![New Westminster Schools logo]

Beyond Barriers:

2023–2026 Accessibility Plan

A blueprint for inclusive access at New Westminster Schools

Territorial Acknowledgement

New Westminster Schools recognizes and acknowledges the Qayqayt First Nation, as well as all Coast Salish peoples, on whose traditional and unceded territories we live, we learn, we play, and we do our work.

The Board of Education believes it's important to recognize and respect Indigenous peoples who originally lived on this land by acknowledging this Traditional Territory. Doing this helps everyone in the school community learn about Indigenous cultures, build better relationships, and understand each other more. This tradition also helps people feel welcomed in the place where they come together. As part of Truth and Reconciliation, our district is committed to listening, learning, and growing. We are actively seeking chances to promote healing and make amends.

In recognizing the historical and ongoing impacts of colonialism on Indigenous communities, we acknowledge the pressing need to deepen our commitment to building meaningful relationships with Indigenous communities, staff, and students. The importance of this endeavor extends beyond mere acknowledgement; it lies in the pursuit of truth and reconciliation. By developing genuine connections to the community and the land, the school district can model positive relationships founded on mutual respect, relevance, reciprocity, and responsibility.

*"We acknowledge the pressing need to deepen **our commitment to building meaningful relationships** with Indigenous communities, staff, and students."*

Prioritizing Indigenous perspectives in curriculum development, engaging in deeper learning for staff, and creating spaces that honor Indigenous languages and traditions are pivotal steps. Through these initiatives, New Westminster Schools strives to not only demonstrate a commitment to truth and reconciliation but also to create an educational environment where Indigenous students feel valued, heard, and empowered, contributing to a more inclusive and equitable educational landscape.

The Foundation:
How Did We Get Here?

The history and journey of disability rights in Canada have been marked by considerable progress and advocacy over the years:

- In 1985, Canadian Human Rights Act was amended to include disability as a prohibited ground for discrimination, laying a legal foundation for change.
- In 1986, Persons with Disabilities were included in the new federal Employment Equity Act.
- In 2006, The Convention of Rights of Persons with Disabilities aimed at protecting the rights and dignity of persons with disabilities without discrimination and on an equal basis with others. Parties must promote and ensure the full enjoyment of human rights of persons with disabilities, including full equality under the law.
- In 2010, Canada ratified the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD). By signing the UNCRPD, the Government of Canada committed to furthering the rights of persons with disabilities.
- In 2019, The Accessible Canada Act (ACA) was enacted in 2019 with the overarching goal of realizing a barrier-free Canada by 2040.
- In 2019, the provincial government engaged in widespread consultation through an Accessibility Legislation Consultation Advisory Committee. The Committee concluded that British Columbia strongly supported the development of accessibility legislation and that more needed to be done to move towards an environment that was inclusive of all people, especially in education and employment.
- In 2021, The Accessible BC Act was created 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.

The Accessible BC Act aims to increase all persons' ability to meaningfully participate in their communities by attempting to remove barriers through the development of accessibility standards. The act requires certain organizations, including school districts and independent schools, to make their organizations more accessible. The key objectives are:

- To increase meaningful participation in communities.
- Develop standards for improved services delivery in areas such as education, including critical infrastructure like entranceways, playgrounds, sidewalks, accessible transportation, employment opportunities, etc.
- Harmonization with other jurisdictions, including federal requirements.

The Act mandated that provincial school districts and independent schools must develop by September 1, 2023:

- An Accessibility Committee.
- An Accessibility plan; and,
- A tool to receive feedback on accessibility, such as an email to receive comments.

Establishing a Accessibility Advisory Committee

Each school district and independent school must create an accessibility committee who will assist the organization in identifying barriers and advise on how to remove and prevent future barriers to those individuals in the organization and to those who interact with the organization. The committee may include members from inside or outside of the organization. Committee membership should ideally reflect the diversity of persons in BC and have at lease on Indigenous person, and half of the members should ideally:

- Be persons with disabilities; or
- Represent an organization that supports persons with disabilities.

Committee members must be focused on progress towards objectives and best practices towards removing and preventing barriers. They must also be committed to supporting the accessibility plan.

