



School District No. 22 – Vernon

ACCESSIBILITY PLAN

June 26, 2024





SD22 Accessibility Plan

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SD22 Accessibility Plan

Introduction

Territorial Acknowledgement

School District No.22 is grateful to be on the shared, unceded territory of the Syilx people. We respect and commit to a deep consideration of their history, culture, stewardship, and voice.

About Our School District Community

Geographically located on ancestral Syilx territory in south-central British Columbia, School District 22 serves the communities of Vernon, Coldstream, Lavington, Lumby and Cherryville, providing excellent educational services to a diverse group of students. The area is home to members of the Okanagan Indian Band (OKIB), Metis, Inuit, and Off-Reserve First Nations students. We welcome a growing immigrant and refugee population as part of the Rural and Northern Immigration Pilot (RNIP) program and host approximately 300 international students annually. We offer a wide variety of educational program including but not limited to French Immersion, VLearn – District Online Learning (DOL), opportunities for Trades Training and Secondary Apprenticeships, school, and district-based alternative programs, as well as numerous sports and specialty Academies. The district employs 1,317 staff and operates on a budget of \$131 million. The mission of SD22 is to inspire and nurture students to thrive in their learning, relationships, and community. Our motto is: Dream. Believe. Achieve.

We are a diverse community of learners including:

- 9200 students
- 1335 students with active Designations/Disabilities
- 1317 staff
- 19 schools – 14 elementary, 5 secondary, 1 District Online Learning (DOL) school (VLearn) & 1 alternative program
- 7 Board of Education Trustees

Staff (as of Sept. 30, 2023):

- 619 teachers on a Continuing Contract, plus additional temporary and casual staff
- 532 support staff
- 69 senior staff, principals and vice-principals, and exempt staff

To learn more about our School District, please follow this link to our district webpage:

<https://sd22.bc.ca/our-district/about-sd22/>

A Message from the Superintendent: Dr. Christine Perkins

Welcome to School District 22 serving the communities of Cherryville, Lumby, Lavington, Coldstream, Vernon, Okanagan Indian Band (OKIB) and Westside Road. We are committed our mission to inspire and nurture students to thrive in their learning, relationships, and community. In SD 22, all are respected, and each person is encouraged to develop their potential within a learning and working environment that supports all students and staff and provides equitable opportunities to support our diverse community. A key element to supporting our community is the development of a Three-Year Accessibility Plan. This plan identifies system needs, priorities, and action plans, and draws on feedback from our school community and the work of the Accessibility Committee to enhance equity of access to programming and our facilities.

Our Accessibility Committee is a diverse and multi-disciplinary team that meets regularly to affirm our commitment to identify priorities and develop and create action plans that will be highlighted in the Accessibility Plan. This plan will reflect our district values of trust & respect, personal growth, equity, being inclusive, and nurturing meaningful relationships and involving community and collaboration. This Accessibility Plan will identify measurable actions across the pillars of the Accessibility Act, supporting equal opportunity for persons with disabilities by identifying, removing, and preventing barriers of access.

We recognize the importance of accessibility not only for those with unique abilities, but also for the benefit of the entire community. We are committed to advancing the efforts of the Accessibility Committee to improve equity and ease of access to services, as well as access to our facilities. We commit to continuous improvements in developing an environment that supports all students, staff and our communities. In SD 22, you can *Dream. Believe. and Achieve.*

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:
- **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.
- **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.
- **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.
- **Information Barrier:** A barrier that arises from inadequate or incomprehensible signage, difficulties reading brochures, forms, manuals, websites, equipment labels, computer screens, and so on.
- **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.
- **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. (For more information about disability and types of disability and support, refer to Appendix A: Disabilities.)
- **Impairment:** A physical, sensory, mental, intellectual, cognitive limitation, whether permanent, temporary, or episodic.

Guiding Framework

The School District No.22 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 and described the CRPD 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 to Accessibility

Accessibility refers to the degree of ease with which people with disabilities can use and enjoy something such as a device, service, or place. At SD22, we are committed to providing an environment that is accessible and practical for all members of our diverse community. We recognize the importance of conscious planning, universal design, and effort in ensuring that barriers are removed, and accessibility is increased.

Our school district is committed to working collaboratively with the community to provide equitable opportunities for people with disabilities in a way that respects their dignity. To achieve this goal, we have outlined the following commitments:

- Engage with staff, community members and people with disabilities in the development and review of its accessibility plan.
- Ensure that 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.
- Continually improve accessibility for people with disabilities in our school community.

