

ADA Plan Reviews are required for Renovations and New Construction of Rhode Island Schools

The State of Rhode Island is in the midst a decade long, billion-dollar public school renovations and new construction. The Rhode Island School Building Authority requires local school departments to submit renovation, alteration, and new construction design plans to the RI Governor's Commission on Disabilities (the NE ADA Center affiliate) for ADA compliance review and approval.

Towns and cities are certainly viewing schools as a priority when developing their budgets. The Commission receives approximately 2-3 school construction project plans per week.

Limited funding and renovations pose the largest hurdle in successfully reaching ADA compliance. A certain amount of funds allocated for projects makes it tricky for the schools built prior to the American on Disabilities Act to achieve full compliance. Most of our public schools were built upwards of 50 years ago. Projects, at times, seem to be prioritized without the ADA in mind. Many schools were built with little to no vertical interior access, on tiered levels, with inaccessible bathrooms, recessed doorways, etc. Our process is to educate and enforce that these types of issues are addressed as a priority when renovations are being proposed. New construction is a much more seamless processes as usually the specs are drawn to compliance.

Technical Assistance reports are provided to the architect once plans are reviewed. Our office requires changes to bring design plans into compliance with the 2010 ADA Accessibility Guidelines. The Commission makes suggestions, comments, and questions on the plan that must be addressed by the architect before the plan is approved and moved forward. This process will ensured that our public schools of the future will be accessible to all.



Pictured above is the fully renovated East Providence High School, which, with the help of our office, is 100% accessible.

Joseph Ferri recently was hired as an Assistant ADA Coordinator with the Rhode Island Governor's Commission on Disabilities in October 2022. He has a background in plan review as a former code enforcement officer for the City of Woonsocket. Following inspections, he was the Program Manager for the City's grant programs.