

# Powering Access Through Systemic Action: Overview & Foundation Video Transcript

ROB CARR: Good day, everybody, and welcome. Thank you so much for joining us. As people are coming in, if you'd like, feel free to introduce yourself, your role, your location, and the reason that you chose to sit in and participate in the webinar series. My name is Rob Carr with NCADEMI, and I'm pleased to kick us off here today.

Our first in the series is Powering Access Through Systemic Action. This is the first of six webinars that we will do in the series, and we are thrilled to have you all here joining as we move ahead and get this conversation started, or help you to advance it wherever you may be.

In terms of the webinar, some logistics and resources, feel free to reach out to our program assistant, Natalie Cardenas, in the chat. If you do need something in terms of technical support, you have issues with Zoom or anything like that. We do have captioning available. You should either see a show captions button at the bottom of your toolbar. It'll be there in with the other tools, with reactions and chat and such. You may have to go into the little more menu to get to it. The slide deck and the resources are available. That address is [bit.ly/qi-webinar1](https://bit.ly/qi-webinar1). There's no spaces in qi-webinar1. Once again that's [bit.ly/qi-webinar1](https://bit.ly/qi-webinar1), and we will have a recording available within 24 to 48 business hours of the webinar fixing-- finishing up, excuse me.

The facilitators there will be several of us here. Oh, I need to go back one. In terms of communication, feel free to use Zoom chat to respond to any prompts that we might give you all to communicate with other attendees and share resources, and then use the React button to raise your hand and ask clarifying questions as we go.

Feel free to just raise a hand when a question comes to mind. If we have time at the end, we will answer any remaining questions. With this one, it'll be helpful, I think, to have questions in the chat as well because we do have a fair amount that we want to get to, and we'll likely, pardon me, likely will respond to most questions at the end.

Your facilitators for the series include Jena Fahlbush who's a technical assistance specialist with NCADEMI, Christopher Phillips, also a TA specialist, Cynthia Curry, the project director. Kristen Perez-Rickels, another technical assistant specialist, and myself.

I serve on the team as a digital accessibility specialist, and we are really thrilled today to have a guest joining us, Dr. Natalie Shaheen, who is a researcher and teacher, educator at Illinois State University. Cynthia, do you want to take it from here?

CYNTHIA CURRY: Sure, thanks so much, Rob, and Thanks, everyone who has started to introduce yourselves in the chat. Please keep those introductions coming. We want to know why you're here. It's the first of six webinars, and obviously plenty of time to make sure that what's to come in the next five webinars really addresses what's important to you as we move through this series.

So as Rob said, I'm Cynthia Curry, I'm the NCADEMI Project Director, and I'm thrilled to have the opportunity to introduce you to NCADEMI and tell you about this webinar series. So you already know how we pronounce our acronym. That's NCADEMI, the National Center on Accessible Digital Educational Materials and Instruction.

We are a technical assistance, or TA center, that's funded by the Office of Special education programs at the US Department of Education. We provide a lot of TA resources and services, all of which are designed to improve the quality, availability, and the timely provision of accessible digital educational materials and instruction for learners with disabilities from preschool through high school.

So while our resources are certainly transferable to other contexts, NCADEMI is funded to improve outcomes for students with disabilities in elementary and secondary education, and all of our TA resources and services are available at no cost. So a little bit more about our TA. We offer two tiers.

These tiers are defined by our funder, the Office of Special Education Programs, as universal and targeted. So as a participant of this webinar. This webinar series you're experiencing our universal to or UTA, which is defined as general TA and information provided to independent users through their own initiative, resulting in minimal interaction with TA project staff.

So contrast that with targeted or TTA, which is defined as specialized to services based on needs common to multiple recipients and not extensively individualized. A relationship is established between the recipient and one or more to project staff.

So a targeted TA learning opportunity from NCADEMI is actually on the horizon. And this webinar series, this Universal TA webinar series is designed as preparation for that. So this is what it looks like.

