



Multi-Year Accessibility Plan 2023-2028

PREPARED IN ACCORDANCE WITH:
Ontarians with Disabilities Act (ODA)
Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act (AODA)
Integrated Accessibility Standards Regulation (IASR)



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Background and Commitment to Accessibility

The intent of the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act, 2005 (AODA) is to improve opportunities for people with disabilities and to provide for their involvement in the identification, removal and prevention of barriers to their full participation in the life of the province. The goal is for Ontario to be barrier-free and accessible by 2025.

The Act requires school boards to:

- review the Multi-Year Accessibility Plan annually;
- consult with people with disabilities in the review and revision of Multi-Year Accessibility Plan;
- make the revisions of the Multi-Year Accessibility Plan 2023-2028 public.

The Act allows organizations to determine their own priorities and implement them within existing planning processes and using existing resources. The District School Board of Niagara (DSBN) Multi-Year Accessibility Plan 2023-2028 has been prepared by the DSBN Accessibility Committee.

The plan describes:

- measures that the DSBN has implemented; and
- measures that the DSBN will implement during 2023-2028 to identify, remove and prevent barriers for people with disabilities.

The Ontario Human Rights Code states the principles of accommodation are based on the following:

- Respect for dignity

- Individualization
- Integration and full participation

The DSBN Accessibility Committee identified a number of barriers for people with disabilities and recommended continued focus on identifying, removing and preventing barriers in the areas of attitudinal, policy, practice, physical, architectural, information and communication, employment and transportation. The DSBN Accessibility Committee continues to explore strategies to put in place for the following areas covered by O. Regulation 191/11 Integrated Accessibility Regulation (IAR) addressing Information and Communication, Transportation, Employment, Customer Service and the Design of Public Spaces.

OBJECTIVES

This plan:

- Describes the process by which the DSBN will identify, remove and prevent barriers for people with disabilities;
- Reviews existing efforts at the DSBN to remove and prevent barriers for people with disabilities;
- Lists the policies, procedures, programs, practices and services that the DSBN will review in the coming years to identify barriers for people with disabilities;
- Describes the measures the DSBN will take from 2023-2028 to identify, remove and prevent barriers for people with disabilities;

- Describes how the DSBN will make this Accessibility Plan available to the public.

PURPOSE

The DSBN is committed to providing services, employment, learning and working environments that adhere to Indigenous rights, human rights, and equity. It is a system priority to foster spaces that are accessible, welcoming, safe, inclusive, equitable, and free from all forms of discrimination. To support this commitment, the DSBN will:

Uphold the principles of and responsibilities under:

- The Ontario Human Rights Code and the AODA;
- The DSBN's Indigenous Education Policy, Human Rights, Policy, Safe and Respectful Workplace and Harassment Prevention Policy and related procedures.

Work collaboratively with DSBN community members to:

- Raise awareness, share information, enhance learning and build capacity about accessibility, ableism and inclusion;
- Identify, prevent and address accessibility barriers in schools, classrooms, teaching and learning, work spaces and operational, employment and corporate policies, procedures, processes and practices using the principles of inclusive design and, for students, culturally relevant and responsive pedagogy and differentiated instruction, assessment and evaluation;

- Explore individualized options and solutions to respond to accessibility needs and to meet the duty to accommodate under the Ontario Human Rights Code in ways that maximize dignity, respect, independence, participation and integration;
- Engage, consult with and seek input from DSBN students, families, employees and community partners (including the Special Education Advisory Committee) about their experiences, and adjust practices as required to respond to feedback and continually improve accessibility.

Commitment

The DSBN Multi-Year Accessibility Plan 2023-2028 receives approval by Senior Administration and shared with Trustees, Student Trustee Senate, Special Education Advisory Committee (SEAC), Parent Involvement Committee and Equity, Inclusion and Racism Community Advisory Committee for information. This process will be in line with the DSBN's governance policy prior to being posted on the Board website.

The DSBN is committed to:

OPERATIONAL

- Establishing an Accessibility Committee;
- Consulting with various stakeholder groups and people with disabilities in the development and review of its annual accessibility plans;
- Ensuring school board policies and procedures are consistent with the principles of accessibility;

Background and Commitment to Accessibility Continued

- Improving access to facilities, policies, programs, practices and services for students, staff, parents/guardians, volunteers and members of the community.

