

Northern BC School District Accessibility Plan
September 1, 2023, to August 31, 2026

Contents

Introduction	2
The Organizations Represented in this Plan:.....	2
Territorial Acknowledgement.....	3
Messages from the Region	3
Definitions	4
Framework Guiding Our Work	5
About Our Committee	6
Overview of the Plan	6
Plan Priorities	6
Priority #1 – Accessibility Inventory.....	7
Priority #2 - Policies and Practices Scan	7
Priority #3 - Accessibility and Inclusion Education	7
Feedback Mechanism	8
Monitoring	8
Evaluating	8
Appendix A: School District Links for Feedback	9
Appendix B: About Disability	10
Appendix C: Suggested References/Resources.....	18

Territorial Acknowledgement

- SD 27 - Located on the traditional and unceded territories of the Secwepemc, Tsilhqot'in, and Dakelh First Nations
- SD 28 - Nazko, Lhtako, ?Esdilagh, and Lhoosk'uz
- SD 49 - Nuxalk Nation, Wuikinuxv Nation, and Heiltsuk Nation
- SD 50 - Located on the traditional and unceded territory of the Haida Nation.
- SD 52 - Located on the traditional territory of the Ts'msyen and Sm'algyax speaking peoples
- SD 54 - Located on the traditional and unceded territory of the Witsuwit'en Nation
- SD 57 - Lheidli T'enneh, McLeod Lake Indian Band, and Simpcx First Nations
- SD 59 - Located on Treaty 8 Territory home of Saulteau First Nation and West Moberly First Nation, a strong Métis community and the many other First Nations and Inuit who have relocated here from across Canada.
- SD 60 - Located on the traditional territory of the Tsáá? Ché Ne Dane within Treaty 8
- SD 82 - Located on the

strive to create an environment where all individuals, regardless of their abilities or disabilities, have equal access to education, employment, resources, and support. Universal access is not only a fundamental principle of society, but it will also simply make our communities better. ~ *Dr. Stephen Petrucci, BCSSA Northern Chapter Director*

The BC Council of Administrators of Inclusive Support in Education (BCCAISE) are engaged in the work to create inclusive spaces for all learners. The Northern Chapter is comprised of the administrators whose work is supporting learners with diverse abilities across the region stretching from Cariboo-Chilcotin north to the Yukon border. Northern group members are deeply involved in the work of accessibility and the work to create a plan to enable school districts and their staff to remove barriers for all individuals. We fully support this work and look forward to barrier free environments that create spaces for inclusion, diversity, and self-determination. ~ *Claire McKay, BCCAISE Northern BC Regional Network Chair*

Definitions

The following definitions are provided in the [Accessible BC Act](#) and the [Developing Your First Accessibility Plan](#) guide which was created as part of the Accessible Organization Project led by Disability Alliance BC.

Accessibility Plan	A plan to identify, remove, and prevent barriers to individuals in or interacting with the organization through the considerations of inclusion, adaptability, diversity, collaboration, self-determination, and universal design.
Adaptability	Disability and accessibility are evolving concepts that change as services, technology, and attitudes change.
Barriers	Anything that hinders the full and equal participation in society of a person with an impairment.
Collaboration	Promoting accessible communities is a shared responsibility and everyone has a role to play.

Disability	An inability to participate fully and equally in society due to the interaction of an impairment or a barrier.
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Diversity

Every person is unique. People with disabilities are individuals with varied backgrounds. Individual characteristics including race, gender, sexual orientation religion, and lived experience inform the experiences of individuals.

About Our Committee

The Northern BC School District Accessibility Advisory Committee has eight members all of whom represent persons with varying physical, sensory and neurodivergent abilities. One of the eight members is Indigenous, three members identify as having a disability and two members are a part of the Northern BC School District Accessibility Working Group, which assists with the tasks of the Committee and connects with the key contacts from each school district represented in this plan.

Overview of the Plan

The school districts represented in this plan are committed to ensuring all members of our communities are treated with dignity, given the opportunity for meaningful participation, and are provided equitable access to learning. The priorities outlined in this plan represent our commitment to:

- Engage with staff, community members and people with disabilities in the development and review of our accessibility plan.
- Ensure our school board policies and procedures align with the principles of accessibility.
- Improve access to facilities, policies, programs, practices, and services for students, staff, parents/guardians, volunteers, and community members.
- Respond to feedback for improving accessibility for people with disabilities in our school communities.