That preparation, that the series metaphor, thanks to Jena's creativity, is the stages of the growth of a plant. So we're thinking about this as a series of six sessions that will build or your team's understanding of accessible digital education systems.

We really want to make sure that this universal TA are opportunity works for both individuals who want to start making a difference, as well as-- and especially teams that are coming together, that can really start to affect systemic change. NCADEMI's quality indicators for the provision and use of accessible materials will serve as the foundation of the series.

And every two weeks we'll explore the quality indicators and how you, your school, your district, or your State education agency can prepare to implement them. An optional office hours are offered between the webinars.

So in webinar 1, we're planting the seeds and providing an overview and laying the foundation of the series. In webinar 2, we'll introduce the quality indicators and a readiness protocol that will help you evaluate the gaps and opportunities for using those quality indicators in your own setting. Here at webinar 2, we'll be aiming for a seedling. In webinar 3, we'll dive into the quality indicators that are specific to accessible digital materials or DM.

These are the quality indicators designed for providing digital materials that are accessible from the beginning or also known as born accessible in webinar 4, we'll dive into the quality indicators that are specific to accessible formats or AF. These are the quality indicators that are designed for ensuring that students who require accessible formats, such as audio, Braille, captions, or digital text, receive them in high quality and in a timely manner.

In webinar 5, we'll explore the self-assessment tools that accompany both sets of quality indicators. So by the end of webinar 5, you should be feeling confident in your grasp of the components of both sets of quality indicators. And then finally in webinar 6, we'll be in full bloom and ready to launch into the details of NCADEMI's targeted TA for implementing the quality indicators.

This, again, is an optional opportunity for those who are interested in continuing to receive from NCADEMI beyond this universal webinar series. So the targeted launches in January. It will be a professional learning group for digital accessibility in education.

As a preview, the professional learning group will be made up of teams from state educational agencies or local educational agencies, that's SEAs and LEAs, are actively implementing the quality indicators in what are called plan do study, act cycles.

So the self-assessment tools and the related resources from NCADEMI will help guide that process of Plan-Do-Study-Act. There will be no application to join the professional learning group, and a team can enroll at any time. The ticket for a team to participate will be completion of the readiness protocol, and the readiness protocol is a topic of this webinar series.

So again, we're designing this webinar series to help prepare for you to continue with to within NCADEMI through the targeted to opportunity, or perhaps you'll be ready to move on independently within your own team.

But of course, if you remain active in this webinar series, you'll have all the information you need to transition to that professional learning group in January when it launches, but you can also sign up for our email notifications to stay updated, which I think the link in the QR code are in the chat. Thank you Christopher.

So questions about NCADEMI, this UDA UTA webinar series or the upcoming professional learning group are welcome in the chat. At the end of this webinar. Come to office hours and ask more.

And of course, you can always reach us by email or phone anytime. If you have any additional questions about NCADEMI or this webinar series itself. In the meantime, we're going to move on to the content and have Jena kick us off with laying the foundation of digital accessibility.

JENA FAHLBUSH: Hey, Thanks, Cynthia. It's a huge pleasure to speak to you all today about digital accessibility, especially because really, if you'd asked me 10 years ago, if I'd ever be speaking on this topic, I would have been very surprised.

At that time, 10 years ago, I was actually transitioning from teaching in the third grade classroom to training other educators, and accessibility really became the foundation of that next stage of my career. And it was just new to me. It was something I totally had to dive into and learn, and I'm so grateful that I am here now with you. So what is digital accessibility?

When we're defining accessibility, what I want you to think about is designing and developing digital products so that students with and without disabilities, and their families and caregivers can use them.

And oftentimes, when we're talking about accessibility and accessible, we have these conversations about digital access, and we find some terms that get substituted or interchanged with one another.

