



Review of Existing TCSS Websites

In 2023, the team conducted an inventory and content analysis of the TCSS district site. Findings included:

Substantial Page Volume

The district site housed content across 209 unique pages. This did not include pages housed on the 36 additional school sites; those sites contained as many as 100 additional pages each. Across all school and district sites, content was spread across more than 3,000 pages.

Lack of Mobile Responsiveness

While the homepage layout was responsive to the size of the user's screen, this did not often continue throughout the interior pages. Most pages were difficult to navigate on a smartphone or tablet.

Inaccessible PDFs

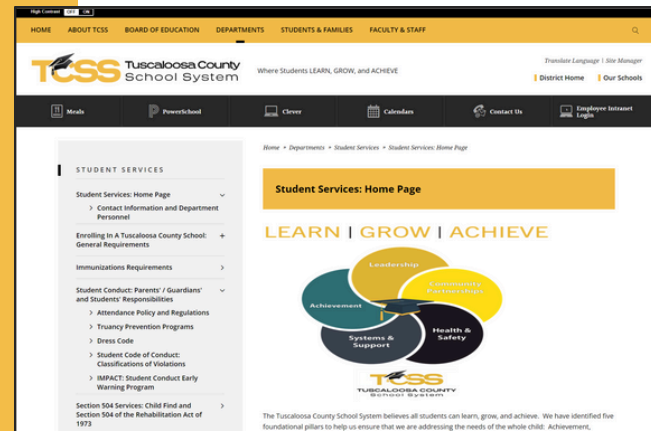
Much of the information on the sites was contained in PDFs, with little or no accessibility for visitors using assistive technology.

Additionally, approximately 40 different languages are spoken among the families of the Tuscaloosa County School System. While the site was translatable, these translation features did not apply to information contained within PDFs, presenting barriers for non-English speakers.

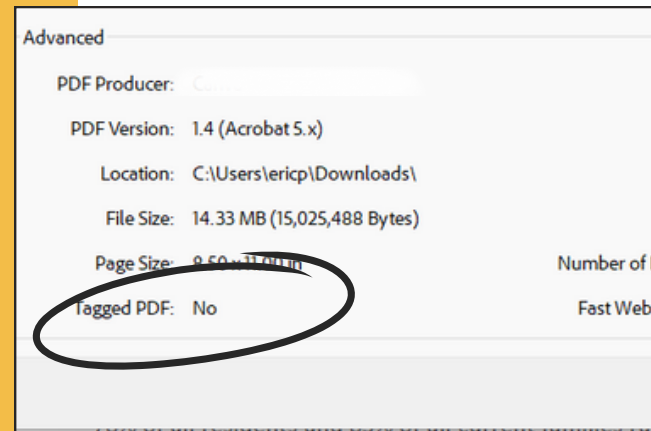
Images & Graphics Without Alternative Text

More than half of the pages throughout the collection of websites contained images without appropriate alternative text, images containing data, or improperly formatted tables.

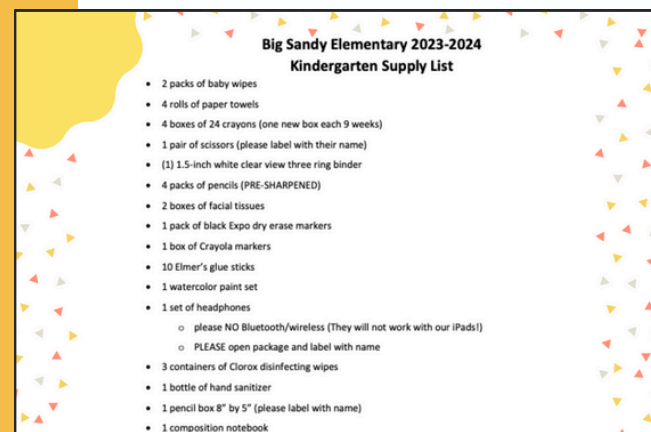
These items also presented barriers for those using assistive technology and non-English speakers. Further, tables and data within graphics created an undesirable experience for visitors using mobile devices.



Pages on the existing sites were not optimized for mobile and contained both confusing navigation and graphics without alt text.



PDFs were rampant on the existing websites—and in almost every case, they were not properly set up to meet the needs of individuals who rely on assistive technology.



Most images on the existing site were missing descriptive alt text. In some cases, like this supply list uploaded as a .png file, they were doomed from the start when it comes to achieving accessibility.

Planning

After receiving the OCR complaint, the district knew quick action was needed. Not only were the sites inaccessible to individuals with disabilities and those using assistive technology, but they were not optimized for use on mobile devices. These shortcomings also meant the sites did not work well for visitors who do not read English, while the volume of pages and inconsistencies in navigation created an undesirable experience for all users.

TCSS considered the high visibility of this work and that the needs of all individuals must be met. But with a one-person communications department serving 36 schools, it was clear that a partner would be necessary to meet the project goal. Given the importance of web accessibility, school communications partner Leif Media & PR was hired to provide support.

Project Goal

Create accessible district and school websites that not only remedy the OCR complaints, but also foster inclusivity and stronger engagement among visitors of all abilities, regardless of their native language or the devices they use to access the websites.

Objective 1

By May 2024, develop 38 district and school websites that meet WCAG 2.1 Level AA standards.

- **Strategy:** Retain partner with necessary expertise in school website design and accessibility.
- **Strategy:** Create content for all websites that contains alternative text, is free of directional language and utilizes a descriptive hyperlink structure. In cases where documents are necessary, ensure they pass accessibility checks.
- **Strategy:** Develop clear content standards that sustain the integrity of this work moving forward, including parameters around site permissions.
- **Target Audience:** All users of TCSS websites, including those with disabilities, non-English speakers and users of all device types.

Objective 2

By August 2024, four district staff and 36 school website managers will demonstrate proficiency in accessibility best practices and school site administration by logging into the CMS, creating a news post, updating gallery photos and knowing how to request support.

- **Strategy:** Design and implement a strategic training program for select school staff in order to ensure consistent updates, accessible content and the integrity of the site structure.
- **Strategy:** Implement a centralized system for school site managers to submit requests for website updates that are beyond the scope of a school site manager.
- **Target Audience:** District-level administrators, school administrators and school website managers.

Objective 3

Achieve at least 50,000 visits to the district website during the back-to-school month of August 2024, with visitors spending an average of at least one minute engaging with the site.

- **Strategy:** Promote redesigned TCSS website to all families, faculty and staff in back-to-school communications, emphasizing dedicated back-to-school hub on the district site.
- **Strategy:** Utilize plain text content and the Finals site posts module—instead of uploaded documents—to facilitate a more accessible and engaging mobile user experience.
- **Target Audience:** All users of TCSS district and school websites.

Planning

Project Team Members

Terri Brewer, Director of Public Relations at Tuscaloosa County School System

- Coordinate efforts between project partner, website vendor and TCSS staff
- Ensure redesigned websites align with the district's goals and Strategic Plan
- Train selected district staff and school website managers to use content management system
- Communicate with all district stakeholders (staff, families and community members) about the new websites

Eric Hagemann, Founder and Strategist at Leif Media & PR

- Develop website strategy and sitemap
- Bring forth recommendations to TCSS
- Redesign all pages while adhering to web accessibility standards
- Provide launch day support
- Create district-specific training materials and collaborate on post-launch communications
- Provide ongoing post-launch support throughout 2024-2025 school year

Note: Several other individuals were also part of the project team—offering everything from technical support to answering stakeholder questions to providing updates to the Board of Education.

- Sara Young, TCSS Receptionist & Website Support
- Brad Jessen, TCSS Director of Technology
- Dr. Keri Johnson, TCSS Superintendent
- TCSS District Administrative Team
- School Website Managers
- Laura Robertson, Finalsite Client Success Manager

Key Messages for TCSS Staff

1. The Tuscaloosa County School System is in the process of updating all district and school websites in order to enhance accessibility and improve the user experience for all visitors.
2. The new websites, including the TCSS Staff Portal, will launch in the spring. Notable features include mobile-first design, streamlined navigation, enhanced accessibility and a robust search engine.
3. School webmasters will receive additional information about website training opportunities prior to the 2024-25 school year.

Key Messages for TCSS Families

1. The Tuscaloosa County School System is in the process of updating all district and school websites in order to enhance accessibility and improve the user experience for all visitors.
2. Launching this spring, the new websites will better serve TCSS students and families with a streamlined navigation, content that is organized more logically, content that is accessible and translatable, a powerful search engine and more.
3. For the first time, all school websites will feature consistency in both design and navigation, allowing families with students at multiple schools to find information more easily and intuitively.
4. In alignment with data, the sites will feature mobile-first design.

Communication Channels

To target district stakeholders and potential users of the websites, the project team utilized these communication channels:

- Emails to families and staff
- Articles in district and school newsletters
- Meetings with district department leaders and administrators of all schools
- Post-launch pop-up alerts on district and school homepages
- In-person training sessions with site editors

Budget

CMS & hosting for 38 domains

- \$56,723 per year

Website strategy & support (Leif)

- \$20,500 initial investment
- \$7,000 earmarked for support throughout the 2024-2025 school year

Implementation

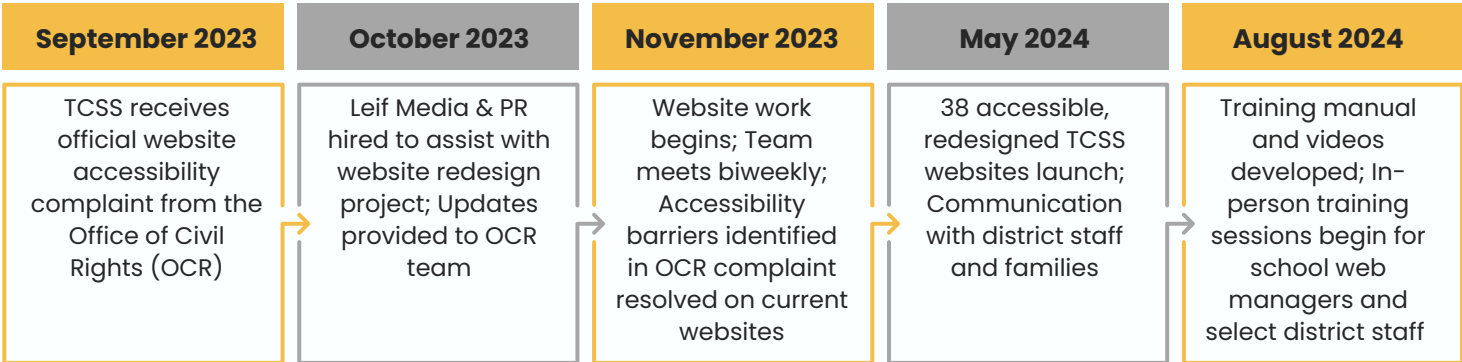
With the project set to begin—and a tight timeline to navigate—the team used specific tactics to carry out strategies and work toward the objectives.



