West Vancouver Schools Accessibility Plan (2023 – 2026)

Welcome to the West Vancouver Schools Accessibility Plan – a comprehensive and inclusive framework designed to ensure that every member of our school community has equitable access to the resources, opportunities and facilities within our district.

With a strong commitment to fostering an environment where diversity is celebrated and all individuals are empowered to thrive, this plan outlines our strategic approach to removing barriers and creating a learning and working environment that is accessible to everyone. By promoting accessibility in physical spaces, curriculum and instructional materials, technology, communication and more, we are dedicated to fostering a culture of inclusivity that embraces the unique strengths and needs of each individual.

We have developed our first three-year Accessibility Plan which highlights some of the work we have done to make our workplaces more accessible, and outlines needs, priorities and an action plan for the future. This first three-year plan will focus on addressing the accessibility to our workplace for our employees. The report draws on feedback through an employee survey as well as feedback from employees directly. The plan will be reviewed and updated as required by the Accessibility Working Committee.

About West Vancouver Schools

Nestled in the stunning landscapes of British Columbia, West Vancouver Schools stands as a beacon of educational excellence and innovation. With a legacy spanning decade, our district has consistently demonstrated a dedication to fostering a holistic and enriched learning experience for students of all ages. Recognized not only for academic achievements but also for our commitment to social and emotional well-being, we take pride in cultivating a supportive environment that nurtures the growth of well-rounded individuals. Our partnership with the local community, coupled with an unwavering focus on personalized learning, equips students to become critical thinkers, compassionate leaders, and active global citizens. As we continue to adapt to the evolving educational landscape, West Vancouver Schools remains steadfast in its pursuit of educational excellence while embracing the values of diversity, collaboration, and inclusion.

Affirmation

West Vancouver Schools affirms its commitment to Indigenous Peoples and Reconciliation by building relationships and deepening our understanding of Indigenous history, worldview, and ways of knowing.

Definitions

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

Accessibility Committee: An official group formed by one or more organizations in collaboration with people with disabilities, to create an accessibility plan and feedback mechanism.

Accessibility Plan: A plan developed by an Accessibility Committee that identifies challenges and solutions for addressing accessibility barriers.

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

Types of barriers:

  a. Physical/Environmental Barrier: A barrier resulting from building design, smells/sounds, lighting, the area adjacent to the building, shape of rooms, the size of doorways, and so on.

  b. Attitudinal Barrier: A barrier that arises from the attitudes of staff, students and the school community, including discriminatory behaviours and a lack of disability awareness.

  c. Communication Barrier: A barrier that arises from difficulties receiving information in person, by telephone or online, interacting with teachers, peers, receptionists or other staff, and receiving training.

  d. Information Barrier: A barrier that arises from inadequate or incomprehensible signage, difficulties reading brochures, forms, manuals, websites, fax transmissions, equipment labels, computer screens, and so on.

  e. Policy or Practice Barrier: Rules, regulations and protocols that prevent a person from performing their job satisfactorily or participating in society. Policy, practice, and procedures that prevent a student from accessing the curriculum and fully participating in the school community.

  f. Technological Barrier: Barriers resulting from computers, photocopiers, fax machines, telephones and switches, including the lack of assistive technologies.

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.

Framework Guiding Our Work

West Vancouver Schools accessibility plan builds on global, national, provincial and school district specific actions to promote and support accessibility.

Global Context – United Nations

In recent years, there has been an emphasis on increasing diversity, equity and inclusion within the workplace and within the larger community. The United Nations has been instrumental in leading the importance of disability as a global health issue. In 2006, the United Nations led efforts to adopt the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD). In 2010, Canada ratified the CRPD 10 and described the CPRD as follows:

"The Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities is an international human right treaty aimed at protecting the rights and dignity of persons with disabilities without discrimination and on an equal basis with others. Parties to the Convention of the rights of Persons with Disabilities are required to promote and ensure the full enjoyment of human rights of persons with disabilities including full equality under the law."