So I don't know how many times, and I know I'm guilty of it too. Sometimes I use the word or hear the word accessible used in place of words like available, inclusive, affordable, and usable, and we know that there are definitely times when those terms are accurate in the context. But I think it's important for our conversation today, and as you take this information back to your teams and your colleagues, that you help them realize that when we're talking about digital accessibility, we are talking about accessible, meaning how students with disabilities effectively use their digital materials.

So in terms of a more formal definition that, again, you can bring back to your teams and your colleagues, here, we have a definition that's used in our federal laws and guidance. You'll see cited at the bottom there the Department of Justice and the Department of Education. So when we're talking formally, we're

talking about individuals with disabilities and making sure that they can access the same information, engage in the same interactions, and otherwise participate in or benefit from the same services, programs, and activities as individuals without disabilities in a manner that provides substantially equivalent timeliness, privacy, independence, and ease of use.

So to take that a little bit further, we can break it down and talk more about those four terms-- timeliness, privacy, independence, and ease of use, and we can do that really by asking ourselves some questions.

So when we're talking about timeliness, I want you to ask yourself, is the material being provided accessible in that it's provided at the very same time that the curriculum, the lesson, or the activity is introduced to the class, as opposed to a delay due to the time needed to convert the material to an accessible format?

And consider that when you're thinking about those accessible formats, depending upon the type of the material that's needed, that really can mean planning anywhere from a few days to a few months in advance.

So that's one of the reasons I'm glad to be talking about digital accessibility, and I'm so happy you're all here, because it is crucial to prioritize accessibility from the beginning in a systematic and strategic way, and not on the fly, because that's when we deny our students access, when we're trying to do it in the moment.

Then, when it comes to privacy, I want you to consider whether students with disabilities are able to access the material without compromising their right to data privacy. And that was something that I had to think about a lot when I started learning about accessibility, it was something that I wasn't connecting, always privacy to accessibility, but they go hand in hand because when we're thinking about whether or not a student has access to material without compromising their data, what could that look like?

That could mean that you have a student with a disability who's having to give their login information to someone else just so they can open a reading assignment in their LMS, and that's making that material inaccessible to them.

And then, when it comes to independence, we can ask ourselves whether students with disabilities are able to use material independently and to fully participate in the learning experience, as opposed, again, to the need for another party to intervene to facilitate that material.

So that goes back to that last example of a student sharing their login information. Not only are they losing their privacy, but they're also having to rely on someone else to gain access for them. And then, ease of use, consider whether or not students with disabilities are able to use that material with the same ease as students without disabilities.

So if a student without a disability has two clicks to get to something, we ideally want that equivalent experience to be for the students with disabilities. And we know so often there are technical difficulties created by lack of compatibility of the material with the students assistive technology, such as text-to-speech or speech recognition, or even a screen reader.

So think about your students with dyslexia. They should be able to have all their materials, including their PDFs, read aloud with speech to text in the learning management system, if that's part of their assistive technology and their accessible formats that are documented in their IEP.

Now, we want to get you interacting with us. And again, don't forget that chat, is definitely there for you to ask questions as you're thinking of them, or please be writing them down for the office hours. But we want

to know, as we've defined accessibility in one word or phrase, how would you describe your system's current approach to accessibility?

So you can answer in the chat there, or do you see the answers coming in, whether it's emerging, scattered, siloed, intentional, unclear, or embedded? You can also use the chat to say more or to answer in the chat. Thanks. I see some answers coming in there, which is great.

So it's great. I'm seeing some intentional answers. Any more participation is definitely encouraged. We see we've got about 40% that's participated. Maybe we'll let it stand for a couple more participants.

CYNTHIA CURRY: This is Cynthia. Chat, I just wanted to clarify that, I think, in the list of options, "international" is supposed to be "intentional," correct? So if you choose-- some folks are putting intentional in the chat as a replacement for international. So just wanted to clarify-- if you choose if international is I think is intended to be intentional. So go ahead and choose international. We'll accept that as intentional.