Tactics

- **Proactive communication with TCSS families and staff members**—via emails, newsletter articles and in-person meetings—to share information about the redesign process and create feedback opportunities. *(September 2023 - August 2024)*
- **Collaborating with department leaders** to gather feedback, ensuring sites meet stakeholder needs and adhere to accessibility requirements. *(September 2023 - April 2024)*
- **A kick-off meeting** between core project team members to set the strategy and discuss the approach to achieving greater website accessibility. *(October 2023)*
- **Designing 38 district and school websites** to achieve accessibility goals—including selecting and modifying color palettes and fonts to achieve appropriate contrast and readability, respectively. *(October 2023 - May 2024)*
- **Refining sitemaps**, while giving consideration to word choices and the journeys users take when interacting with the sites. *(October 2023)*
- **Bi-weekly meetings** between core project team members, plus monthly meetings with the client success manager representing the website vendor. *(November 2023 - August 2024)*
- **Migrating and consolidating content** to ensure alignment with web accessibility best practices and reflect a mobile-first strategy. *(November 2023 - May 2024)*
- **Developing TCSS-specific web standards** to help the sites retain their integrity post-launch. *(November 2023 - May 2024)*
- **Collaborating with the TCSS technology team** regarding specific domain requirements and other technical aspects to prepare for launch. *(March - May 2024)*
- **Crafting and disseminating communications** that announce the new sites to staff, families, students and community members. *(April 2024)*
- **Creating a site maintenance strategy** that gives select district and school employees access to update certain portions of the sites. *(April - July 2024)*
- **Creating a user-friendly back-to-school hub** on the TCSS website that encourages repeat visits to the site at a time when stakeholders are most likely to seek out this information. *(July 2024)*
- **Developing training materials** for webmasters. *(July - August 2024)*
- **Hosting in-person training sessions** for webmasters to practice using the CMS, become familiar with the sitemap/strategy and better understand web accessibility. *(August 2024)*
- **Publishing articles in the staff newsletter** to share site navigation tips and website accessibility insights with the district's 2,400 employees. *(October - December 2024)*

Timeline



Ongoing: TCSS and Leif meet biweekly to monitor and discuss feedback and ensure site integrity remains intact.

Evaluation

When evaluating the measurable objectives outlined in the planning phase, the team gleaned key takeaways and some valuable lessons learned for future website projects.

Objective 1

By May 2024, develop 38 district and school websites that meet WCAG 2.1 Level AA standards.

- **Evidence:** On May 3, 2024, TCSS launched **38 redesigned district and school websites**. Site design was based on WCAG 2.1 Level AA standards, with all pages required to have text entered directly into the CMS, all images required to have alt text, and any necessary documents required to pass an accessibility check. Page consolidation was performed to help visitors locate information in as few clicks as possible.
- **Evaluation:** When scanned by an accessibility checker, TCSS district and school sites **scored 100** in key areas, including color contrast, orientation, forms and documents. Further, the district site was reduced from 209 pages to 32 pages, resulting in an **85 percent** page reduction rate, while the average school site saw a **57 percent** page reduction rate.

Objective 2

By August 2024, four district staff and 36 school website managers will demonstrate proficiency in accessibility best practices and school site administration by logging into the CMS, creating a news post, updating gallery photos and knowing how to request support.

- **Evidence:** By August 28, 2024, **100 percent** of school site managers and necessary district staff had registered for site manager credentials and successfully completed site manager training.
- **Evaluation:** Site manager training sign-in sheets; user management in content management software; submissions to centralized web update request portal

Objective 3

Achieve at least 50,000 visits to the district website during the back-to-school month of August 2024, with visitors spending an average of at least one minute engaging with the site.

- **Evidence:** During August 2024, there were approximately **58,000 active users** of tcss.net. While we cannot be certain who the exact users are, this averages to nearly three visits per family and staff member. Users engaged with the site for an average of **1 minute, 47 seconds**.
- **Evaluation:** Review of Google Analytics data

Key Takeaways: Navigating Change & Maintaining Site Integrity

The most engaging and effective websites don't rest on their laurels; instead, they remain relevant and accessible by adapting based on stakeholder feedback. While the launch of a website is an exciting milestone, it marks the beginning of a long-term commitment to maintaining a user-friendly, accessible platform that meets the needs of all individuals.

Several key takeaways emerged at the conclusion of this project, including how uniquely challenging it can be to achieve full stakeholder buy-in on accessibility initiatives. And while the overall reception of the new sites has been positive, some longtime users of the old sites (particularly staff) have voiced frustration with the

different approach to site navigation and organization. A series of newsletter articles were published in the fall to help employees acclimate to the new Staff Portal, and all the sites have evolved based on user feedback. But even when change is good, it is still hard for people.

Another lesson learned is the importance of limiting web editing access for most staff in order to preserve site integrity. After a website manager made an update on the new district site that could have triggered an OCR complaint, the team realized that maintaining granular permissions and continuing to offer staff training are essential to ensure the sites remain accessible and aligned with best practices.

Appendix

In September 2023, Superintendent Dr. Keri Johnson received notice of accessibility complaints filed with the U.S. Department of Education's Office of Civil Rights. Soon after, two district leaders—Director of Public Relations Terri Brewer and Directory of Technology Brad Jessen—began meeting with an OCR general attorney.

Dear Superintendent Johnson:

The attached letter is notifying the District that a complaint investigation, regarding the digital accessibility of the District's website, has been opened with our office. Our team – the national digital access team ("NDAT") will be available to provide more information in a call next week; this would provide Tuscaloosa Schools District with the opportunity to expedite the processing of this case. Please let me know your availability to meet:

- Mon, Sep 18, 2023 – anytime between 11 am & 4 pm EDT
- Tue, Sep 19, 2023 – between 10:30 am & 4 pm EDT
- Thu, Sep 21, 2023 – between 10 am & 3:30 pm EDT

Please have relevant District staff on the call who can discuss the technical concerns on the website. Thank you for your time and attention to this matter.

Respectfully yours,

General Attorney
THE U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
OFFICE FOR CIVIL RIGHTS
NATIONAL DIGITAL ACCESS TEAM
REGION IV



UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
OFFICE FOR CIVIL RIGHTS
41 FOREST STREET, SW, SUITE 1810
ATLANTA, GA 30303-8927

REGION IV
ALABAMA
FLORIDA
GEORGIA
TENNESSEE

September 12, 2023

By email only to: kjohnson@tcss.net

Dr. Keri Johnson
Superintendent
Tuscaloosa County School System
1118 Greensboro Avenue
Tuscaloosa, Alabama 35401

Re: OCR Docket No. [REDACTED]
Tuscaloosa County School System, Alabama

Dear Superintendent Johnson:

On August 22, 2023, the U.S. Department of Education (the Department), Office for Civil Rights (OCR), received a complaint filed against the Tuscaloosa County School System (the District) alleging discrimination based on disability. Specifically, the Complainant alleges that the District is failing to afford persons with disabilities an opportunity to participate in and benefit from the services, programs, and activities communicated through the District's websites and third-party websites that is equal to opportunities afforded to others.

OCR enforces Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, 29 U.S.C. § 794, and its implementing regulation, 34 C.F.R. Part 104, which prohibit discrimination on the basis of disability by recipients of Federal financial assistance. We also enforce Title II of the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990, 42 U.S.C. §§ 12131 *et seq.*, and its implementing regulation, 28 C.F.R. Part 35, which prohibit discrimination on the basis of disability by public entities. As a recipient of Federal financial assistance from the Department and a public entity, the District is subject to these laws.

Because OCR has determined that it has jurisdiction and that the complaint was filed timely, it is opening this disability discrimination allegation for investigation. Specifically, we will investigate the following issues:

- Whether the District, on the basis of disability, excluded qualified persons with disabilities from participation in, denied them the benefits of, or otherwise subjected them to discrimination in its programs, activities, aids, benefits, or services in violation of the regulation implementing Section 504 at 34 C.F.R. § 104.4 and the regulation implementing Title II at 28 C.F.R. § 35.130.

The Department of Education's mission is to promote student achievement and preparation for global competitiveness by fostering educational excellence and ensuring equal access.

www.ed.gov

Good Morning,

I had a meeting with [REDACTED] from OCR this morning and she provided me guidance on how these documents needed to be fixed.

I've had the chance to speak with each of you and see what actions are being taken. I wanted to send this as a summary here and then potentially schedule a meeting Monday Morning to go over any questions on how to move forward.

1. Lunch Menu: It's my understanding Mrs. Tavolino has created text-only menus and Mrs. Brewer is uploading them to the website.
 - a. Let me know when this is done and we can pass it along to the Auditor to review and see if it is acceptable.
 - b. Mrs. Loughlin also expressed that she would be willing to make the nicer calendars accessible if you'd like to schedule that time with her.
2. Board meeting Minutes: We're awaiting further feedback from Mr. Ward
3. TCSS Policy Manual: This PDF needs to be recreated from the original Word Document and have the tags and Headers put in place.
4. TCSS 2023-2024 Middle School Handbook: This has tags, but it needs the Header, list and table formatting.

For numbers 3 & 4 (and potentially 2), Does everyone have 10 AM on Monday available? If so, I can schedule that meeting to go through what I was shown needs to be done.

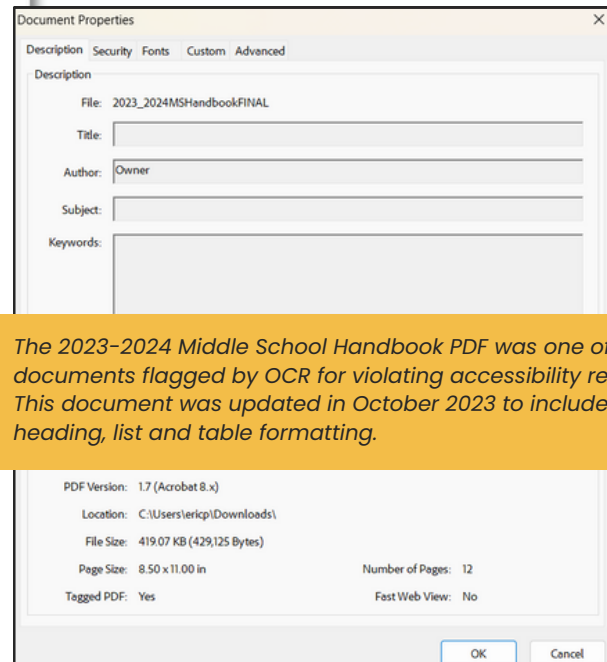
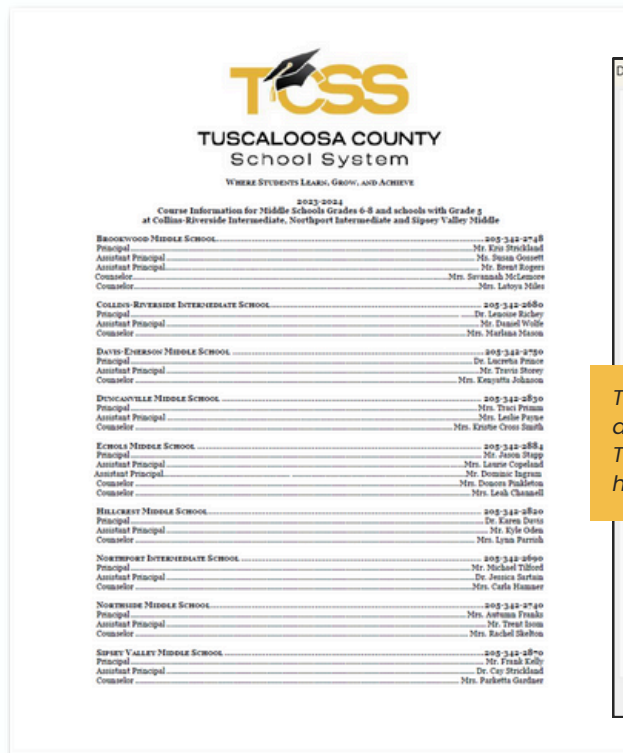
Thanks for all you help and I hope you all have a great rest of your day!

Sincerely,

Brad Jessen
Director of Technology
Tuscaloosa County Schools

Appendix

Work to address the specific OCR complaints—including updating the Middle School Handbook to reflect accessible PDF standards—took place in October 2023. A case closing meeting was scheduled for November.



The 2023-2024 Middle School Handbook PDF was one of several documents flagged by OCR for violating accessibility requirements. This document was updated in October 2023 to include proper heading, list and table formatting.

