SCHOOL DISTRICT 46 SUNSHINE COAST

Accessibility in Schools

Accessibility Committee

https://yourvoice.sd46.bc.ca/accessibility-committee

Accessibility Committee

Introduction

School District 46 is committed to continuing improvement for livability, inclusivity, and accessibility for persons with disabilities who live, learn, work, and play on the Sunshine Coast. The Accessibility Committee has been established to ensure that students, staff, and visitors with disabilities have equal access to educational programs, services, and facilities within the school district. The committee is responsible for identifying, planning, and implementing initiatives that promote accessibility and inclusion for all members of the school community.

Some Terms to Know

Disability: The state of being unable to participate fully and equally in society as a result of the interaction between an impairment and a barrier.

Impairment: A physical, sensory, mental, intellectual, cognitive limitation, whether permanent, temporary or episodic.

Inclusion: "An attitude and approach that embraces diversity and differences and promotes equal opportunities for all. Inclusion is not just about people with disabilities. When our communities include and embrace everyone, we are ALL better able to reach our full potential." - Inclusion BC

Accessibility: The state of having programs, services and environments that allow all individuals to participate fully in society without encountering barriers.

Barrier: Anything that prevents a person with a disability from fully participating in all aspects of society because of their disability. This includes architectural, attitudinal, information, communications, policy or practice, and technological barriers.

Examples of Disabilities

Physical Disability
Paraplegia, multiple sclerosis, cancer, epilepsy, diabetes

Mental Health Disability
Psychiatric disorders such as major depressive disorder, anxiety disorders, schizophrenia, bipolar disorder, post-traumatic stress disorder, substance addiction

Sensory Disability
Hearing loss, vision loss

Neurodevelopmental
Autism Spectrum Disorder, ADHD, Intellectual disability

Learning Disorder
Dyslexia

Cognitive Impairment
brain injury, stroke or dementia

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Overview

The Accessible B.C. Regulation requires over 750 organizations in the public sector to comply with Part 3 of the Accessible B.C. Act.

This includes:

- School districts and independent schools
- Post-secondary institutions
- Local governments
- Libraries
- Municipal Police departments
- Crowns

School Districts are in the first phase of organizations and must comply by September 1, 2023

Key Features of the Accessible B.C. Regulation

Organizations must establish:

An Accessibility Committee;

An Accessibility Plan;

A tool to receive feedback on Accessibility.

Accessibility Plan

Outlines the activities to identify, remove and prevent barriers.

Organizations:

Can determine the content of their own plans

Must consult with their accessibility committee on the plan

Must make the plan publicly available

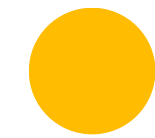Must review and update the plan every 3 years

By September 1, 2023 School Districts must have a publicly available accessibility plan.

This can be a draft plan, a plan that the organization is consulting on, an existing plan that is amended to include accessibility, a plan developed jointly with others, etc.

Accessibility Committee

- Provides advice to the organization on their accessibility plan and how to remove and prevent barriers.
- Committees should aim to have at least half of its members be persons with disabilities and/or represent a disability-serving organization
- Membership should also aim to reflect the diversity of British Columbians and include Indigenous peoples
- •By September 1, 2023 School Districts must have an accessibility committee.
  - This can be an existing committee with an updated terms of reference, you might have started recruiting for an accessibility committee, or you might have a committee that has started identifying barriers.

Feedback Mechanism

A way for those in or interacting with the organization to provide feedback on barriers and the accessibility plan.
- Feedback received must be considered when updating the accessibility plan
- Feedback can be shared with the accessibility committee to support their work

By September 1, 2023 School Districts must have a way for people to provide feedback on barriers.
- This might be an email address, a webform, a designated individual in the organization, etc.

Complying with the Accessible B.C. Regulation

- The regulation allows organizations to evolve their approach to the plan, committee and feedback tool over time.
- You may choose to continually evolve your approach to these requirements over time and with feedback from people with disabilities.
- Requirements are framed flexibly, and organizations will have significant discretion coming into compliance.
- Various strategies will be available to obligated organizations:
  - Building on existing work
  - Collaboration

Objectives

The objectives of the Accessibility Committee are as follows:

1. **To identify** barriers to accessibility within the school district and develop strategies to remove them.
2. **To provide** recommendations for improving accessibility in the school district.
3. **To develop** and implement accessibility policies and procedures.
4. **To promote** awareness and understanding of accessibility issues in the school district.
5. **To collaborate** with other committees and stakeholders to promote accessibility and inclusion.

Scope of Work

To achieve the objectives, the Accessibility Committee will: Review and provide recommendations for Elementary, Secondary, Early Learning and District facilities:
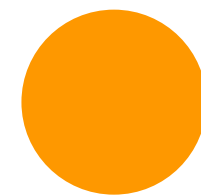
Develop Plan
Provide input into the development of an accessibility plan based on the principles of Inclusion, Adaptability, Diversity, Collaboration, Self-Determination, and Universal Design.
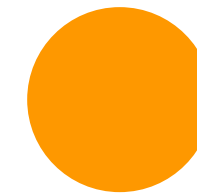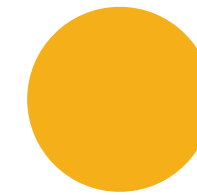
Learn Barriers
Provide input into SD46's barriers to accessibility such as attitudinal, physical, sensory, information and communication, systemic and technology issues.
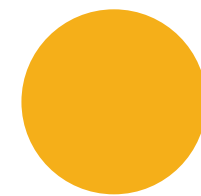
Community Feedback
Review feedback from the SD46 engagement platform.