ATTITUDINAL

In order to promote inclusion and eliminate the stigma of these beliefs, we must challenge assumptions by:

- By learning about different disabilities and their effects on individuals. This allows us to understand the diversity and complexity of disability experiences and avoid generalizing or making assumptions about people with disabilities;
- Including and listening to people with disabilities as they are experts on their own experiences. Listening to their stories and perspectives can help challenge stereotypes and assumptions;
- Recognizing that people with disabilities are unique individuals with their own strengths, abilities, and challenges. Avoid making assumptions based on someone's disability and instead get to know the person as an individual;
- Promoting inclusion to create inclusive environments within the DSBN that promote the full participation of people with disabilities. This includes making accommodations and providing support as needed to ensure that people with disabilities can fully participate in all aspects of society.

The Director of Education has authorized the DSBN Accessibility Planning Committee to prepare an accessibility plan that will enable the DSBN to meet these commitments.

The DSBN is committed to the continual improvement of access to school board facilities, policies, programs, practices and services for students, staff, parents/guardians, volunteers and members of the community with disabilities.

About Us

We are a supportive, innovative community that is focused on doing what's best for kids, and helps every student achieve success. We proudly serve over 40,000 students across almost 100 elementary and secondary schools in Niagara, located between Lake Erie in the South and Lake Ontario in the North.

At the DSBN, we value the role and importance of each individual's contribution. Each person brings something different to our schools, and that's what makes each school community unique. It's the individual talents and dedication of each person that is the true source of the DSBN's strength. We believe that every individual involved in our system – from students, staff, and volunteers to trustees, families and community partners – has a valued voice, and has an important contribution to make to the learning, growth and well-being of DSBN students.

Students are at the heart of everything we do. This commitment is ubiquitous throughout our entire system, and is captured by the Vision and Mission laid out in our 2023-2028 Strategic Plan.

DSBN's Strategic Plan 2023-2028

Redefining Excellence is the theme of the 2023-2028 Strategic Plan. This plan is founded in recognizing that we are all unique, making our individual versions of excellence just as unique. We are redefining what excellence means to each and every one of us. With this strategic plan, excellence is not about being the best. It's about being your best.

Redefining Excellence gives us a clear identity, purpose and direction, and it is our guide towards defining our values, and achieving our strategic priorities.

OUR VISION

Our Vision is the future we aspire to:

Learning and Growing Together

OUR MISSION

Our Mission describes the actions we will take to reach our ideal future of Learning and Growing Together:

Within a culture of care, inclusion and innovation, the District School Board of Niagara's purpose is to inspire lifelong learning and foster relationships through meaningful connections with individuals, communities and the environment.

FIVE STRATEGIC PRIORITIES

Our Vision and Mission are propelled by five strategic priorities that will guide the DSNB for the next five years. Embedded within each strategic priority are strategic actions. The five strategic priorities and actions are posted to www.dsnb.org:

- 1. Learning:** Learning and Growth.
- 2. Belonging:** Equity, Inclusion and Human Rights
- 3. Thriving:** Mental Health and Well-Being
- 4. Walking Together:** First Nation, Inuit, and Métis Education and Voice
- 5. Spaces:** Learning Environments

The DSNB's Strategic Plan 2023-2028 can be found at www.dsnb.org.



Accessibility Accomplishments

PREVENTING NEW BARRIERS

All DSBN programs, policies, practices and services are subject to the guiding principles of inclusionary practice. The DSBN will continually strive to create an environment that is accessible to all people.

Through the continual accessibility planning process, the DSBN's programming, policies, and practices will be assessed to ensure continuous improvement in accessibility.

CUSTOMER SERVICE

The DSBN provides mandatory training for all new employees on accessibility awareness in order to continue to facilitate change. This training in combination with other initiatives works to create an inclusive environment and common understanding of the accessibility obligations to better serve students, staff, families and the community. The DSBN website contains an Accessibility Feedback Form for students, staff, families and community members to share input or request information. The site is monitored to ensure a timely response.

Through the Staff Portal, staff continue to receive mandatory online training which includes Accessibility Standards for Customer Service, Accessibility in the DSBN, and Human Rights Guide to Understanding Rights and Responsibilities at Work. All newly hired staff are required to complete training before beginning their employment. All current staff complete this training every three years. Information regarding accessibility at the DSBN has been made available to both staff and the public on the DSBN website.

INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION

The Communications Department maintains the website content, which conforms with WCAG 2.0 Level AA requirements.

To support student and staff requests for accessible resources (e.g., audiobooks, closed-captioned videos, accessible print), Library Services and the Special Education Department continue to work to provide accessible documents through a variety of methods.