Canadian Context and Legislation – Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms

Canada-wide, around one in five people had some form of disability in 2017. Nationally, Canadian accessibility legislation started in 1985 where disability was included in the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms and in 1986, Persons with Disabilities (PWDs) were included in the new federal *Employment Equity Act*. The Accessible Canada Act (ACA) came into force in 2019, with the overarching goal to realize a barrier-free Canada by 2040. This act applies to federally regulated entities. The ACA has seven focus areas, and was developed based on the following guiding principles:

1. All persons must be treated with dignity regardless of their disabilities.

2. All persons must have the same opportunity to make for themselves the lives that they are able and wish to have regardless of their disabilities.

3. All persons must have barrier-free access to full and equal participation in society, regardless of their disabilities.

4. All persons must have meaningful options and be free to make their own choices, with support if they desire, regardless of their disabilities.

5. Laws, policies, programs, services and structures must take into account the disabilities of persons, the different ways that persons interact with their environments and the multiple and intersecting Forms of marginalization and discrimination faced by persons.

6. PWDs must be involved in the development and design of laws, policies, programs, services and structures.

7. The development and revision of accessibility standards and the making of regulations must be done with the objective of achieving the highest level of accessibility for PWDs.

B.C. Context and Legislation - Accessible B.C. Act

The *Accessible British Columbia Act*, enacted in June 2021, and initially the accessibility planning requirements only applied to provincial government organizations. The Accessible British Columbia Regulation, under the Accessible British Columbia Act, came into force on September 1, 2022. These regulations identify schools as accessible organizations, and school districts and independent schools will be required to have an

Accessibility Committee, an Accessibility Plan, and a tool to receive feedback on accessibility by September 1, 2023: The goal of the act is to improve opportunities for people with disabilities and involve them in identifying, removing, and preventing barriers to their full participation in the life of the province.

Principles in the Accessible B.C. Act

The *Accessible B.C. Act* includes a list of principles that must be considered as organizations develop an accessibility plan. The Definitions are adapted from the foundational document *BC Framework for Accessibility Legislation*.

a. Adaptability: Accessibility plans should reflect that disability and accessibility are evolving concepts that change as services, technology, and attitudes change.

b. Collaboration: Promoting accessible communities is a shared responsibility and everyone has a role to play. Accessibility plans should create opportunities for Organizations and communities to work together to promote access and inclusion.

c. Diversity: Every person is unique. People with disabilities are individuals with varied backgrounds. Individual characteristics including race, gender, sexual orientation, religion, and lived experience greatly inform the experiences of individuals. Accessibility plans should acknowledge the principle of intersectionality and the diversity within the disability community.

d. Inclusion: All British Columbians, including persons with disabilities, should be able to participate fully and equally in their communities.

e. Self-Determination: Accessibility plans should seek to empower people with disabilities to make their own choices and pursue the lives they wish to live.

f. Universal Design: The Centre for Excellence in Universal Design defines Universal Design as "the design and composition of an environment so that it can be accessed, understood, and used to the greatest extent possible by all people regardless of their age, size, ability or disability." An accessibility plan should be designed to meet the needs of all people who interact with the Organization

Our Commitment and Approach to Accessibility

In West Vancouver Schools, we hold an unwavering commitment to inclusion and accessibility as fundamental principles. We are committed to creating an inclusive environment that embraces diversity and promotes equitable participation for students, parents, educators, staff, and stakeholders alike.

By actively seeking input from all members of our community, continuously refining our accessibility policies, and leveraging innovative tools and technologies, we aim to foster an environment where every voice is heard, every perspective is valued, and every individual can contribute and thrive.

To achieve this goal, we have outlined the following commitments and priorities:

- Engage with staff and stakeholders in the development and on-going review of the accessibility plan;

- Ensure that our school board policies and procedures align with the principles of accessibility;
- Improve access to facilities, programs, and services for students, staff and parents/guardians, volunteers and community members.
- Continually improve accessibility for people with disabilities in our school community.

In the spring of 2023, we surveyed all employees asking about their experience, perspective and opinion about accessibility in our district. This information provided additional context and information to support the future work of the committee and the development of this plan. Our Committee will meet periodically over the first year to confirm the initial plan's directions and then will meet as required over the course of this three year cycle. This plan is intended to be flexible and respond to the needs of our stakeholders.