Our Approach

At School District No.22, we believe that all members of our community have the right to be treated with dignity, given an opportunity to participate, and provided with access to learning and community. Our approach is grounded in the core provincial principles of accessibility, including adaptability, collaboration, diversity, inclusion, self-determination, and universal design.

In April 2023, we began the process of establishing an accessibility committee and identifying barriers to accessibility in our school district community. This process involved:

- Appointing members of the Accessibility Committee
- Assessing the current physical and architectural accessibility of our schools
- Conducting surveys and interviews to understand the issues, challenges, and priorities of stakeholders within our school district community.
- Holding key discussions to identify barriers to accessibility.
- Developing a district-wide feedback tool
- Prioritizing immediate actions to be taken
- Discussion around development of a monitoring and evaluation process

Our approach is designed to recognize the gaps and opportunities to improve accessibility and participation in our community. With thoughtful planning, meaningful engagement, training, and direct action, we aim to deliver lasting accessibility improvements for all members of our community.

About our Committee

Purpose of the Accessibility Committee

Under the Accessible B.C. Act, organizations must establish an Accessibility Committee to assist with identifying and preventing barriers to individuals in or interacting with the organization. The purpose of the accessibility committee is to work collaboratively to assess and improve community accessibility, focusing on the experiences of individuals with disabilities while encompassing the whole community. The Accessibility Committee also advises the District Administrator/Board on strategies to reduce social, physical, sensory and other barriers that prevent people from fully participating in all aspects of school community life.

Recruitment of the Accessibility Committee Members

Under the Accessible B.C. Act, the selection of accessibility committee members must, to the extent possible, align with the following goals:

- At least half the members are persons with disabilities (PWD), or individuals who support or are from organizations that support PWDs.
- At least one member is an Indigenous person; and
- Members reflect the diversity of persons in B.C.

Appointments to the Accessibility Committee were held in June 2023 to recruit a diverse representation as outlined above. The Accessibility Committee was formally constituted in June 2023. Current members of the Accessibility Coordinating Committee are listed below.

Accessible BC ACT – School District No.22 Committee Members

We would like to thank the following committee members for their time and commitment to accessibility and inclusion.

Indigenous Community Representative	Charity Sakakibara
Members of SD22 Accessibility Working Group	Danielle Galbraith, Louisa Cotton, Brittany Weber
CUPE Members	Tanya Abramenko, Anna Carter
VTA Members	Christine Molaison, Lisa LaBoucane
SD22 Student	Matthew Leach
Parent of an SD22 student	Michelle Ayers
Director of Instruction – Inclusion	Christine Love (also a member of the working group)
District Principal of Inclusion	Dianne Ballance

Consultation Conducted

Barrier Identification Methodologies

The Accessibility Committee are utilizing the following methods to identify barriers:

- Audit of policies and practices – SD22 is working with Anne Cooper and senior leadership staff to review and update current policies and practices to ensure accessibility and inclusion.
- Survey to Staff - An accessibility and inclusion survey was developed and distributed to staff. Active as of: June 2023
- Survey to Parents/Guardians - An accessibility and inclusion survey was developed and distributed to parents/guardians. Active as of: June 2023
- Survey to Students - An accessibility and inclusion survey was developed and distributed to students. Active as of: June 2023
- Physical Accessibility Audit - An Assessment for our school's physical accessibility was developed. A working group was identified, and continually conduct physical accessibility assessments in each of our schools. Active as of: March 2023 (on-going working documents)
- District Accessibility Feedback Tool - A feedback tool was developed, emailed to families and staff, and posted to the district website. Information about the tool was shared with district and school stakeholders (i.e., students, staff, outside professionals and parents/guardians).
- Accessibility Committee - The Accessible Committee will review the input and feedback from the survey, assessment, and feedback tool. The Committee will collaborate to suggest priority areas to target in the Accessibility Plan. This will be shared with administrators and the Board, who will give the final approval of priority areas for the plan.
- Other Barriers – To Be Determined

Feedback Mechanism

Feedback Mechanism Development

School District No.22 has developed an online feedback tool that includes a series of questions about accessibility experiences that students, staff and members of the school district community can complete. The tool is posted to the main page of the district website and an information announcement about the tool has been provided to students, staff and parents/guardians. Feedback can be anonymous, or people can add their name and contact information if they wish to be contacted.

The following is the contents of the online Accessibility Feedback Tool, that will continue to be available to identify current or future accessibility issues. Survey results are being monitored by the working group and accessibility committee.

Report an Accessibility Barrier

At SD22, we want to learn about specific barriers that people face when they are trying to:

- Access a school program, building or school information.
- Receive a service or support.