Current members of the New Westminster Schools Accessibility Advisory Committee are:

- Rhonda Jones, Director of Instruction, Inclusive Education (New Westminster Schools)
- Kenneth Headley, District Vice Principal, DEIA and Antiracism
- Karen Bower, CUPE (New Westminster Schools)
- Maniya Rafiei, Mosaic (SWIS Program)
- Salimah Haji, (Kinsight)
- Anne Belanger, Parent
- Kelly Shields, NWTU (New Westminster Schools).
- Zahra Lalani, SHARE
- Leah Barrett, central registration, CUPE, (New Westminster Schools)
- David Bollan, CUPE President 409
- Connie Swan, District Vice Principal for Indigenous Education (New Westminster Schools)

As the advisory group engages deeper into the accessibility plan, they will provide opportunities for interested parties from the school community and community at large to participate within subcommittees and working groups when working on specific projects and or initiatives.

The Accessibility Advisory Committee will meet on the following dates for the upcoming 2024/2025 school year:

- **Wednesday, November 29** - 3:30 p.m. to 4:30 p.m. at the school board office.
- **Wednesday, February 28** - 3:30 p.m. to 4:30 p.m. at the school board office.
- **Wednesday, May 1** - 3:30 p.m. to 4:30 p.m. at the school board office.

Accessibility as Part of Diversity, Equity, Inclusion & Antiracism

In 2020, our district went through an extensive engagement process for our Inclusive Education Review. We heard from our community and begun to implement the recommendations. This alignment works well with our Accessibility Plan. Please read our Inclusive Education Review Action Plan here for our priorities and progress. This document will act as a foundational guide for our Accessibility Advisory Committee to see where we have grown, and where we need to focus on moving forward. We also engaged in another engagement process that shared our journey and the work needed for our district regarding Diversity, Equity, Inclusion and Antiracism. Our shared understanding and new learning have resulted in us taking an intersectional approach to this work.

Intersectionality and accessibility intersect in the pursuit of creating a more inclusive and equitable society. Intersectionality acknowledges that individuals may experience multiple layers of discrimination and privilege simultaneously, such as race, gender, disability, and more. When addressing accessibility, it's crucial to consider how these intersecting identities can compound barriers or create unique challenges for certain groups. For example, a disabled person who is also a member of a racial or gender minority may face different and more complex obstacles. Recognizing intersectionality in accessibility means tailoring solutions to accommodate the diverse needs and experiences of marginalized communities in their pursuit of accessing education, employment, or public spaces.
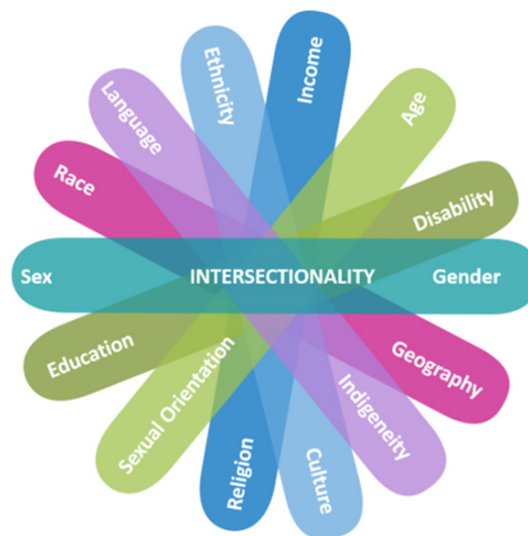
Accessibility involves not only physical spaces but also could also involve barriers from digital, social, and economic inaccessibility. By adopting an intersectional approach, we can better address systemic inequalities and ensure that accessibility initiatives are truly inclusive and equitable for everyone, regardless of their intersecting identities. In this way, intersectionality enriches the conversation and practice of accessibility, promoting a more just and inclusive society for all.

We have completed our Diversity, Equity, Inclusion Antiracism Framework, and you will notice that we will focus on removing barriers systemically for students, families, and communities to engage with us in their most authentic ways which will include objectives connected to Inclusion and Accessibility.

New Westminster Schools Accessibility Priorities

Our school district is committed to ensuring that every student has equal access to education, regardless of their abilities or needs. To achieve this goal, we have developed three Accessibility Plan Goals outlining key objectives we are hoping to dive deeper into. Our goals are connected to three areas:

1. Reviewing our Inclusive Education Plan,
2. Physical Accessibility and
3. Digital/Communication Accessibility.

Through these goals, we aim to create a learning environment that is inclusive, supportive, and responsive to the diverse needs of our student body. By prioritizing accessibility and equity, we will work towards creating a school community where every individual can thrive and succeed.