Good morning!

I had a final call with [REDACTED] this morning. We are looking to have all these done by this week – preferably by Thursday so that Mimi can review and Approve on Friday. After that she'll pass it along to the next phase for the final review.

Here is what we need to do to close this out:

1. Lunch Menu PDFs (<https://www.tcass.net/Page/18577>)
 - a. This is good to go. Just make sure to upload the November the res
2. Board Meeting Minutes (<https://www.tcass.net/Page/24531>)
 - a. Good news: Simbli can function as an accessible resource for us (th
 - b. Bad News: It will take them a couple weeks to become accessible, s
 - c. Action items:
 - i. Convert September and October 10th Minutes into a p
 - ii. @Terri Brewer, Can you please go ahead and truncate
3. Policy Manual
 - a. @Sara Young, I'm going to reach out to you about applying some fo
4. Middle School Handbook.
 - a. @Terri Brewer, Jackie has completed the updates on this (Attached

Thanks!

Brad Jensen
Director of Technology
Tuscaloosa County Schools

Good Afternoon,

We have been sent a Closure letter for the **OCR** case: Thank you very much for all your help!

Although this case is closed, there were some additional "future proofing" steps that [REDACTED] gave us. At the start of the year, I'll set a time to review these.

Thank you again for your help and I hope you have a great week!

1. Document edits:
 - a. Extra line breaks need to be removed (Policy Manual (PM) and the Middle School Handbook (MSH))
 - b. Blank lines formatted as headings need to be styled correctly (PM, MSH)
 - c. Discipline appeal forms (132-134, PM)
 - i. Apply style formatting to these forms
 - ii. Mark "blanks" in these forms as "Decorative"
 - d. Headers not being picked up in the creation of the PDF (Lunch Menus)
1. Future proofing –
 - a. Creating a Template for all official documents that has necessary Accessible styles
 - b. "Instructions" on how to remediate via MS Word and PDF
 - c. Lunch menu Calendar format as accessible

Thanks!

Brad Jensen
Director of Technology
Tuscaloosa County Schools

Appendix

With school communications partner Eric Hagemann of Leif Media & PR joining the project team, the website accessibility and user experience work began in earnest in November.

The team conducted accessibility checks to ensure the websites work for all users.

Foreground
Hex Value: #636363
Color Picker: [Slider]
Alpha: 1
Lightness: [Slider]

Background
Hex Value: #FFFFFF
Color Picker: [Slider]
Lightness: [Slider]

Contrast Ratio
6:1
[permalink](#)

Normal Text
WCAG AA: **Pass**
WCAG AAA: **Fail**
The five boxing wizards jump quickly.

Large Text
WCAG AA: **Pass**
WCAG AAA: **Pass**
The five boxing wizards jump quickly.

Graphical Objects and User Interface Components
WCAG AA: **Pass**
[Star icon]
Text Input

General Score: 100

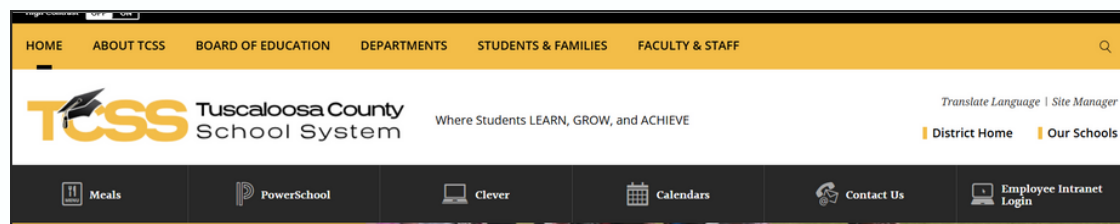
- Deleted text should include an additional description
- Breadcrumbs should be labeled accordingly and tagged as navigation
- Reviews and ratings should be labeled and described accordingly
- Include a web accessibility interface
- ☒ Iframe elements should be labeled or titled

Orientation Score: 100

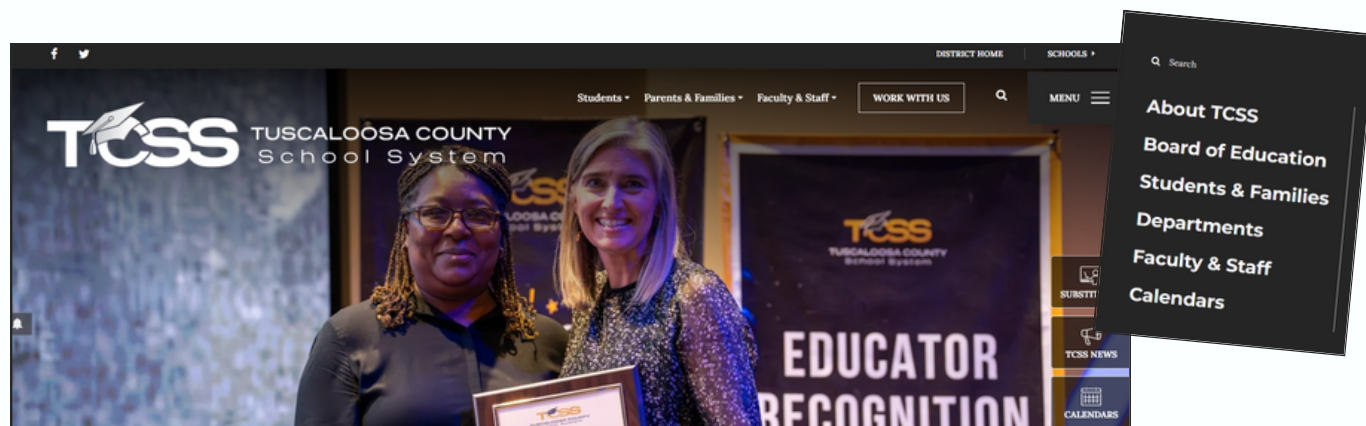
- ☒ Interactive elements should be navigable using the keyboard
- ☒ Keyboard focus should have a noticeable outline
- Active popups should be tagged for assistive technology
- ☒ Every page should include hidden links that allow skipping blocks
- ☒ Manipulatively hidden interactive elements should be excluded from assistive technology
- Manipulatively hidden interactive elements should be excluded from tabindex

Forms Score: 100

- Form fields should be properly labeled
- Form fields should not have duplicate ID selectors
- Required form fields should be tagged for assistive technology
- ☒ Incorrect use of aria-describedby/labelledby
- Search forms should be tagged for assistive technology

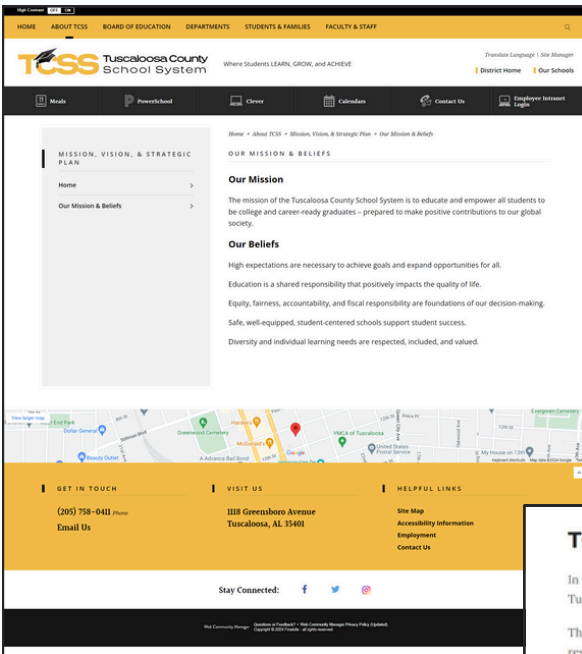


Careful consideration went into the navigation strategy and overall sitemap. What was a cumbersome user experience on the old sites (top) has become more streamlined and mobile responsive (bottom).



Appendix

Thorough research helped inform the strategy behind the new TCSS websites. Aside from meeting accessibility requirements, the sites are more organized and easier to navigate.



Mission, Beliefs, & Strategic Plan

We exist to educate and empower all students to become highly-skilled graduates, prepared to positively contribute to their community.

What We Believe

High expectations and challenging opportunities are necessary to engage all students.

Education is a partnership among students, families, schools, and the community.

Equity, accountability, and resource management are the foundation of our decision-making.

A healthy, safe, and supportive environment is important for all.

Individual learning needs are respected, included, and valued.

TCSS 2024-2029 Strategic Plan

In 2024, after months of planning, research, analysis, and development, the Tuscaloosa County Board of Education approved a 2024-2029 Strategic Plan for the Tuscaloosa County School System.

The **TCSS Strategic Plan** will guide the strategic work of the Tuscaloosa County School System over the next five years. All initiatives and allocation of resources are to be closely aligned with the goals of the strategic plan. The plan is divided into five strategic themes: Challenged, Engaged, Supported, Healthy, and Safe. Within each theme, the plan highlights Objectives, Critical Initiatives, Activities, and Key Measures.

To learn more about the strategic plan, please review the entire **Strategic Plan**. The document includes:

- Details on how the plan was developed.
- A glossary of terms used within the strategic plan.
- TCSS Mission Statement and Beliefs.
- An outline of the strategic themes of the plan.
- Additional Key Measures relevant to the plan.

Each school's unique **Alabama Continuous Improvement Plan (ACIP)** is available at each school. You may view a copy by visiting the school office. You may also contact the school's administration to request a physical copy or have one emailed to you.

Explore the Strategic Plan



Development of the Plan

The 2024-2029 Strategic Plan was developed over a period of several months. In 2023, surveys were made available to stakeholders electronically, and nearly 800 surveys were completed.

[Read More](#)



Strategic Planning Team Members

View a list of the 52 staff, parents, and community members who served on the 2024-2029 Tuscaloosa County School System Strategic Planning team.

[Read More](#)



Definitions and Clarifying Phrases

From "benchmark assessments" to "learning goals," several terms were defined at the onset of the strategic planning process to provide stakeholders with a common understanding.

[Read More](#)



Strategic Theme: Challenged



Strategic Theme: Engaged



Strategic Theme: Supported

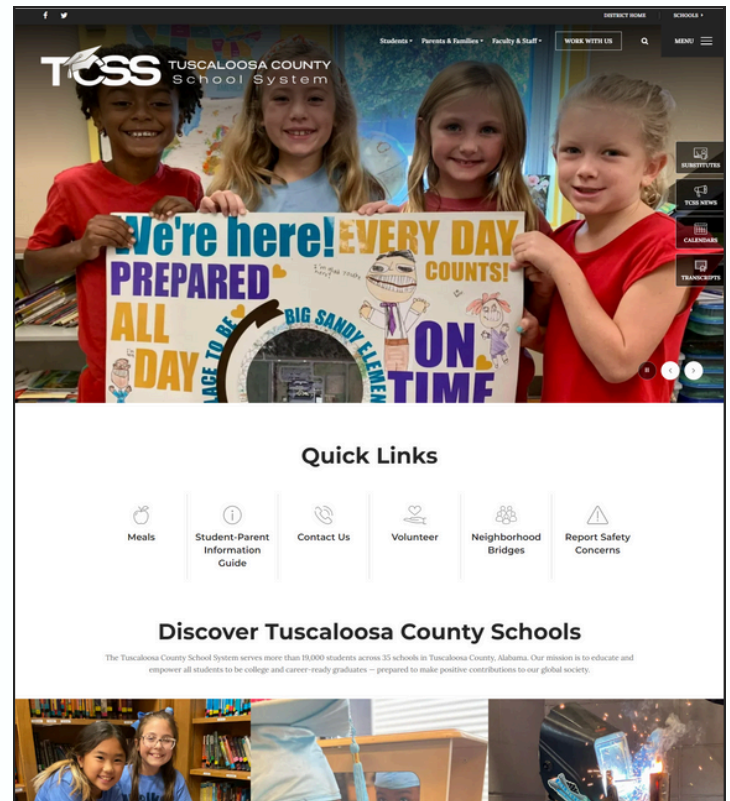
From a design perspective, the old TCSS website (top left) was clunky and difficult to navigate. A tertiary-level interior page navigation confused visitors and muddled the user experience. The use of proper headers and callout boxes gives the new page (top right) visual interest and an engaging look. Additionally, recreating the TCSS 2024-2029 Strategic Plan via plain text in posts (right) ensures users can interact with the content—and that the content is translatable and accessible to all visitors, even those using assistive technology.