Accessibility Committee

Our Accessibility Committee consists of a diverse group of school district employees representing a cross section of positions, skills, backgrounds and lived experiences. Our hope is to have captured the diversity of our district community. We are very appreciative of the committee member's time and commitment to accessibility and inclusion.

Accessibility Accomplishments and Plan Priorities

The guiding principles of inclusive practice inform West Vancouver Schools programs, policies, practices, and services to reduce and minimize barriers to accessibility for people with disabilities. We strive to create an environment that is accessible and we seek to ensure continuously improve our accessibility. There are a number of initiatives we have taken to identify, remove and prevent barriers for people with disabilities.

The following is a summary of some of the major achievements we have accomplished related to accessibility and plans we have for the future:

Information and Communication

- ✓ Shared information about the *Accessibility Act* with district/school staff.
- ✓ Our schools' libraries maintain a suite of documents accessible to school staff outlining the various methods by which the librarian can support student and staff requests for accessible library resources such as audiobooks, high interest/low vocabulary books, and closed-captioned videos.
- ✓ We have and/or will update our communication tools as follows:
  - o We have completed optimizing the orientation for Mobile screens.
  - o Ensuring there is a clear homepage (easy to read, uncluttered, appropriate fonts, etc.).
  - o Implemented a translation button on our website.

- Improving Readability of Megamation Menu Navigation Links (in progress).
- Conversion of various PDF's into webpages in order to work with a variety of translated languages and screen readers (for example – Administrative Procedures) (in progress).
- Cleanup of search function (in progress).
- Updating of ALT tag function to support visually impaired readers (in progress).
- Update and improve wireless internet access as well as access to devices to support staff in the performance of their duties.

Human Resources Practices

- ✓ Review of all human resources practices and procedures including hiring procedures, professional learning opportunities and job requirements to ensure we promote inclusivity and accessibility for all employees – both current and future.
- ✓ Identify gaps in staff training or knowledge on accessibility.
- ✓ Create an action plan and timeline for implementation.

Accessible Infrastructure

- ✓ In partnership with the Rick Hansen Foundation, the district conducted a Physical and Architectural Environment Audit of all of our schools
- ✓ The district has invested in several upgrades to existing facilities to new standards that support accessible school communities. Investments have been targeted to upgrade washroom accessibility, ramps and door operators, elevator renewal and upgrades as well as new elevators, upgraded fire alarms complete with strobes, and parking and curb cut enhancements to support main entrance access improvements.
- ✓ Future plans include to continue to work through the recommendations made by the Rick Hansen Foundation to make our sites more accessible.
- ✓ Review wireless network connectivity challenges and look to improve internet accessibility
- ✓ Review of policies and procedures related to access to IT resources to support employees as well as student learning.

How to Give Us Feedback

We have established an online feedback tool that allows students, staff or members of the school district community the opportunity to share information or feedback about accessibility experiences or any concerns. Feedback can be anonymous, or people can provide their name and contact information if they wish to be contacted. We will also provide people with a phone number as an alternative to provide this feedback.

Appendices

Appendix A: About Disability and 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, that 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

Visual disabilities reduce one's ability to see clearly. Very few people are totally blind. Some have limited vision such as tunnel vision, where a person has a loss of peripheral or side vision, or a lack of central vision, which means they cannot see straight ahead. Some can see the outline of objects while others can see the direction of light. Impaired vision can restrict a person's ability to read signs, locate landmarks or see hazards. In some cases, it may be difficult to tell if a person has a visual disability. Others may use a guide dog or white cane. Here are some suggestions to help you interact with people with visual disabilities:

- Identify yourself when you approach the person and speak directly to them.

- Speak normally and clearly.

- Avoid referring to the disability or using phrases like "handicapped".

- Unless it is an emergency, only touch the person if you have been given permission.

- If you offer assistance, wait until your receive permission.

- Offer your arm (the elbow) to guide the person and walk slowly.

- Service animals are working and have to pay attention at all times. Refrain from engaging with the animal.

- If you're giving directions or verbal information, be precise and clear. For example, if you're approaching a door or an obstacle, say so. Don't just assume the individual can't see you.

- When entering a room, show the individual to a chair, or guide them to a comfortable location.