Plan Priorities

The Advisory Committee and the thirteen school districts in northern BC represented in this plan are committed to priorities that align with the principles of accessibility. The following priorities focus on gathering

information based on the lived experience of people with disabilities to better understand the scope of work required to reduce social, physical, sensory, and other barriers that prevent people from meaningful interactions in and with our organizations.

Priority #1 – Accessibility Inventory

Through the development of surveys, online feedback forms, working groups, etc., each district will gather information to identify attitudinal, physical, communication, systemic, technology, and sensory barriers to develop strategies, action plans, and timelines to prevent and remove barriers that people with disabilities face when interacting in and with our organizations.

Priority #2 - Policies and Practices Scan

Through the development of surveys, focus groups, online feedback forms, working groups, etc., each district will review existing policies and practices to:

- understand to what extent current policies and practices align with the principles of accessibility,
- identify gaps in staff training or knowledge on accessibility issues,
- summarize and celebrate existing accessibility practices, and
- inform actions and timelines for improvement.

Priority #3 - Accessibility and Inclusion Education

In the fall of 2023, school districts will publicize their commitment to removing barriers to accessibility through the creation of the Northern BC School District Advisory Committee and the Northern BC School District Accessibility Plan and invite students, staff, and the public to provide

feedback using the online feedback tools provided. Based on ongoing feedback provided, districts will develop strategies to:

- increase visibility of those with disabilities
- develop targeted education and training programs
- increase meaningful inclusion in schools

Feedback Mechanism

Each school district represented in this plan has developed an online feedback form that includes a series of questions about the accessibility plan and the accessibility experiences that members of the school communities and the public can complete. Please find the link for the school district in your area in Appendix A. Once you get to the school district [wet4.19999f/Type/Pagc4l](#)

Appendix A: School District Links for Feedback

Please find the link listed below for the school district in your area. On the

Appendix B: About Disability

The Disability Continuum

There is no universally accepted meaning for the word "disability". However, the Ontario Human Rights Code provides definitions of disability that form our guiding principles. Definitions of disability can be placed on a continuum. At one end, disability is explained in terms of medical conditions (medical model). At the opposite end, disability is explained in terms of the social and physical contexts in which it occurs (environmental model). The medical model focuses on deficiencies, symptoms, and treatments. The World Health Organization's (WHO) 1976 definition for disability, for example, is "any restriction or lack (resulting from an impairment) of ability to perform an activity in the manner or within the range considered normal for a human being." Medical model definitions promote the idea that disability is a deviation from the norm. Many people with disabilities are troubled by definitions that regard disability as abnormal, preferring instead to portray disability as commonplace, natural, and in fact, inevitable. As people age, they experience gradual declines in visual acuity, auditory sensitivity, range of motion, bodily strength, and mental powers. Significant functional limitations affect almost half of people between the ages of 55 and 79, and over 70% of people over 80 (World Health Organization (WHO) report titled "Ageing and health", 2015). Beyond middle age, disability is the norm. The environmental model explains disability in relation to social and physical contexts. In this view, the environment, not an individual's medical condition, causes disability. For example, during an electrical blackout, a person who is completely blind can effortlessly navigate around the home, hammer nails, and, if a Braille user, read a novel. A sighted person would be unable to perform these tasks easily, if at all. In this example, the environment disables the sighted person. The environmental model emphasizes that people with disabilities are capable individuals, and it is the barriers in the built and human environments, not their medical conditions, which create disability.

Disability occurs when the world is designed only for a certain way of living, without considering the natural variation among human beings. Barriers are created by humans, and modifying how we live, the tools we use, and our understanding of the proper way to do things can eliminate or minimize design problems that cause barriers. Systematic barriers can be eliminated by modifying policies, plans, and processes. Attitudes that cause barriers can be addressed through disability awareness, respect, and positive interactions with people with disabilities.

Types of Disability and Functional Limitations

A person's disability may make it physically or cognitively challenging to perform everyday tasks such as operating a keyboard, reading a sign, differentiating colours, distinguishing sounds, climbing stairs, grasping small items, remembering words, or doing arithmetic. There are many kinds of disabilities, including physical, sensory, hearing, mental health, developmental and learning. Disabilities can be visible or invisible.