Your responses to the questions below will be reviewed by the SD22 Accessibility Committee for their consideration. This information can be submitted anonymously, or you can provide your contact details at the bottom of this form if you wish to be contacted.

1. School or workplace?
2. Which group do you most identify with? (Individual with an accessibility need, Caregiver for an individual with an accessibility need, Caregiver with an accessibility need, Service Provider/Therapist outside of school, sd22 Staff Member, Parent/Guardian, Student, Other).
3. What are the barriers when interacting with the school system?
4. Please describe how these barriers impact you or the student.
5. Suggestions for improvements? (please provide details)
6. Is there anything else you think is important for us to know?
7. Please provide your name and email or phone number if you would like to be contacted. (optional)
You can also email: studentsupport@sd22.bc.ca In the subject line of the email, please include the words: Accessibility Survey 2024

Thank you for providing your valuable feedback! You will be contacted shortly if you have provided your contact details.

Our Three-Year Plan

Overview

This Accessibility Plan outlines the measures that School District No.22 will take to remove and prevent barriers and to promote inclusion for individuals with disabilities in our school district community. The plan will be based on the Accessibility Principles of Adaptability, Collaboration, Diversity, Inclusion, Self- Determination, and Universal Design, as set out in the Accessible B.C. Act, and will be completed by June 2024.

Accessibility Priorities

Based on the feedback being gathered from staff, parents/guardians, and students, and the Physical and Architectural Environment Audit, the Accessibility Committee has identified the following areas as the top priority for improving accessibility in the school district community.

A. Priority #1: Information and Communication

- Online form for families with specific accessibility requests to be developed for September 2024. This form will be connected from the district site and populated to each school website.
- District Accessibility Feedback Tool - A feedback tool was developed, emailed to families and staff, and posted to the district website. Information about the tool was shared with district and school stakeholders (i.e., students, staff, outside professionals and parents/guardians).
- Survey to Staff - An accessibility and inclusion survey was developed and distributed to staff. Active as of: June 2023 and updated January 2024
- Survey to Students - An accessibility and inclusion survey was developed and distributed to students. Active as of: June 2023 and updated January 2024
- Survey to Parents/Guardians - An accessibility and inclusion survey was developed and distributed to parents/guardians. Active as of: June 2023 and updated January 2024
- Focus groups involving students and staff as a follow-up to survey information and key points identified in the 2023-2024 survey.
- Inclusion Specialists and Technology Innovation Coordinators have been providing training centered around building awareness of available options for assistive technology through a variety of programs in our district.
- The current Accessibility Plan will be posted to the SD22 website, along with the yearly report including survey findings.
- School Principals and Vice Principals will be provided their school results from the survey.

B. Priority #2: Physical and Architectural

The committee will support a review of current SD22 practice and BC standards for accessibility. To be completed by June 2024.

- Physical Accessibility Audit - An Assessment for our school's physical accessibility was developed. A working group was identified, and continually conduct physical accessibility assessments in each of our schools. Active as of: March 2023 (on-going working documents).
- The working group has identified key barriers to prioritize accessibility needs for the upcoming school year.
- Our survey identified both vision and hearing impairment related accessibility issues as a priority. The committee will look at what opportunities are there to reduce other barriers.

- Noratek Solutions Inc. has been contracted by SD22 to carry out an assessment for our school's physical accessibility.
- BC CAISE (The Counsel of Admin of Inclusive Support in Education) and Untapped Accessibility (non-profit organization) developed a site accessibility tool that will become available Fall 2024.
- Continue to utilize a referral process for providing sound fields in classrooms to support students with hearing impairments.
- Determine the current needs for alternate learning spaces for students with diverse needs and disabilities, Fall 2024 through the site Accessibility Tool and/or Focus Group findings.
- Audit of alternate learning spaces/sensory rooms with the working group, January 2025.
- Create a plan and budget for sensory rooms and alternative learning spaces or accommodations to address the needs identified in the survey. To be presented to the Board, February 2025.
- Accessibility Committee - The Accessible Committee will review the input and feedback from the survey, assessment, and feedback tool. The Committee will collaborate to suggest priority areas to target in the Accessibility Plan. This will be shared with administrators and the Board, who will give the final approval of priority areas for the plan. To be shared with PVP at the June Admin meeting. Progress report to the Board June 2024.

C. Priority #3: School Policy and Practice

The committee will review and revise SD22 policies and practices to ensure they align with the principles of accessibility, and to address any identified gaps in staff training or knowledge on accessibility issues. To be completed by June 2024.