- Identify landmarks or other details to orient the person to the environment around them.

- Ensure you say good-bye prior to leaving the individual.

- Be patient. Things may take a little longer.

Hard of Hearing and Deafness

People who have hearing loss may be deaf or hard of hearing. Like other disabilities, hearing loss has a wide variety of degrees. People who are hard of hearing may require assistive devices when communicating. While some people may use sign language, notes or hearing aids when communicating, others may also use email, pagers, TTY telephone service or Bell Canada Relay Service. Here are some suggestions to help you interact with people who are deaf or hard of hearing:

- Always ask how you can help.

- Don't shout.

- Avoid referring to the disability or using phrases like "handicapped".

- Attract the person's attention before speaking. The best way is a gentle touch on the shoulder or gently waving your hand.

- Make sure you are in a well-lighted area where the person can see your face.

- 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 been understood.

- Service animals are working and have to pay attention at all times. Refrain from engaging with the animal.

- Any personal (e.g., financial) matters should be discussed in a private room to avoid other people overhearing

- Be patient. Communication for people who are deaf is different because their first language may not be English. It may be American Sign Language (ASL).

- If the person uses a hearing aid, try to speak in an area with few competing sounds.

Physical Disabilities

There are many types and degrees of physical disabilities and not all require a wheelchair. For example, people who have arthritis, heart or lung conditions, or amputations may also have difficulty moving, standing or sitting. It may be difficult to identify a person with a physical disability. Here are some suggestions to help you interact with people with physical disabilities:

- Speak normally and directly to the person rather than someone who is with them.

- People with physical disabilities often have their own ways of doing things. Ask before you help.

- Avoid referring to the disability or using phrases like "handicapped".

- Be patient and be sure you understand their needs.

- Unless it is an emergency, refrain from touching any assistive devices, including wheelchairs.

- 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.

- Don't 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've said.

- If you can't understand what's 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 a host of different communications 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 body language. Here are some suggestions to help you interact with people with learning disabilities or disabilities:

- Patience and a willingness to find a way to communicate are your best tools.

- Recognize that some people with communication difficulties use augmentative communication systems such as Signed English and Picture Exchange System.

- When you know that someone with a learning disability needs help, ask how you can best help.

- Speak normally and clearly, and directly to the person

- Take some time — people with some kinds of disabilities may take a little longer to understand and respond.

- Try to find ways to provide information in a way that works best for them. For example, have a paper and pen handy.

- If you're dealing with a child, be patient, encouraging and supportive.

- Avoid referring to the disability or using phrases like "handicapped".

- Be courteous and patient and the person will let you know how to best provide service in a way that works for them.

Mental Health Disabilities

People with mental health disabilities look like anyone else. You won't know that the person has a mental health disability unless you're informed of it. But if someone is experiencing difficulty in controlling their symptoms or is in a crisis, you may need to

help out. Be calm and professional and let the person tell you how you can best help. Here are some suggestions to help you interact with people with mental health disabilities:

- Treat people with a mental health disability with the same respect and consideration you have for everyone else.

- Be confident and reassuring and listen to persons with a mental health disability and their needs.

- If someone appears to be 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 doesn't mean they have another. For example, if a person has difficulty speaking; make no assumption they have an intellectual disability as well.

- If you don't understand, ask the person to repeat the information.

- Avoid referring to the disability or using phrases like "handicapped".

- If you are able, ask questions that can be answered 'yes' or 'no'.

- Take some time. Be patient and polite and give the person whatever time they need to get their point across.

- Allow the individual to finish their sentences themselves without interruption.

- Patience, respect and a willingness to find a way to communicate are your best tools.

Deaf-Blind Disabilities

A person who is deafblind cannot see or hear to some extent. This results in greater difficulties in accessing information and managing daily activities. Most people who are deafblind will be accompanied by an intervener, a professional who helps with communicating. Interveners are trained in 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 the person who is deaf-blind.

- Don't touch service animals – they are working and have to pay attention at all times.

- Unless it's an emergency, refrain from touching a deaf-blind person without permission.

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Appendix B: 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

- Auditory Outreach Provincial Resource Program

- 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)

- Gifted Children's Association of BC 36