Visual Disabilities

- Look at and speak directly to the person. Address the person, not their interpreter.
- If necessary, ask if another method of communicating would be easier, for example a pen and paper.
- Keep your face clearly visible when speaking.
- Be clear and precise when giving directions and repeat or rephrase if necessary. Make sure you have understood

- Provide the person with information about accessible features of the immediate environment (automatic doors, accessible washrooms, etc.)

Intellectual Disabilities

People with intellectual or developmental disabilities may have difficulty doing many things most of us take for granted. These disabilities can mildly or profoundly limit one's ability to learn. You may not be able to know that someone has one of these disabilities unless you are told, or you notice the way people act, ask questions or body language. Here are some suggestions to help you interact with people with intellectual disabilities:

- As much as possible, treat the person with an intellectual disability like anyone else. They may understand more than you think, and they will appreciate you treating them with respect.
- Do not assume what a person can or cannot do.
- Avoid referring to the disability or using phrases like "handicapped."
- Use simple words and short sentences.
- Make sure the person understands what you have said.
- If you cannot understand what is being said, ask again.
- Give one piece of information at a time.
- Be polite and patient.
- Speak directly to the person, not to someone who is with the person.

Learning or Cognitive Disabilities

Learning or cognitive disabilities can result in many different communication difficulties for people. They can be subtle, as in having difficulty reading, or more pronounced, but they can interfere with the person's ability to receive, express or process information. You may not be able to know that someone has one of these disabilities unless you are told, or you notice the way people act, ask questions, or use body

- If someone is in a crisis, ask him or her to tell you the best way to help.
- Take the person with a mental health disability seriously, and work with them to meet their needs.

Speech and Language Disabilities

Some people have communication challenges. It could be the result of cerebral palsy, hearing loss, or another condition that makes it difficult to pronounce words, causes slurring or stuttering, or not being able to express oneself or understand written or spoken language. Some people who have severe difficulties may use communication boards, sign language or other assistive devices. Here are some suggestions to help you interact with people with speech and language disabilities:

- Just because a person has one disability does not mean they have another. For example, if a person has difficulty speaking; make no

special sign language that involves touching the hands of the client in a two-hand, manual alphabet, or finger spelling, and may guide and interpret for their client. Here are some suggestions to help you interact with people who are deafblind:

- Make no assumptions about what a person can or cannot do. Some deaf-blind people have some sight or hearing, while others have neither.
- Avoid referring to the disability or using phrases like “handicapped.”
- A deaf-blind person is likely to explain to you how to communicate with them or give you an assistance card or a note explaining how to communicate with them.
- Speak directly to the person, as you normally would, not to the intervener.
- Identify yourself to the intervener when you approach a person who is deaf-blind.
- Do not touch service animals – they are working and must always pay attention.
- Unless it is an emergency, refrain from touching a deaf-blind person without permission.

Appendix C: Suggested References/Resources

Global, Canadian and Local Accessibility Context and Legislation

- [United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities](#)
- [Canada Ratifies UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities](#)
- [Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms](#)
- [British Columbia Framework for Accessibility Legislation](#)
- [Accessible British Columbia Act](#)
- [BC Accessibility Legislation Plan Language Summary](#)

Accessibility Planning Resources for Schools and School Boards

- [BC Accessibility Hub](#)
- [Universal Design](#)
- [Special Education Technology BC \(SET BC\)](#)
- [Accessible Resource Centre - BC](#)
- [Standards Council of Canada](#)
- [B6521-95 Barrier-Free Design](#)
- [A Guide to Creating Accessible Play Spaces](#) (Rick Hansen Foundation)
- [Canadian National Institute for the Blind \(CNIB\)](#)
- [Canadian Hard of Hearing Association](#)
- [Canadian Hearing Services](#)
- [Provincial Inclusion Outreach Program](#) (Complex Needs)
- [Multiple Sclerosis Society of Canada](#)
- [Learning Disabilities Association of Canada](#)
- [Brain Injury Canada](#)
- [Spinal Cord Injury Canada](#)
- [Tourette Canada](#)
- [Kelty Mental Health](#) (BC Children's Hospital)