Appendix

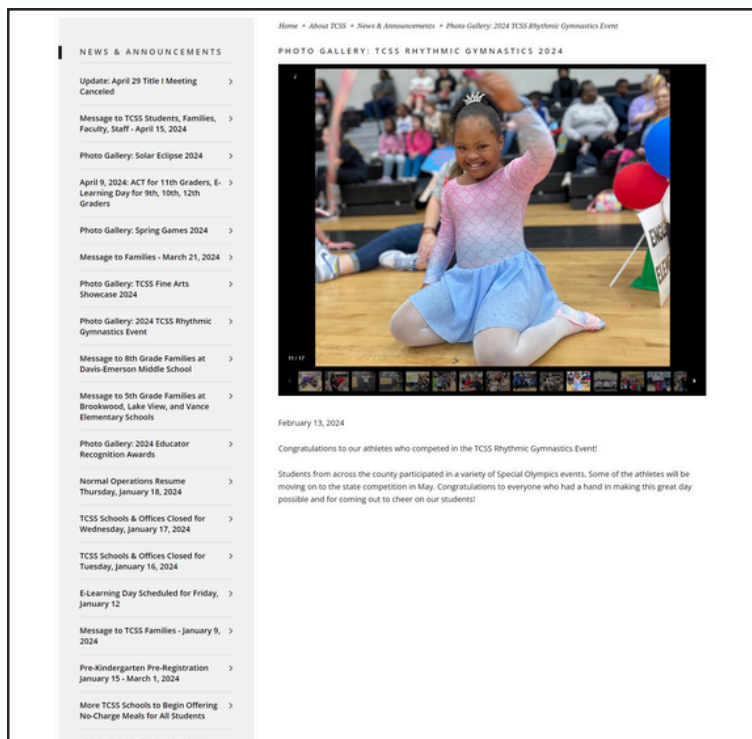
Old District Homepage



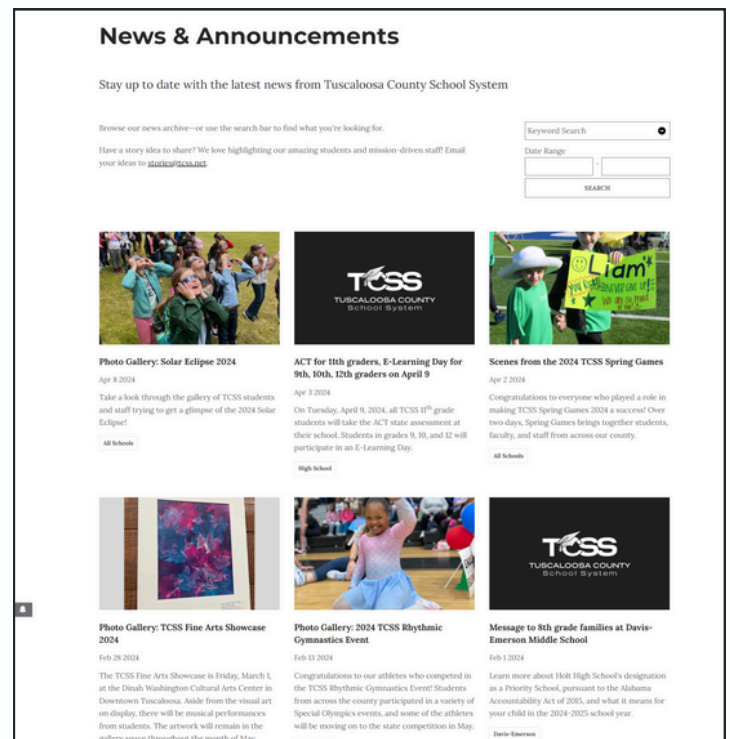
New District Homepage



Old News Archive page

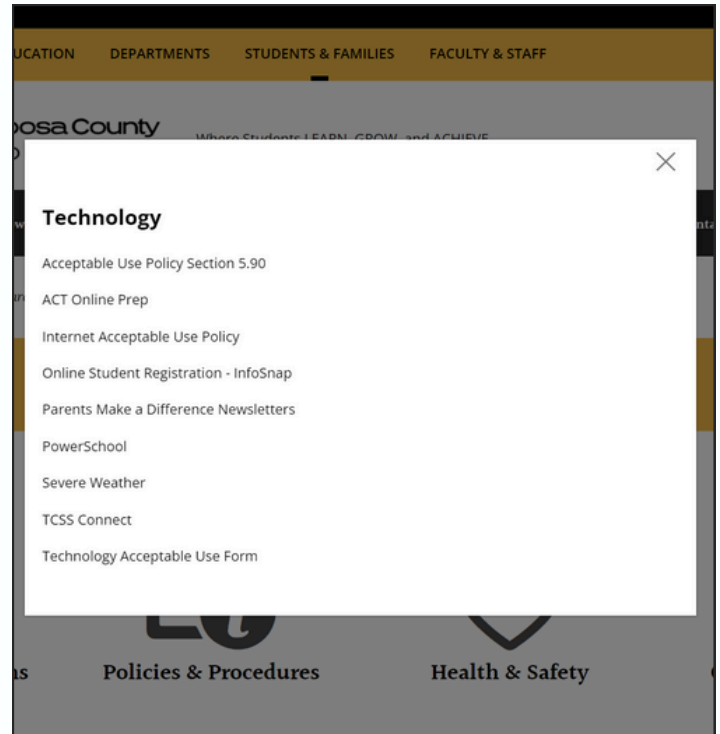
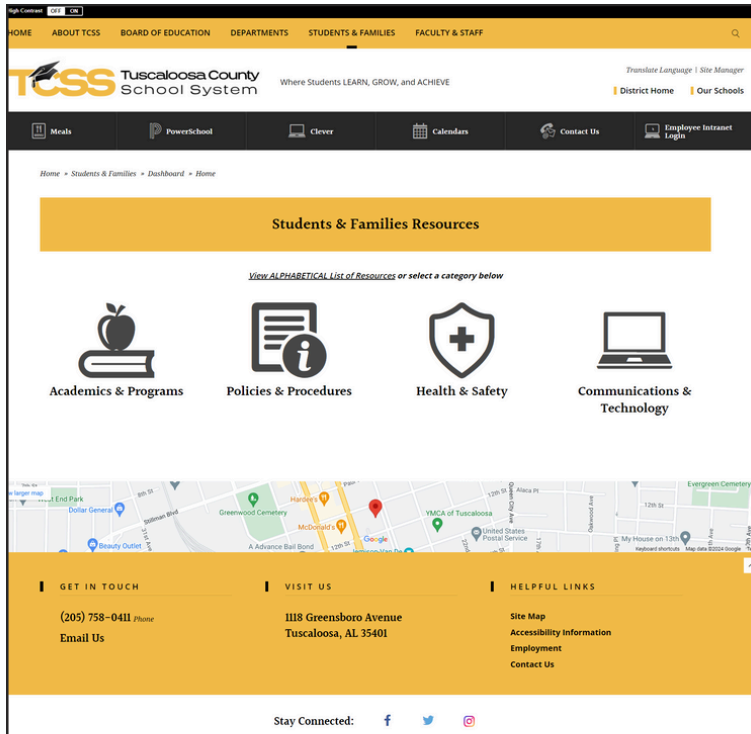


Reimagined News & Announcements page

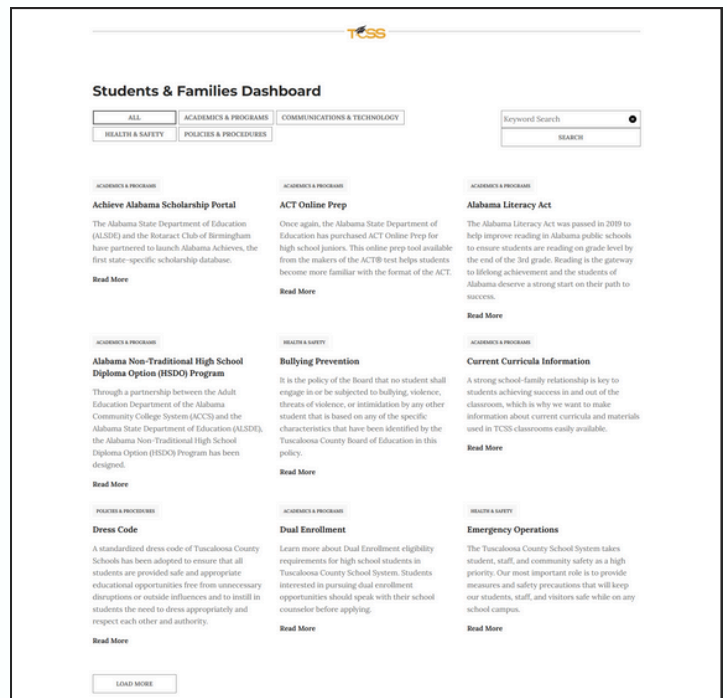
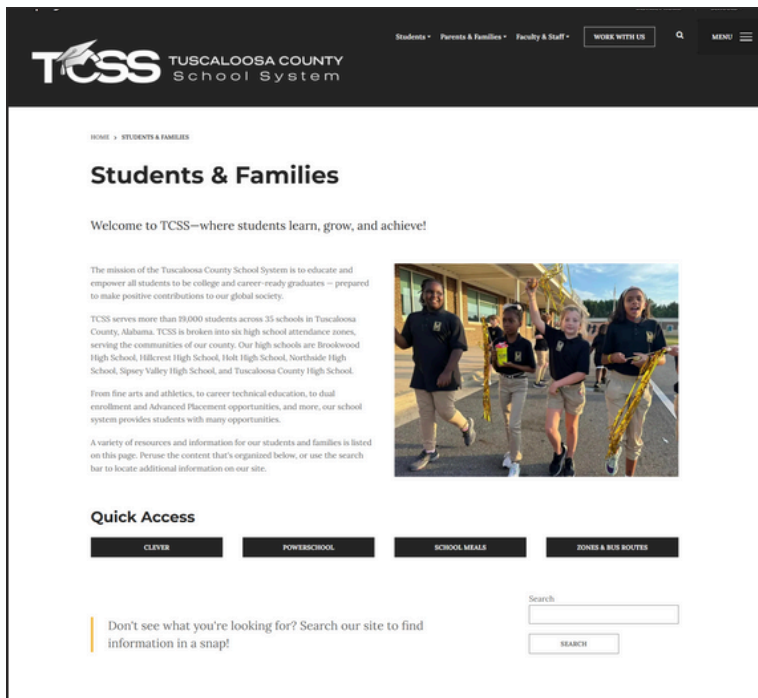


Appendix

Old Students & Families page and pop-up



New Students & Families page with dedicated site search and filterable, user-friendly pop-ups



Appendix

The new TCSS Back to School page is a strategy that supported the project's third objective.

Back to School

Mark your calendars: The first day of school is Thursday, August 8, 2024!

Welcome to the 2024-2025 school year! In Tuscaloosa County School System, our mission-driven educators have been preparing all summer for another incredible year of learning, discovery, and fun.