JENA FAHLBUSH: Yeah, thanks for that clarification. Yeah, very similar words. Easy for a typo there. And yeah, if we want to go ahead and end that pole, we can tell you that, right now, we're seeing most of you, 33% of the respondents of about 57% responded do say it is intentional, followed by scattered approaches, siloed approaches is equal to emerging.

So definitely have a lot of you here that are just in the beginning stages, which is great. We're glad you're here because this is right where you need to be, and there's a few of you that said, it's unclear. And I hope we provide some clarity, at least today on where, you know, you might go and some questions to be asking and some next steps for you to be thinking about.

All right, and last but not least, in my section here is thinking about the fact that now we've got some of that what is accessibility? What is digital accessibility under our belts. We're going to shift to the why. And there's no better person here than Dr. Shaheen to paint the picture of why this work is so critically important.

Dr. Shaheen is a leading expert in k-12 digital accessibility and born accessible STEM learning. She's also the principal investigator of the Ally and SC project. And today, she'll be sharing some of her Ally inside work, which will highlight the impact of digital accessibility or the lack thereof. So Thanks Dr. Shaheen for being here and sharing your time with us today. I'm excited to hear what you have to say.

NATALIE SHAHEEN: Awesome. Thanks, Jena, and hello, everybody. What a great way to spend my Thursday afternoon. So you could choose to do digital accessibility work for many reasons. You could do it to comply with the law, which might be what brought you to this webinar. I'm here, however, to talk about a different reason to do digital accessibility work-- to do it for disabled students. I'm going to share the wisdom that blind and low-vision students have graciously shared with me.

When I asked Jacob what he wished teachers knew about his experience with inaccessible technology in class, he said, "you've set the whole class with handouts and stuff to use this website for the next three weeks to compose a project, and now, me or another blind student is stranded on this desert island because that site doesn't work. You can't just recharge your whole teaching plan, especially when you've distributed it."

Next slide, please. A few years ago, I conducted a qualitative study of blind and low-vision teens experiences using accessible and inaccessible technologies in school. The first thing I wanted to learn from them was, what's it like being in classes that use inaccessible technology?

The students told me, it's like playing the desert island game-- a rigged game where you have to discover hidden rules and develop special skills just to survive. The other thing I wanted to learn was-- what meaning do blind and low vision students make of their experiences in classes that use inaccessible technology? It turns out that the students takeaway was that access is their responsibility.

The students learned they can't count on other people for accessibility. Certainly not what we would hope for them to take away from their educational experience. Right? Next, I'm going to share a story that emerged from this study. Next slide, please.

Sometimes I Cry is a short story about Rebecca, an 18-year-old junior at a public high school in the Midwest. Rebecca is a Braille reader and a screen reader user. Rebecca's younger sister, Megan, is a sighted ninth grader at the same high school. Feelgood. When did Aretha part 1 and 2 of Sometimes I Cry. You can scan the QR code on the slide, or follow the link on the slide to read along with me.

The diffuse light of the setting sun illuminates. Rebecca curled up at her desk, hugging her knees and weeping. Megan bursts into the room. "You'll never guess what happened at choir." Megan stops. Her gaze darts from the crumpled tissue on the floor to the pile of tissues on her sister's desk.

She walks over and rests her hand between Rebecca's shoulder blades. "It's no big deal," Rebecca murmurs. "Just vibing to your sad playlist tonight?" Megan sits on the foot of the bed and Rebecca's bookbag tumbles to the floor, ejecting some of its contents.

Rebecca leans over to locate the things that fell out of her bag. Megan interrupts Rebecca's search before it begins. "Sorry, I got it. It's just a scrunchie, your graphing calculator, and this Braille. Megan picks up the small comb bound packet and reads the print label scrawled in the narrow margin at the top of the page. Chem Gizmos, 11/15.

"More Gizmos simulations today?" Rebecca swivels to face her sister and parts the curtain of her hair, revealing her red, puffy face. "Yeah, it's getting really annoying. The simulations really point out that I'm different and stuff." "Bad," Megan huffs.