PRIORITIES	ACTIONS
Review the Inclusive Education Plan • Allows for the assessment of the the effectiveness of our current strategies in meeting the diverse needs of all students. • Identify areas of strength and areas for improvement, ensuring our practices align with best practices and legal requirements. • Serve as a foundational step in our commitment to providing equitable access to education for every student in our district.	• Provide ongoing training and professional development opportunities for teachers, support staff, and administrators on best practices for inclusive education and accessibility. • Gather data and feedback from interested parties, including students, families, teachers, support staff, CUPE staff, and community members, to identify strengths and areas for improvement in our inclusive education initiatives.
Physical Accessibility • Work towards eliminating physical barriers that may hinder access to classrooms, restrooms, libraries, cafeterias, and recreational areas. • Through regular assessments, strive to create an environment where everyone feels welcomed and able to navigate our facilities • Develop an awareness and understanding among all members of our school community about the importance of physical accessibility and inclusivity.	• Regularly assess the physical accessibility of school buildings and address any issues promptly. • Ensure that all school facilities, including classrooms, libraries, restrooms, and play areas, are accessible.

New Westminster Schools Accessibility Priorities

PRIORITIES	ACTIONS
Communication and Accessibility • Ensure that communication with students, parents, and community members is accessible to individuals with diverse needs, including providing alternative formats such as braille, support for non-English speakers, large print, or audio recordings.	• Train staff on effective communication strategies for interacting with individuals who have diverse needs, including using clear language, visual aids, and assistive communication devices. • Establish procedures for providing interpreters and translators for students and families who are deaf, hard of hearing, or non-English speakers. • Ensure that school websites, online learning platforms, and educational materials are accessible to students with disabilities, including those using screen readers, alternative input devices, or other assistive technologies. • Provide training for teachers and staff on creating accessible digital content and using accessibility features of technology tools. • Regularly evaluate the accessibility of digital resources and address any barriers to access.

Accessibility Resources

- Accessible British Columbia Act (https://www.bclaws.gov.bc.ca/civix/document/id/complete/statreg/21019)

- Accessible Canada Act (https://www.canada.ca/en/employment-social-development/programs/accessible-canada/act-summary.html)

- British Columbia Framework for Accessibility Legislation BC Accessibility Legislation Plan Language Summary Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms (https://www2.gov.bc.ca/assets/gov/government/about-the-bc-government/accessible-bc/disability-consultation/2019-consultation/framework-for-accessibility-legislation.pdf)

- Canada Ratifies the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (https://social.desa.un.org/issues/disability/crpd/convention-on-the-rights-of-persons-with-disabilities-crpd)

- Autism Canada: Words Matter B6521-95 Barrier-Free Design (https://autismcanada.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/04/AC_LanguageDocument-2016-1.pdf)

- BC Accessibility Hub Brain Injury Canada (https://bcaccessibilityhub.ca/)

- Canadian Hard of Hearing Association (https://www.chha.ca/)

- Canadian Hearing Services (https://www.chs.ca/accessibility)

- Canadian National Institute for the Blind (CNIB) Creating an Accessibility Committee (https://www.cnib.ca/en?region=bc)

- Developing Your First Accessibility Plan: A Guide for BC Prescribed Organizations (https://bcaccessibilityhub.ca/plans/developing-a-plan/)

- Gifted Children's Association of BC (GCABC) (https://giftedchildrenbc.org/)

- Kelty Mental Health (BC Children's Hospital) (https://keltymentalhealth.ca/)

- Learning Disabilities Association of Canada (LDAC) (https://www.ldac-acta.ca/)

- Multiple Sclerosis Canada (https://mssociety.ca/)

- Provincial Inclusion Outreach Program (Complex Needs) (https://www.inclusionoutreach.ca/)

- Provincial Outreach Program for Autism and Related Disorders (POPARD) (https://autismoutreach.ca/)

- Provincial Outreach Program for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing (POPDHH) (https://popdhh.ca/)

Accessibility Resources

- Provincial Outreach Program for Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder (POPFASD) (https://www.fasdoutreach.ca/)

- Provincial Outreach Program for Students with Deafblindness (POPDB) (https://popdb.ca/)

- Provincial Resource Centre for the Visually Impaired (PRCVI) (https://www.prcvi.org/)

- Special Education Technology BC (SET BC) (https://www.setbc.org/)

- Spinal Cord Injury Canada (https://sci-can.ca/)

- Standards Council of Canada (SCC) (https://www.scc.ca/en)

- Tourette Canada (https://tourette.ca/)

- Universal Design (https://universaldesign.ie/What-is-Universal-Design/)