Plan Roll-Out
Provide information to the Superintendent's office on rolling out the Accessible British Columbia Act and of the school district's work on accessibility.

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Barriers to Accessibility & Inclusion: Physical/Environmental Barriers

Examples of Barriers:

- Sidewalks or doorways that are too narrow for a wheelchair
- Lack of curb cuts in sidewalks
- Inaccessible parking
- Doors without automated openers
- Poor lighting
- Desk, shelves, or counters that are too high
- Noisy, cluttered classrooms
- Signage that is too small or not in alternate formats
- Inaccessible emergency equipment

Easy Suggestions for Educators

- Make lighting adjustments
- Use a microphone/FM Systems
- Have adjustable desks
- Create a quiet room
- Reduce clutter and use muted colours
- Provide signage in Large print, Braille, & symbols
- Install flashing alarms and ensure there are emergency escape routes for all

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Barriers to Accessibility & Inclusion: Communication/Information Barriers

Examples of Barriers:

- Inaccessible documents that can't be read by a screen reader
- Unclear, high-level language
- Videos that aren't captioned and don't have transcripts
- Curriculum that is not engaging and/or does not meet the needs of all types of learners
- Materials that are too small to see, too cluttered, or that lack colour contrast
- Providing documents only in paper format

Easy Suggestions for Educators

- Use accessibility checkers to ensure that all documents are accessible
- Use plain language
- Provide information in various formats
- Allow students to show their learning in ways that work best for them
- Provide students with assistive technology and accommodations that will allow them to access information
- Use a dyslexia-friendly font such as Verdana and Arial, size 14

Barriers to Accessibility & Inclusion: Technological Barriers

Examples of Barriers:

- Lack of assistive technology
- Inaccessible websites and online documents
- Lack of alternative text for images
- Learning Management Systems that can't be accessed by screen readers
- Improper formatting of lists, bullets, headings, and tables
- Lack of training and understanding of accessibility features in technology

Easy Suggestions for Educators

- Become familiar with the Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG) and implement them
- Use alternative text for all images
- Use an online website checker such as WebAim Wave
- Use proper formatting for lists, tables, bullets, & headings
- Use named hyperlinks to enhance comprehension
- Enable accessibility in pdf's and tag pdf's

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Barriers to Accessibility & Inclusion: Barriers to Policies & Practices

Examples of Barriers:

- No flexibility in course selection or options for hybrid learning
- Having unclear learning objectives or instructions
- Lack of accommodation procedures
- Lack of support for mental health and other invisible disabilities
- Lack of funding and time for disability awareness training
- Lack of emergency evacuation protocols, individual plans and evacuation equipment for students with various disabilities

Easy Suggestions for Educators

- Provide flexible learning options including part-time learning, hybrid learning, and alternatives for course selection
- Create learning objectives that are "strength-based, meaningful, authentic, responsive, and triangulated" (Shelley Moore)
- Prioritize mental-health supports and other disability supports
- Provide more funding and time
- Include students with disabilities and their support network in emergency planning

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Barriers to Accessibility & Inclusion: Attitudinal Barriers

Examples of Barriers:

- Assuming that a person with a disability is incapable or 'less than'
- Using non-inclusive language and language that is not person-centric
- Forming ideas about disabled people based on stereotypes or preconceived ideas
- Thinking that giving accommodations is special treatment or unfair to the other students
- Not utilizing or celebrating the strengths of a student

Easy Suggestions for Educators

- Always presume competence
- Use inclusive, person-centric language
- Have representation of people with disabilities in curriculum and materials; as well as in the school staff and leadership
- Avoid unconscious bias
- Educate yourself and others about people with disabilities
- Find and utilize the strengths of all students
- Recognize that accommodations are a human right
- Provide Disability Awareness training to all staff and students

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Timeline

✓ **Identify Accessibility Committee**

✓ **Create Accessibility Terms of Reference**

✓ **Create mechanism for feedback from Students, Families, Staff and Community**

✓ **Create Draft Accessibility Plan**

✓ **September 1st, 2023 | Draft Accessibility Plan Ready**

Considerations for Setting Priorities

- **Control** – Choose action items that you have the operational control to implement
- **Internal Momentum** - You may want to consider action items that expand on goals or improvements you have already planned
- **Cost** -Investigate any grants that may be available and prioritize based on funds you have available
- **Impact** - Consider creating action items that will create the biggest positive effect on the most people
- **Time** - Consider how much time it will take to implement your action items.

More Information

For more information about the Accessible B.C. ACT, see the following links:

- **Accessible B.C. Act (full Act)**

- **Accessible B.C. Act (in force)**

- **Accessible B.C. Regulation comes into force September 1, 2022**

- **Plain Language summary of the Accessible B.C. Act**

- **Timeline for implementation (PDF)**