Rebecca shifts in her chair, pulling her knees back into her chest. "With those activities, it's staring me straight in the face that I can't do this, and I need to have help and assistance." Megan stands up and begins pacing. "Did you tell Mr. Hoffman off?" Rebecca shakes her head. "I know he doesn't mean it that way. They're great activities for sighted people." She trails off, finishing the sentence silently. There's lots of nice colors and stuff.

"Why are you so nice?" Megan grumbles. "The Gizmos are only a little better than a textbook," She brightens. "We could protest for the science department to bring textbooks back." Rebecca side eyes her sister. "I wish it could just be easy." Downstairs, the garage door rumbles open. "Girls I brought home pizza. Let's eat."

Rebecca and Megan sit at a cafe table in the commons, sipping frappuccinos while they work. A few other students are scattered throughout the large space, but it's pretty quiet. There's still 40 minutes before the first bell. "What class should I take next year? What do you take sophomore year?" Rebecca pulls out her iPad, logs in through the school single sign on, and navigates to the scheduling app.

She turns off voiceover and hands the iPad to Megan. Then, she goes back to writing an essay on her Braille note. Megan swipes around on the iPad for a few minutes. "I forgot juniors registered last week." "Calc, creative writing, psychology, US history," Megan reads.

"No science senior year?" Rebecca shrugs. "I got burnt out. It's hard to keep going when things just always seem like they're coming against you. I'm at the point where I'm like, this is really difficult. Why am I pushing so hard to do all this stuff? Is this really worth it?" She drops her head in shame.

"When I picked classes, I immediately went to, 'can this be accommodated easily?' That's what I was thinking." "I feel you." Megan puts an arm around her sister. "But that sucks. You shouldn't have to worry about that accommodation stuff." Rebecca takes a deep breath. "But that's not how things work IRL," Megan adds. "Yeah, Rebecca says under her breath."

I encourage you to read part three of the story on your own. Next slide, please. I'm sharing research-based stories about blind and low-vision students' experiences in technology mediated education through the A11y in Sci library. Currently, there are 10 stories, including the one that you just heard part of. You can read the stories at [a11ys.org](http://a11ys.org). That's [a11ys.org](http://a11ys.org). You can also scan the QR code that's on the slide. So educators who have been doing accessibility work for several years have explained to me that they do the work because they feel accessibility is imperative to providing an equal education for all. If you already view accessibility as an imperative, and you're trying to get your colleagues to understand that accessibility is about more than compliance, I encourage you to share a story from the A11y in Sci library. Stories are powerful. Thanks so much. Back to you all.

KRISTEN PEREZ-RICKELS: Thank you, Natalie for sharing part of that story. I will definitely go and read the rest of it. I'm invested now. So as Natalie mentioned, through her research, she found that overwhelmingly, students said that accessibility was their responsibility. And it's really not and shouldn't be, right? So thinking about your system and where you are currently working, we'd like for you to share with us who is responsible for ensuring access in your system. And this is not a gotcha.

There are no right answers. If currently it is students. That's an important thing to know. And to be aware of. So who is responsible for ensuring access in your system? You should see a poll open that you can answer directly into. We have a few people responding to that short response. And I unfortunately cannot see them as they come in, but it will generate a word cloud for us.

If you are having difficulty with the poll, please feel free to add it into the chat also, who is responsible for ensuring access in your system? Give it just another 30 seconds maybe OK. All right, so this will generate a word cloud. Great, thank you so much for sharing that, Natalie. So you should see a word cloud of everyone's responses.

The larger the word, the more frequently that response was given. So we can see special education staff is one of the largest responses one of the most frequent responses. Some people did say everyone. Others said the school or specialists teachers.