We've compiled the most important information your family needs to make a smooth transition back to the classroom. Explore the accordion menu and pop-ups on this page, or call (205) 758-0411 if you need additional assistance.

2024-2025 At a Glance

- + Academic Calendar
- + Schedule Pickup & Open House Events
- + School Contact Information



Send Us Your Smiles!

Help us celebrate the start of a new school year by [emailing us](#) your photos or using the hashtag #TCSSFirstDay on social media.



Back to School Resources

Browse the pop-ups or search by keyword to find what you're looking for.



Bus Routes, School Zones, & Transportation Requests



Extended Day Program



OpenGate System



Registration



School Meals



Student-Parent Information Guide

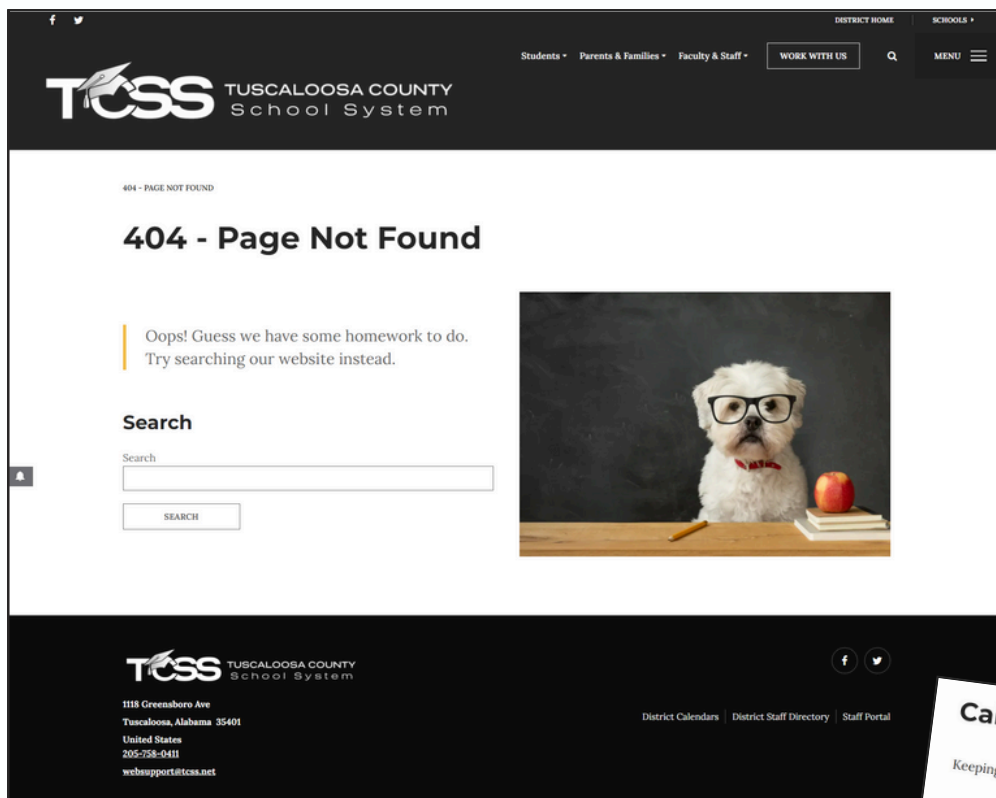


Supply Lists

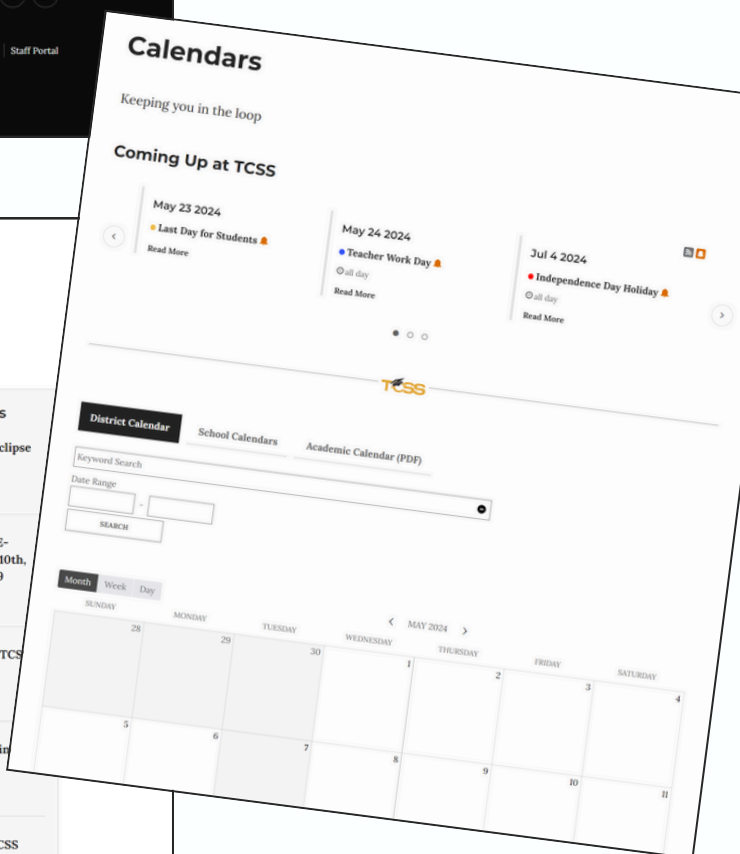
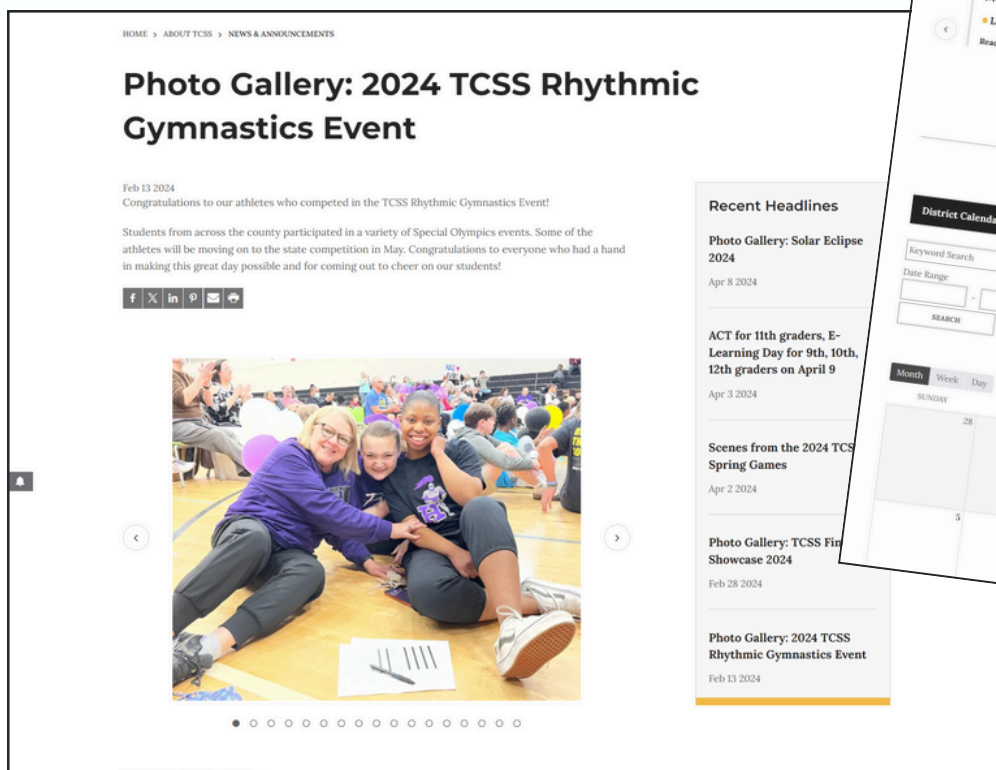


TCSS Connect (iPads Assigned to Students)

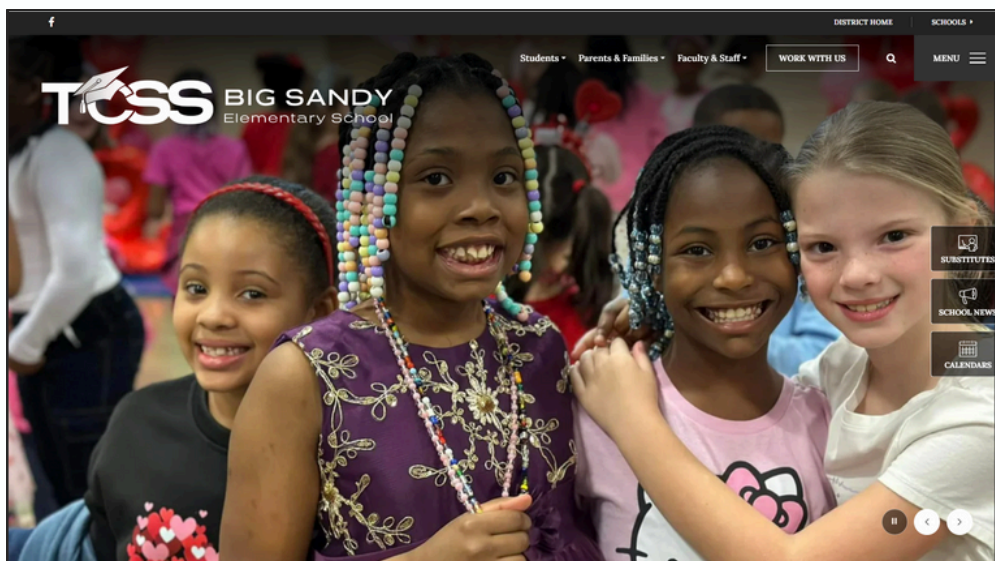
Appendix



Thoughtful consideration went into every page across all 38 websites—including the 404 page. The team's strategy-first approach was grounded in thorough research and anecdotal data from staff and caregiver focus group participants. Unique touches like integrated site search features, recent headlines on article pages and multiple calendar views support the user journey and combine for a website experience that's not only accessible, but also functional and aesthetically pleasing.



Appendix



When it comes to the school websites, the team took the same approach to melding accessibility with creating an exceptional user experience. School sites mimicked the look of the district site, giving families a consistent experience even if they have children attending multiple schools. Other strategies, such as removing unnecessary PDFs and including content as plain text, also support the project's overall goal. To reduce the page count and make site updates more manageable, the team utilized tools like shared elements and Finalsité's reuse page functionality.

Quick Links



Meals



Student-Parent
Information
Guide



Contact Us



Volunteer



Neighborhood
Bridges



Report Safety
Concerns

About Big Sandy Elementary

Serving learners in pre-kindergarten through fifth grade

Big Sandy Elementary opened in August 2013 with 368 students in grades K-5. The school was built to ease overcrowding of the community's K-2 and 3-5 schools. Teachers and support staff came from the two schools to form the new staff of Big Sandy Elementary.

They currently serve PreK - 5th grade. Big Sandy Elementary enjoys the support of the community members, many of whom attended the original Big Sandy Elementary that was located in the community 60 years ago.

The faculty, staff, and stakeholders of Big Sandy Elementary are committed to creating and maintaining a warm, friendly, and caring environment that will enable students to thrive and accomplish great things. High expectations for both academics and behavior, as well as good communication with students and stakeholders, will produce great students who do great things.



Through rigorous and engaging instruction, and in an environment that fosters excellence, Big Sandy Elementary will prepare students to be college and career ready. By providing a safe and happy environment, we will promote student leadership and responsibility as we educate today's children to become tomorrow's leaders.