- Audit of policies and practices – SD22 is working with Anne Cooper and senior leadership staff to review and update current policies and practices to ensure accessibility and inclusion.
- BC CAISE and Untapped is developing resources for reviewing and drafting policies with an accessibility perspective to be release Fall 2024. SD22 will utilize this resource moving forward for reviewing and drafting policies.
- Develop priorities for staff accessibility training and professional development.
- Develop emergency plans for people with disabilities and diverse needs.
- Develop evacuation guideline procedures for students and staff who encounter various barriers (including mobility, vision, hearing, learning) by November 2024.

D. Priority #4: Technology

- Inclusion Specialist offering training in assistive technology needs in collaboration with the Technology team.
- Google Read & Write accessibility program (Text Help) - Licensing is available to schools.
- Other accessible programs:

- iPads have accessibility options for voice to text, text size for vision, and contrast adjustments.
- Technology Innovation Coordinators offer training to EAs and teachers for options built into access tools.
- The Technology Coordinators also offer district and school one-on-one training as requested.
- Programs offered and supported with training once a year: Boardmaker, TouchChat, Read & Write, Kurzweil
- SeeSaw – voice recording and text to speech.
- The Technology departments looks at and considers multiple ways to support assistive technology options when purchasing district programs that can assist for all users.
- Develop an Inclusive Education Technology Plan
- The committee will review School District No.22 technology to increase awareness and training on assistive technology for students with disabilities. To be completed by June 2024.

Monitoring and Evaluation

The Accessibility Planning Committee will meet quarterly to review progress and evaluate the effectiveness of the plan's implementation and plan for increased accessibility throughout the school. The committee will ensure the following steps are taken regarding the Three-Year Accessibility Plan:

1. Prepare an annual status report on the progress of the measures taken to implement the plan.
2. Review and update the Three-Year Accessibility Plan every three years in consultation with persons with disabilities and other relevant community members.

How to Give Us Feedback

In addition to the public availability of the plan, SD22 will continue to post an annual status report on the progress of the Three-Year Accessibility Plan on the district website. Accessible formats of the plan will be made available upon request. Questions, comments, or feedback regarding the Accessibility Plan may be directed to our committee by using our survey link: [Survey Link](#)

Appendices

Appendix A: 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, 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 colors, 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:

1. Identify yourself when you approach the person and speak directly to them.
2. Speak normally and clearly.
3. Avoid referring to the disability or using phrases like “handicapped”.
4. Unless it is an emergency, only touch the person if you have been given permission.
5. If you offer assistance, wait until you receive permission.
6. Offer your arm (the elbow) to guide the person and walk slowly.
7. Service animals are working and have to pay attention at all times. Refrain from engaging with the animal.
8. 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.
9. When entering a room, show the individual to a chair, or guide them to a comfortable location.
10. Identify landmarks or other details to orient the person to the environment around them.
11. Ensure you say good-bye prior to leaving the individual.
12. 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:

13. Always ask how you can help. Don't shout.
14. Avoid referring to the disability or using phrases like “handicapped”.
15. Attract the person's attention before speaking. The best way is a gentle touch on the shoulder or gently waving your hand.
16. Make sure you are in a well-lighted area where the person can see your face.
17. Look at and speak directly to the person. Address the person, not their interpreter.
18. If necessary, ask if another method of communicating would be easier, for example a pen and paper.
19. Keep your face clearly visible when speaking.
20. Be clear and precise when giving directions and repeat or rephrase if necessary. Make sure you have been understood.
21. Service animals are working and have to pay attention at all times. Refrain from engaging with the animal.
22. Any personal (e.g., financial) matters should be discussed in a private room to avoid other people overhearing.
23. 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).
24. 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:

25. Speak normally and directly to the person rather than someone who is with them.
26. People with physical disabilities often have their own ways of doing things. Ask before you help.
27. Avoid referring to the disability or using phrases like “handicapped”.
28. Be patient and be sure you understand their needs.

29. Unless it is an emergency, refrain from touching any assistive devices, including wheelchairs.
30. 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:

- a. 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.
- b. Don't assume what a person can or cannot do.
- c. Avoid referring to the disability or using phrases like "handicapped".
- d. Use simple words and short sentences.
- e. Make sure the person understands what you've said.
- f. If you can't understand what's being said, ask again.
- g. Give one piece of information at a time.
- h. Be polite and patient.
- i. 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. 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, 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 it's important they pay attention.
- Unless it's an emergency, refrain from touching a deaf-blind person without permission.

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](#)