Some people did admit that at this point, it is the student who is responsible for ensuring their own access. Some other employees like accessibility employees, general education teachers. Wonderful thank you so much for sharing that, Natalie. And thank you, everyone, for participating in that question. This is really just meant to give you an idea of who currently is responsible for ensuring access in your system, and who you might want to invite in conversation to the accessibility provision. Right? because we know that we are all responsible for ensuring accessibility.

It is the responsibility of all of the staff at our district organization school to ensure that our materials, resources, and instructional educational materials are accessible for all of our students, right? So our task

for you over the next two weeks before our next webinar, we would like to encourage you to get that accessibility conversation started to speak with others in your system.

If it is the sole responsibility of special education staff now, consider inviting some of your general education colleagues into conversation, if it is the responsibility of just the specialists, consider how you might invite in conversation, the Gen Ed or special education teachers or the site administrators.

And so as a resource for you, there are some conversation starters and a sample email template that you can use to invite others into conversation about how we provide accessible materials to all students. We are asking that you connect with at least one colleague within your system. So at your school, your district, or your State to explore an accessibility practice.

This is not a-- you immediately have to distribute the leadership and responsibility. This is the first step to increasing understanding with everyone, that it is the responsibility of everyone to ensure access. So you can choose to have that conversation in person if that is a modality that you prefer, and we have some of those conversations starters, like I said, to help you frame that conversation.

You could also send an email to a colleague to begin that conversation. All right, and Christopher has the link in the chat for you. And it will be on the Materials page with this webinar as well. When we come back together, there will be a little bit of time for us to discuss how those conversations went.

But we do encourage you to attend office hours and work through any problems or barriers or questions you have as you begin those conversations. All right. I will turn it over to Christopher now.

CRISTOPHER PHILLIPS: Thank you so much, Kristin. So as has been mentioned, this is the first of a series of webinars. We want to talk just a little bit about some of what is coming up so you can be prepared. And also, as you said in today, and maybe you're thinking of a colleague or someone you wish could have been here, how they can join in and be a part of our future sessions.

So first of all, After each session has been mentioned, there will be a couple of different office hours that you can choose one a couple of different times that you can come to. We're really excited about these. These will be opportunities a little bit less formal, less presentation. But we will walk through some next steps and ideas and really talk with you on what does this look like for you and your organization specifically.

And so you can see the dates on the slide here, next Tuesday, October 14, starting at 4:00 Eastern or Wednesday, October 15 starting at 6 PM Eastern, and we will send out an email tomorrow that will include a link to those office hours registrations that you can jump in and be a part of.

And again, feel free to share this as well with somebody else who you wish could have been here today, or would love to be a part of this. The recording of today's session will be up and available on that link we shared earlier. As we mentioned that anybody can get caught up and join us going forward.

And then, additionally, just to look forward to. And again, when you registered for this webinar, you registered for that series of the 6. So this should already be on your calendar from that Zoom registration. But in two weeks from today, on October 23, will be our next webinar, again at 2:00 PM Eastern, where we'll go into an introduction to the quality indicators, help you understand what they are and all the different pieces to that, and start going over the readiness tool as well that can be used to determine where you're at on your readiness to enter into this process.

And so again, if you're here today, you've already registered for that one. It should be on your calendar. But please share that with others. We would love to have more people join us to those as we go forward.

OK, and then as we-- just a couple of things we want to just mention as we to wrap up today, and then we'll have a few minutes for questions. Just keep in touch with us and share, again, with people. There is a link to our website in [ncademi.org](http://ncademi.org). Feel free to reach out to us with any questions by email or text. Email is [ncademi@usu.edu](mailto:ncademi@usu.edu). Our phone number 435-554-8213 where you can either call us or send us a text, and I also would encourage you to follow us on LinkedIn. That link is in the chat there, and then sign up for our newsletter as well.

We only send that out about quarterly. And so it's not something that will clog up your inboxes, but share all the new resources and things as they become available. We have just a couple of slides here we just need to share as a part of our work. Again, we went over a lot of this introductory material at the beginning. But with that--