Explore More

[Bell Schedule](#)

[Continuous Improvement Plan](#)

[School History](#)

- The first bell rings at 7:45 a.m.
- The tardy bell rings at 8:00 a.m.
- Bus Rider Dismissal is at 2:37 p.m.
- Car Rider Dismissal is at 2:39 p.m.
- Students Dismissed to Extended Day at 2:50 p.m.

Supply Lists

Materials needed for the 2024-2025 school year

Supply Lists by Grade Level

Pre-Kindergarten

Ms. Adams

Ms. Adams Inclusion Pre-K Class

- 1- 1.5 inch white clear view binder
- 1- pack Expo Dry Erase Markers
- 1- yellow folder w/ 2 pockets & prongs
- 1- Bottle of Elmer's Glue
- 1- 24 count crayons
- 1- Box washable markers
- 1- Watercolor Paint Set
- 1- 8 x 5 Pencil Box (label w/name)
- 4- packs of baby wipes
- 8- rolls of paper towels
- 1- box of Kleenex
- 3- Containers of Disinfecting Wipes
- 1- Bottle antibacterial hand soap
- 1- 50 count sheet protectors
- Boys: 1- pack white cardstock
- Girls: 1- pack white copy paper

Supplies can be brought to BSES's Open House on 8/6/24. In addition to the list, we request a \$25 classroom donation for your child's teacher. Also, each student will need headphones which are available for purchase through MySchoolBucks.

Appendix

Old Brookwood High School Athletics page

Brookwood High School Athletics

Brookwood High School is proud to participate in 12 sanctioned sports at the 6A level.

- Baseball
- Bowling
- Boys Basketball
- Girls Basketball
- Cross Country
- Flag Football
- Football
- Golf
- Soccer
- Softball
- Indoor Track
- Outdoor Track
- Volleyball
- Wrestling

Our goal is to offer students an opportunity to prepare for their future through sports. Being part of a team teaches life skills such as commitment, reliability, and dependability. Sports teach students how to collaborate and work independently and interdependently. Student athletes also learn important skills such as leadership and time management.

NCAA Course Information - For a list of courses that meet NCAA eligibility requirements

- NCAA High School Portal

Athletic Directors

- Mr. Joe Childers

Required Athletic Forms

- Revised 2018 Physical Form (2021-2022 Form)
- AHSAA Consent Form
- Concussion Form
- Student Accident Insurance
- NFHS Sportsmanship Program

New Brookwood High School Athletics page with accessible pop-ups

Athletics

Striving for excellence on and off the field of play

Brookwood High School is proud to participate in 12 sanctioned sports at the 6A level. Our goal is to offer students an opportunity to prepare for their future through sports. Being part of a team teaches life skills such as commitment, reliability, and dependability. Sports teach students how to collaborate and work independently and interdependently. Student athletes also learn important skills such as leadership and time management.


Use the pop-ups below to explore athletics opportunities at our school.

DragonFly


All students who participate in school-sponsored athletics and activities must use the DragonFly software. Parents and caregivers can download the mobile app, [join us online](#), or [view this PDF](#) to learn more.

Quick Links


- Access Required Forms & Documents from AHSAA
- Visit the NCAA High School Portal




Brookwood High School Athletics




Baseball




Basketball (Boys)




Basketball (Girls)



Cheerleading



Cross Country



Football

Old Tuscaloosa County High School About Us page (with child pages)

High Content

TCSS

TCSS

Tuscaloosa County High School

Instruction, Guidance, Service... We are County High!

District

HOME

OUR SCHOOL

STAFF

FOR STUDENTS & FAMILIES

ATHLETICS

ORGANIZATIONS

CURRICULUM

ALUMNI

Calendars

Cafe Menu

PowerSchool

Faculty Directory

Contact Us

OUR SCHOOL

Contact Information

Our Beliefs

Mission Statement

Continuous Improvement Plan (CIP)

Directions

Alma Mater

Message to TCHS Students, Families, Faculty, Staff - February 17, 2024

Home > Our School > Our School > Contact Information

Tuscaloosa County High School

12500 Wildcat Drive

Northport, Alabama 35475

Email: tchinfo@tcss.net

• Office: 205.342.2670

• Fax: 205.247.4194

• Cafeteria: 205.339.7846

GET IN TOUCH

PHONE: 205.342.2670 Phone

FAX: 205.247.4194 Fax

Email Us

VISIT US

12500 Wildcat Drive

Northport, AL 35475

HELPFUL LINKS

Site Map

Employment

Contact Us

Web Community Manager

Developed at Embarcadero & Web Community Manager (Atlanta)

Copyright © 2021 Embarcadero. All rights reserved.

New Tuscaloosa County High School About Us page (consolidated)

TCSS

TUSCALOOSA COUNTY High School

Students > Parents & Families > Faculty & Staff > WORK WITH US

Q

MENU

About Tuscaloosa County High

Administration

News & Announcements

Staff Directory

Strategic Plan

Title I


HOME > OUR SCHOOL > ABOUT TUSCALOOSA COUNTY HIGH

About Tuscaloosa County High

Instruction, Guidance, Service... We are County High!

Welcome to Tuscaloosa County High School, where our mission-driven staff members proudly serve learners in grades 9-12:

“Committed to excellence, the Tuscaloosa County High School community provides students with the opportunity to develop intellectually, emotionally, socially, and physically to better function as contributing citizens in a diverse society.”



Explore More

Alma Mater

Bell Schedule

CATS-TV

Continuous Improvement Plan

Our Beliefs

TCHS Alumni

“

(v)

Rising midst the golden cornfields

Tis our Alma Mater true.

Points our dear old TCHS

Proudly to the velvet blue.

”

TCHS Fight Song

Rah, Rah for County High

County High must win.

Fight to the finish

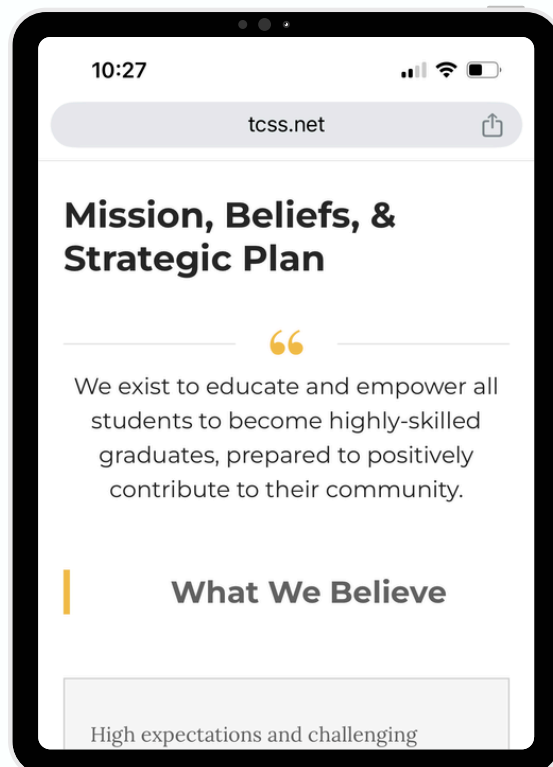
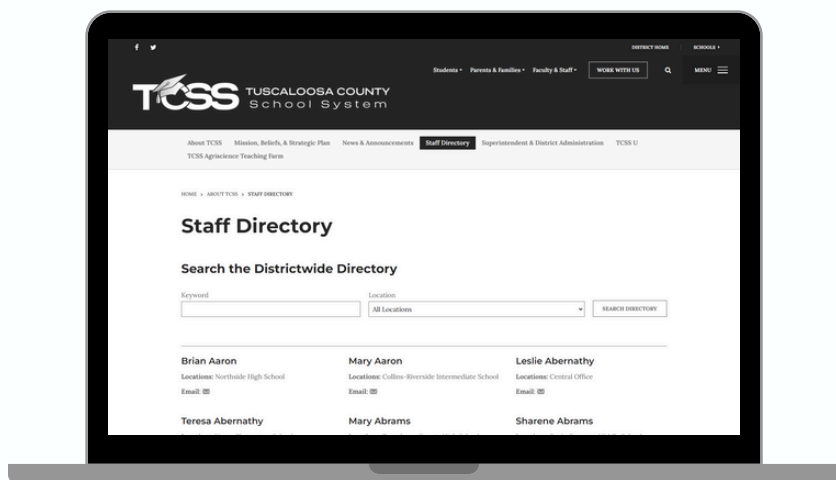
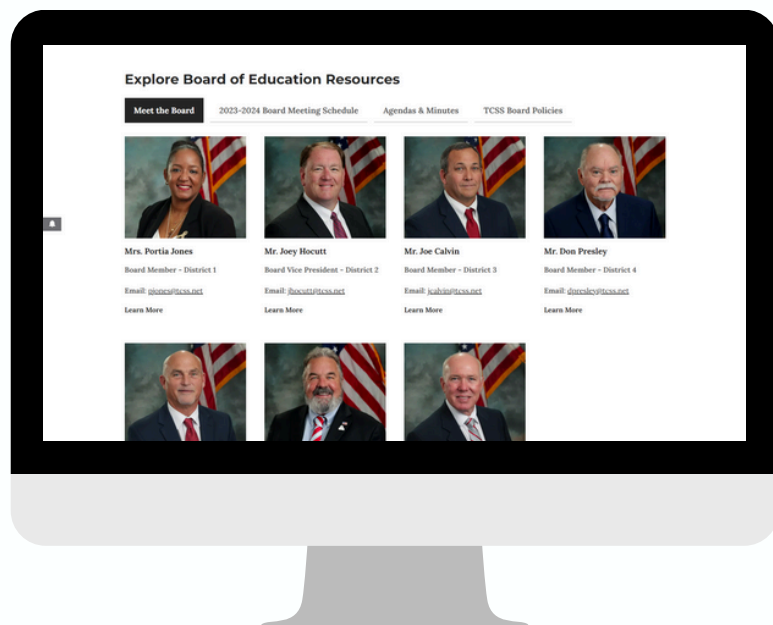
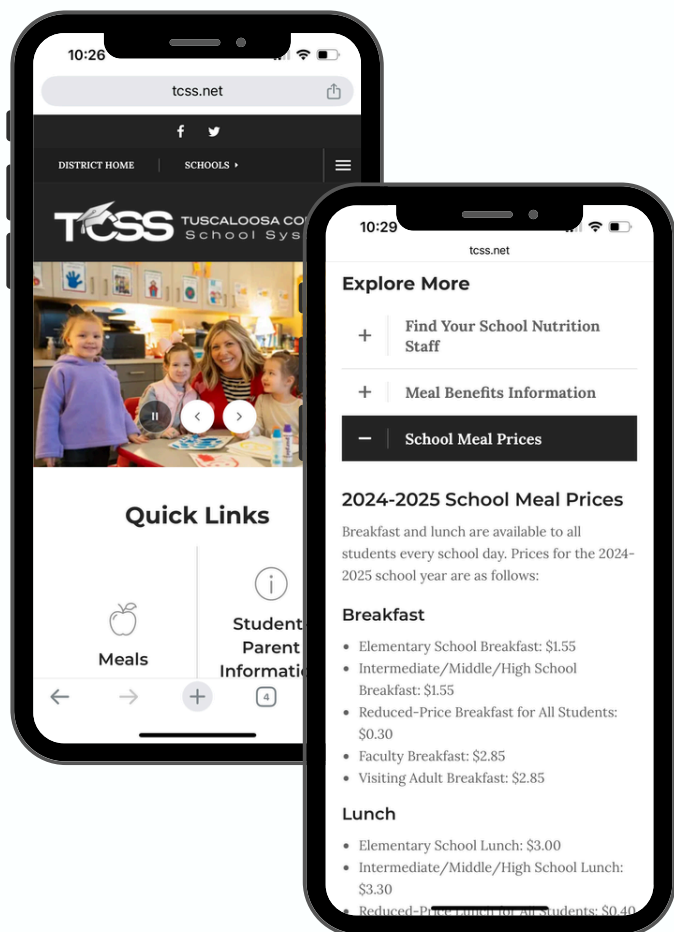
Never give in.

