

2022 Article from CSDA website

In California, being a special district means having a website. SB 929 — The Special Districts Transparency Act — was enacted in January 2020. True to its name, SB 929 established website maintenance and posting requirements to ensure all independent special districts are transparent and accountable to the communities they serve.

The origins of transparency requirements date back 22 years. In May 2000, the Little Hoover Commission investigated special districts and released a report titled *Special Districts: Relics of the Past or Resources for the Future?* The report offered many recommendations, including requiring website and financial transparency:

Through this review, the Commission has come to understand that thousands of special districts provide valuable services to millions of Californians. But it also found reason to be concerned that the government closest to the people is not always visible or accountable to the people.

The Commission turned its attention back to special districts in 2018, releasing a report that offered many suggestions for additional oversight, including that all districts maintain a website with specific posting requirements to encourage transparency. We have CSDA to thank for ensuring the outcome of the report was only five requirements in SB 929, not fifteen as originally suggested.

Special district websites must also comply with WCAG 2.0 AA, which outlines the requirements for website accessibility enforced by the Americans with Disabilities Act (Section 508/ADA). This is often the most challenging part for special districts - it's a bunch of pretty technical requirements. Noncompliance isn't an option, however, because lawsuits over inaccessible websites are on the rise and can be very expensive to settle.

In a nutshell, to comply with all California requirements, special districts need to:

Establish and maintain a website that is accessible to visitors with disabilities by January 2020.

Post contact information for the district on the website.

Post agendas to the website at least 72 hours in advance of each regular meeting, in a format that is searchable, indexable, and platform-independent. A direct link to the most recent agenda on the home page is also required under AB 2257.

Post a link to the State Controller's PublicPay website (or include the district's most recent Compensation Report on the site).

Post a link to the State Controller's ByTheNumbers website (or include the district's most recent Financial Transaction Report on the site).

Post a link to the district's Enterprise System Catalog in a "prominent location" on the website as required by SB 272.

Healthcare Districts must also include their annual budget, a list of their current board members, recipients of grant funding, and the district's policy for providing grants, audits, financial reports, and municipal service reviews or LAFCO studies, if any.

And districts must have this content on a website that is ADA-compliant and complies with AB 434:

Scanning your site for conformance with WCAG 2.0 AA (free scanner and instructions at getstreamline.com/accessibility)

Ensuring closed captioning on videos

Ensuring accessible PDF attachments