Rah, Rah, Rah,

You do your best boys.

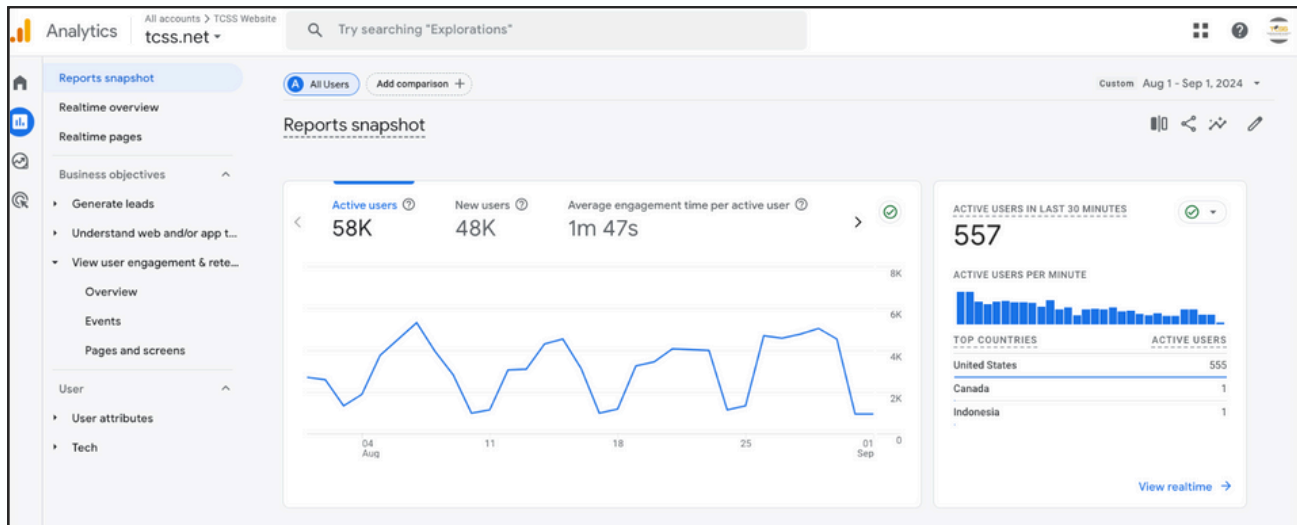
Appendix

All 38 TCSS district and school websites were designed using a mobile-first strategy and optimized for an excellent user experience on all types of devices. The new sites are accessible, responsive and translatable—serving stakeholders districtwide.



Appendix

Google Analytics data shows that the 2024 back-to-school timeframe yielded strong traffic on the TCSS website, especially to pages geared toward current families such as Calendars, Students & Families, and Back to School.



The screenshot displays the 'Pages and screens' report in Google Analytics, showing the page path and screen class. The table lists the following data:

Page path and screen class	Views	Engagements	Avg. time per user	Active users	Engagements per active user	Views per active user	Engagements per active user
Total	323,440	57,640	5.61	1m 47s	1,081,456	0.00	0.00
1 /	147,604	42,840	3.45	58s	498,171	0.00	0.00
2 /students	20,038	7,899	2.54	13s	65,925	0.00	0.00
3 /calendars	16,936	6,766	2.50	45s	38,461	0.00	0.00
4 /students-families	14,287	6,568	2.18	26s	45,682	0.00	0.00
5 /search-results	12,463	6,369	1.96	24s	47,152	0.00	0.00
6 /login	9,862	2,431	4.06	1m 20s	30,530	0.00	0.00
7 /departments/human-resources	7,977	3,918	2.04	55s	31,090	0.00	0.00
8 /our-school/staff-directory	7,860	3,637	2.16	58s	34,845	0.00	0.00
9 /staff-links	6,936	3,489	1.99	49s	21,589	0.00	0.00
10 /faculty-staff	6,425	3,295	1.95	37s	20,026	0.00	0.00
11 /students-families/back-to-school	4,715	2,840	1.66	50s	13,665	0.00	0.00
12 /about-tcss/tcss-u	4,292	2,652	1.62	21s	12,856	0.00	0.00

Appendix

The staff and family key messages crafted during the planning phase helped inform communication with stakeholders throughout the project. A small sampling of the messages appears below.

From: Terri Brewer <tbrewer@tcss.net>
Date: Thursday, May 2, 2024 at 3:33 PM
To: employees <employees@tcss.net>
Subject: Coming Soon: New School & District Web Sites

TCSS Faculty and Staff,


Good afternoon! Within the next few days, you will notice a change to our TCSS school and district web sites. The company that previously provided our web site management system merged with another company, and this means our web sites are getting an updated look. The new sites are better designed for use on smart phones and iPads, have a better search function, and are organized so that there are fewer pages and fewer clicks to find what you need.

As with any new technology, there may be some bumps in the road as we transition. There will be some brief delays in accessing the sites on the day we go live. Please be patient in navigating the new sites, as they are organized differently than our current sites. If you have a problem finding information you need on the new site, please email websupport@tcss.net.

Once the new sites go live, the information that used to be housed on our Employee Intranet will be in the Staff Portal section of the district web site. After the new sites launch, I will send information about how to find and log into that portion of the site.

Thank you,
Terri Brewer

Terri Brewer
Director of Public Relations
Tuscaloosa County School System
1118 Greensboro Avenue
Tuscaloosa, Alabama 35401
(205) 342-2886



From: Terri Brewer <tbrewer@tcss.net>
Date: Wednesday, May 15, 2024 at 12:18 PM
To: employees <employees@tcss.net>
Cc: Sara Young <sdyoung@tcss.net>
Subject: Information About New Web Sites & Important Deadline

TCSS Faculty and Staff,

Thank you for your patience as we continue to make adjustments to our new TCSS school and district web sites. With a district site and 36 school sites, this is a complex transition.

Please see below for some updates and an important deadline.

June 24 Deadline

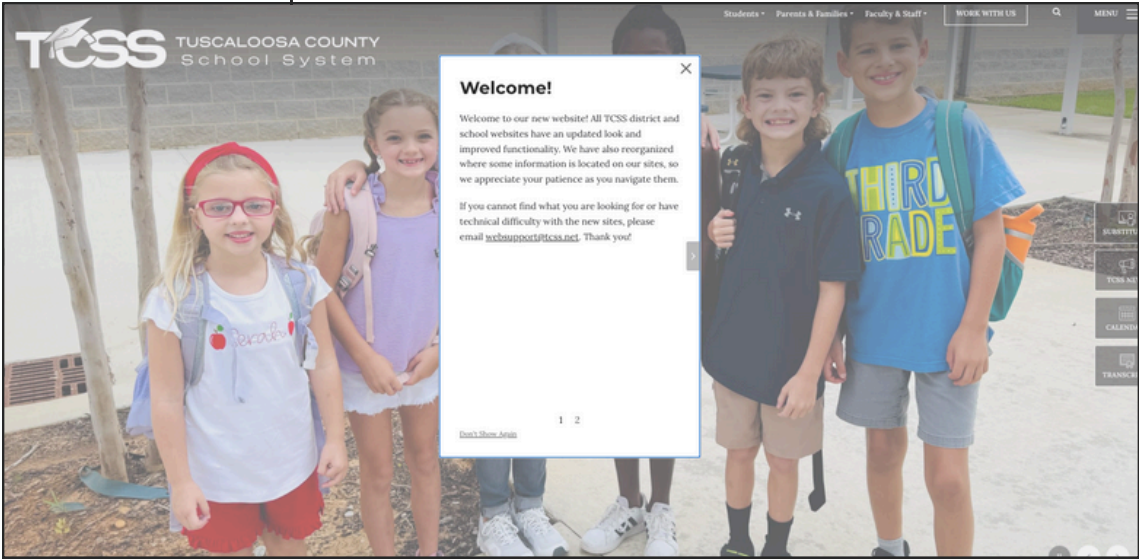
If you have any content you need to save from your former school web site/district department web page, you can access our old web site at this address: a01001644.schoolwires.net

When you visit this address, you can log in and see Intranet content. You can also access site manager software, if you had access to the editing platform. There are some broken links on the old site, but most content should be accessible through the site manager software.

Be sure to retrieve any information from the old site by June 24. The old site will no longer be available after this time. Contact myself and Sara Young if you need assistance. Sara is copied on this email.

Can't Find What You Need?

If you encounter problems with the new site or cannot find something you need, please email websupport@tcss.net.



ciated with the new site at this time.

Appendix

A series of articles that appeared in the TCSS staff e-newsletter



Week 1

The Top 5 Most Accessed Staff Portal Links (and Where to Find Them)

We launched the [TCSS Staff Portal](#) last spring, and throughout the past few months, we've been refining the site to ensure a better user experience. From leave requests and travel documents to forms and field trip information, our Staff Portal is your one-stop shop for all things employee-related.

Throughout the next few weeks, we'll share tips and tricks to help you navigate the site more quickly. This week, we're starting with an overview of the top five most accessed Staff Portal links and where you can find them.

- **District Email Login:** Located in the Faculty & Staff Links dropdown on every page and to the right of the gallery slideshow on the homepage.
- **Personal Leave Requests (Frontline):** Located in the Faculty & Staff Links dropdown on every page and in the Quick Links section underneath the gallery slideshow on the homepage.
- **Field Trip Requests & Forms:** Located on the Curriculum & Instruction department page—plus in the Quick Links section underneath the gallery slideshow on the homepage.
- **Travel Forms & Documents:** Located in a yellow pop-up on the HR, Benefits, Payroll, Employee Information page.
- **Benefits Information:** Located in the Employee Quick Links accordion menu near the top of the HR, Benefits, Payroll, Employee Information page.

Please note that if you're accessing the Staff Portal on a mobile device, the Faculty & Staff Links dropdown can be accessed via the hamburger menu (the three horizontal lines in the upper-right corner of the screen).

As always, the search bar (also located in the upper-right corner of the Staff Portal) can help you find what you're looking for in a snap!

Week 2

Finding & Accessing Forms on the Staff Portal

This week's Staff Portal spotlight puts the focus on some of the most-accessed content on the site: employee and department forms.

Employee-related forms—including benefits, leave, travel and retirement forms—can be found on the [HR, Benefits, Payroll, Employee Information page](#), while forms and resources related to professional development opportunities are located on the [Professional Development page](#).

Most other forms can be found on department-specific pages. (For example, the Student Services page contains forms organized in pop-ups for Homebound Services, Section 504 and more.) Remember: Department content that is public facing is located on the district website, not the Staff Portal.

The search bar (located in the upper-right corner of the Staff Portal) can help you easily locate what you're looking for!

Week 3

Navigating TCSS Websites & the Staff Portal on Mobile Devices

Did you know? All school and district websites are optimized to provide a fantastic user experience on desktop and mobile devices. This includes the Staff Portal—meaning that you're covered if you need to access information on the go.

On mobile devices, as it is on desktop computers, the main navigation is found in the hamburger menu (the three horizontal lines in the upper-right corner of the screen). From here, you'll be able to view a listing of pages and access the Faculty & Staff Links.

One key difference is the search bar: On mobile devices, it is also located in this expanded hamburger menu view, and it's a powerful tool that can help you find the content you're seeking.

Week 4

Department Pages: Differences Between the District Website & Staff Portal

Our updated TCSS district and school websites launched last spring, and they have been thoughtfully designed to provide an enhanced user experience for families, community members and staff alike.

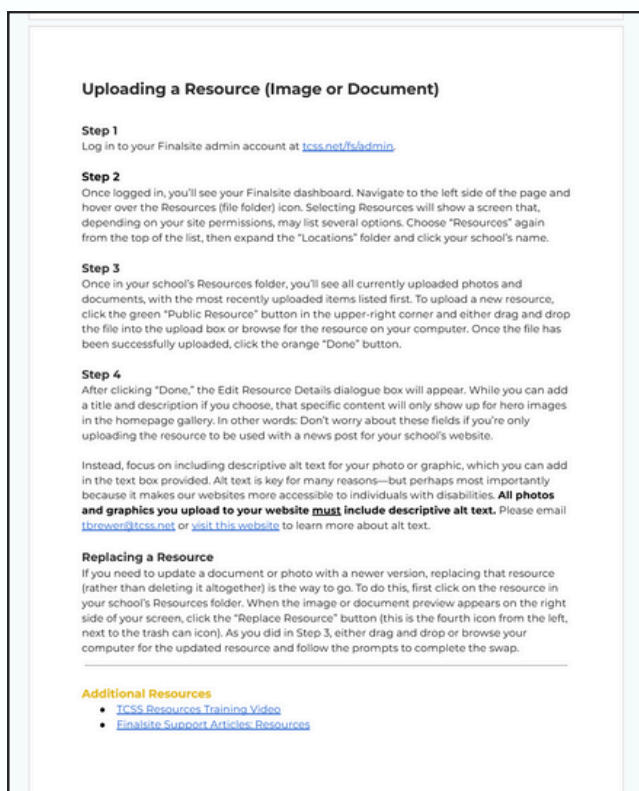
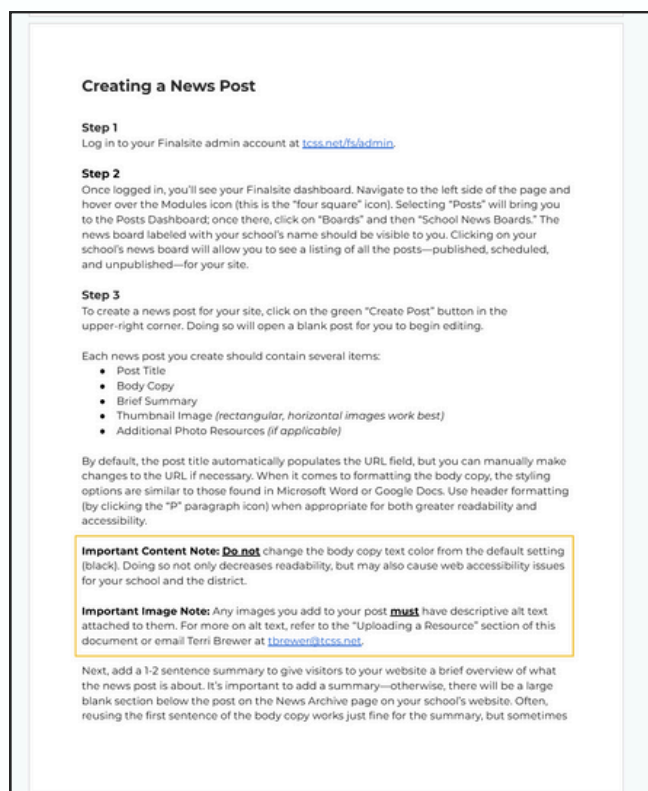
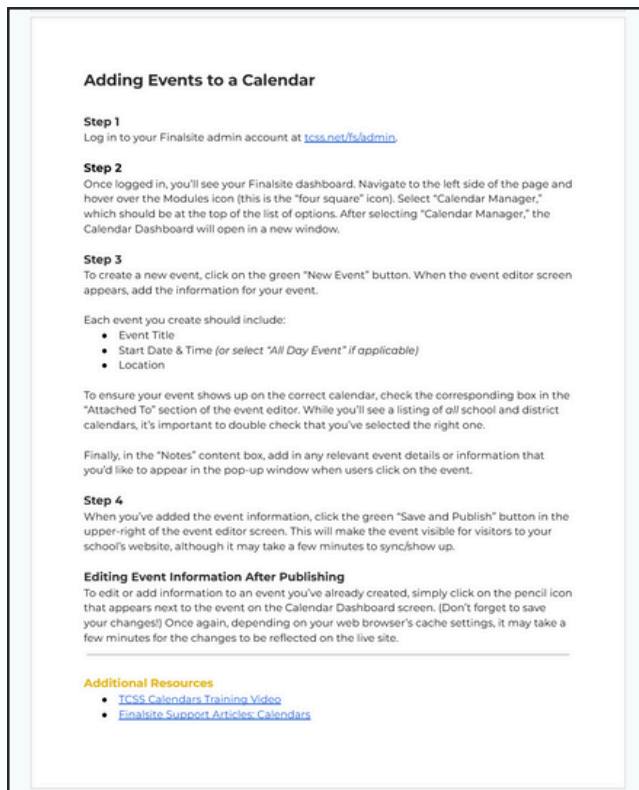
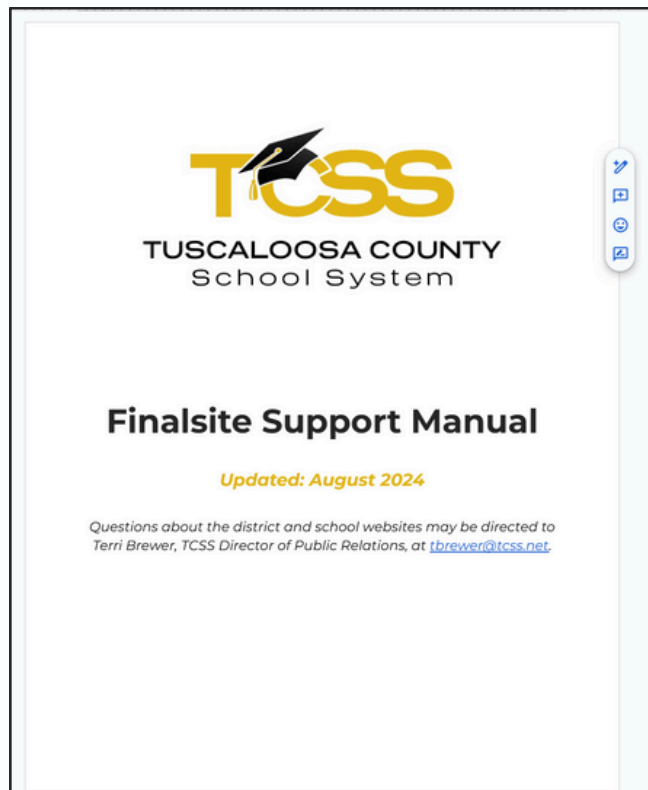
But while the district website and the Staff Portal may look similar, there are several key ways in which they're different—namely, the type of content found on each. When it comes to department-specific content, anything that's public facing and meant to be accessed by external users is located on the district website, [tcss.net](#). For departmental content geared toward TCSS faculty and staff, check the Staff Portal to find what you're looking for.

Once again, the search function on our websites is powerful, and the search bar (located in the upper-right corner of any page on any site) can connect you with the information you're looking for and help you get on with your day.

Change can be hard, and after the sites launched, the project team received feedback from employees who were having a difficult time locating content on the Staff Portal. To better support district staff members, Eric and Terri created a series of articles to help acclimate individuals to the intranet. These articles appeared in the TCSS weekly staff e-newsletter and sought to help employees find information and highlight the key features of the new, accessible websites.

Appendix

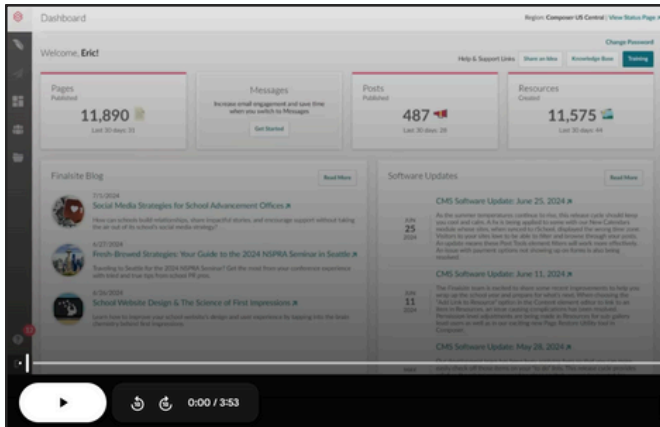
Prior to the school webmaster training sessions in August 2024, the project team created comprehensive support materials. Samples appear below and on the following page.



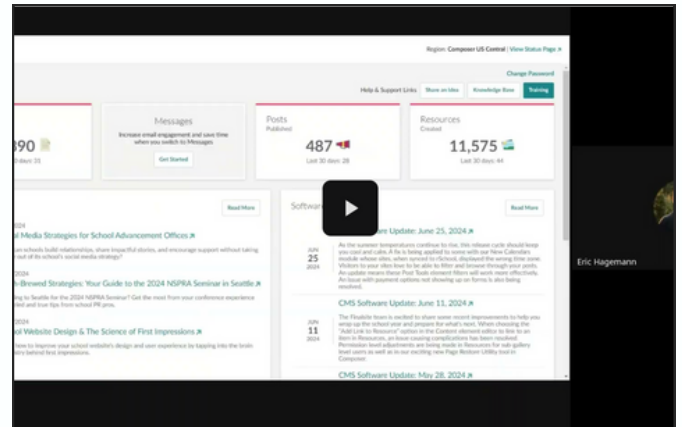
Appendix

Note: Click the images to play the videos in Google Drive.

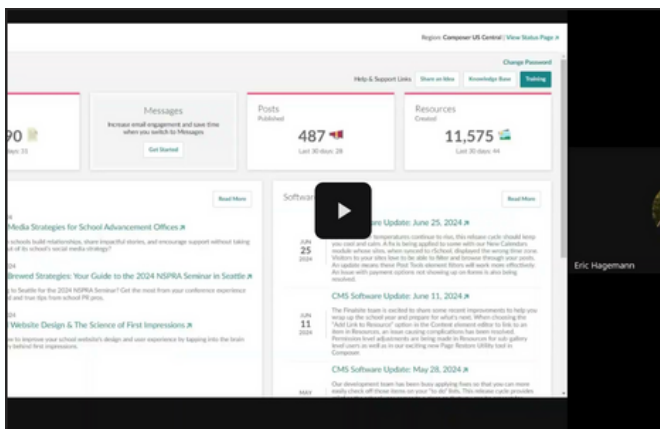
TCSS Finalsite Training Video: Resources



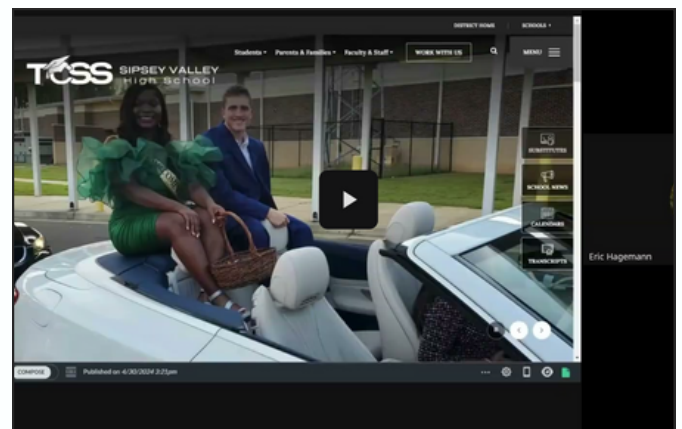
TCSS Finalsite Training Video: Posts



TCSS Finalsite Training Video: Calendars



TCSS Finalsite Training Video: Social Media Links



TCSS Finalsite Training Video: Creating Admin Users