EMPLOYMENT

The DSBN is committed to continuing to support employees with disabilities, ensuring employment practices are AODA compliant, and pro-actively supporting employees with their health. This encompasses an inclusive, barrier-free recruitment and selection processes when hiring, by offering accommodation for applicants as required throughout the stages of the hiring process and continuing throughout all facets of employment. Accommodation requirements are assessed on a case-by-case basis to achieve an appropriate resolution, in each circumstance. All information relating to accommodation is addressed confidentially. Job postings include clear messaging as it relates to DSBN's commitment to accommodations, equity, and collection of voluntary self-identification data.

Staff are encouraged to identify barriers that they may encounter at DSBN sites or obstacles that they believe may be barriers to those with disabilities and to report such findings to their Administrator,

Accessibility Accomplishments Continued

Supervisor or Wellness Advisor. Members of the public may also provide recommendations or concerns.

The DSBN also ensures accommodations are adhered to by maintaining up-to-date accommodation administrative procedures that ensure consistent process for accommodating employees throughout the employment cycle. This includes making applicants aware that accommodations are available throughout the recruitment and selection process. In addition, job information is provided in accessible formats that support individual employee accommodation plans.

The DSBN ensures accessibility and accommodation needs are met through the performance management and career development processes and continues to provide documented individual accommodation plans and support return to work initiatives through clear processes.

In 2020, the DSBN conducted a Workforce Census to gather and report identity-based data, including those who identify as having a disability, to learn what improvements are necessary for the workplace. The Workforce Census asked employees to report on various aspects of their identity including ethnicity, indigeneity, language, race, religion, gender identity, sexual orientation and disability. In addition to identity-based questions, staff were provided the opportunity to participate in focus groups to share their employment experience. All data was collected on a voluntary basis and in accordance with laws governing privacy and confidentiality.

BUILT ENVIRONMENT

The Facilities Services Department identifies immediate and anticipated needs for building facilities and spaces to ensure they are accessible and inclusive for everyone. Renovations are completed on existing buildings and new buildings are constructed to meet accessibility standards as defined in O. Regulation 368/13 under Building Code Act, 1992, S.O. 1992, c. 23.

Upgrades to existing facilities and spaces include: barrier free washrooms, ramps, automatic door operators, new and upgraded elevators, parking and curb enhancements to support entrance access improvements.

TRANSPORTATION

The individual considerations of each DSBN student are reviewed annually to determine what services and supports are required to meet their needs as they relate to transportation services. Although full integration is our ultimate goal, vehicles of a variety of sizes and other assistive/safety devices are made available to meet the integrated accessibility needs of each student of the Board.

SYSTEM

As policies and procedures are developed and/or revised, they are examined to reflect the DSBN's commitment to accessibility.

Multi-Year Accessibility Plan Objectives

BARRIERS TO BE ADDRESSED UNDER THE MULTI-YEAR ACCESSIBILITY PLAN

The DSBN Accessibility Committee will address barrier groupings during the coming years. Our focus is to continue to raise awareness about the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act (AODA) and the Board Accessibility Plan. It is our intent to expand our focus by including more opportunities to collaborate with people with disabilities in the review of our annual accessibility plan. This plan will address at least one area in each of

communication, information, attitude, physical, policy, practice and architecture. The Integrated Accessibility Standard (IASR) and the Built Environment Standard regulations, made under the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act, 2005, establish accessibility standards and apply to every designated public sector organization and to every other person or organization that provides goods or services to members of the public or other third parties that has at least one employee in Ontario.

BARRIER IDENTIFICATION

GROUP	METHODOLOGY
Students	Barriers to accessibility are identified by students, staff and caregivers. Staff in Elementary and Secondary Programs, Special Education, the Equity and Inclusion Team, Facilities, and Transportation Departments work with stakeholders to remove and prevent barriers, and develop accommodation plans.
Staff	In consultation with staff, Human Resource Services will identify barriers, restrictions and limitations and develop accommodation plans.
Board Wide	Ongoing liaison with union partners, provincial associations, school boards, and public sector agencies provides updates on emerging barriers to accessibility. Review of our facilities provides up-to-date identification of barriers and plans to remove/prevent such barriers and permits planning to remove/prevent such barriers. Barriers to accessibility are referred to the Board's Accessibility Committee for review.
Public	<p>Barriers to accessibility are identified by individuals accessing programs and services offered by the school board. Members of the public may bring concerns to the attention of the school or facility, or may use the Board website: https://www.dsbni.org/accessibility-feedback-process</p> <p>Development of the Multi-Year Accessibility Plan and the ongoing feedback opportunities are important methods to identify barriers to accessibility.</p>

DSBN Goals

Below is a sample of continued goals established by the Accessibility Committee to continue DSBN's commitment to accessibility standards:

CUSTOMER SERVICE

The DSBN is committed to continuing to ensure that policies, practices and procedures are clear and provide barrier free services for students, staff, and community members with disabilities by:

- Reviewing public information frequently and posting in a timely fashion for efficient and transparent communication;
- Ensuring ongoing training is provided to staff to continue to raise awareness of accessibility needs and importance of removing barriers;
- Ensuring libraries provide accessible or conversion-ready formats of materials when they are available and that users are aware of this opportunity.

INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION

The DSBN is committed to continuing to ensure the website and web content is conformed with WCAG 2.0 Level AA by:

- Partnering with departments and schools to assist in ensuring that content is accessible and available in conversion-ready formats where possible;
- Continuing to provide training on assistive technology for staff;
- Continuing to maintain feedback processes for reporting barriers and accessibility issues and respond to accessibility inquiries and requests in a timely and transparent manner.

EMPLOYMENT

The DSBN is committed to continuing to support employees with disabilities, ensuring employment practices are AODA compliant, and supporting employees pro-actively with their mental health and well-being by:

- Addressing the health and wellness of all employees through collection of data to inform specific strategies to address gaps and barriers;
- Maintaining up-to-date accommodation administrative procedures to ensure consistent process for accommodating employees;
- Continuing to ensure applicants are aware that accommodations are available through a recruitment and selection process;
- Ensuring job information is provided in accessible formats and support individual employee accommodation plans through a recruitment process;
- Ensuring accessibility and accommodation needs are met through the performance management and career development processes;
- Continuing to provide documented individual accommodation plans and support return to work initiatives through clear processes.

BUILT ENVIRONMENT

The DSBN is continuing to build new schools and upgrade existing schools to meet or exceed the requirements of the Ontario Building Code. In addition to our past projects to make our buildings accessible and inclusive for everyone, our

commitment is to continue to ensure our buildings are accessible and inclusive. The DSBN commits to the following by:

- Continuing to audit DSBN built environments to identify areas of improvement for accessibility and inclusiveness;
- Collaborating across the system to align DSBN priorities with identified building needs;
- Continuing to allocate resources to improve equity of access to our facilities;
- Consulting with staff and professionals when constructing new or redeveloping existing outdoor play spaces.

TRANSPORTATION

The DSBN is committed to continuing to ensure that it provides accessible transportation services are provided to students with disabilities by:

- Continuing to develop individual student transportation plans;
- Making available to the public current information on accessibility equipment and features on school transportation vehicles, routes and services;
- Deploying lifting devices and ramps upon request, ensuring adequate time is provided to safely board, assisting with safe and careful storage of assistive devices, and allowing people with disabilities to travel with medical aid;
- Continuing to work with all stakeholders on finding solutions as we support increasingly complex transportation needs.

SYSTEM

The DSBN is committed to continue to provide ongoing training to all staff around AODA and accessibility. A recording of this training will be maintained, including dates on which training is provided and the number of individuals it was provided to.

Newly developed and revised policies and procedures will be reviewed by the DSBN Accessibility Committee to provide input from an accessibility lens.

Review and Monitoring Process

The DSBN Accessibility Committee will meet on an on-going basis to review progress and to monitor the effectiveness of barrier removal and prevention strategies. This will include monitoring the input and comments gathered through the accessible customer service feedback process.

Communication Of Plan

The DSBN's Accessibility Plan, and Policy C-3: Service Accessibility Standards for Ontarians with Disabilities is posted on the DSBN website at www.dsbn.org/about/accessibility.

Contact information for accessible format requests:
Communications 905-641-1550.

Appendix A

THE ACCESSIBILITY PLANNING COMMITTEE

Superintendent of Human Resource Services

Superintendent of Business Services

Superintendent of Special Education & Mental Health and Well-Being

Human Rights & Equity Advisor

Executive Director, Transportation Consortium

Administrator, Special Education Support Services

Consultant, Special Education Services

Resource Teachers, Special Education

Senior Manager, Communications & Public Relations

Capital Project Manager, Plant Services

Manager, Network Services

Senior Manager, Wellness-Human Resource Services

Administrator, System Information Services

Health & Safety Officer

Elementary & Secondary Teacher Representatives

Elementary Administrator

Secondary Administrator

Appendix B

DEFINITIONS

Definition of Accessibility: The term accessibility means giving people of all abilities opportunities to participate fully in everyday life. It is used to describe how widely a service, product, device, or environment is available to as many people as possible. Accessibility can be seen as the ability to access and benefit from a system, service, product or environment.

Definition of Disability: The Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act adopts the broad definition for disability that is set out in the Ontario Human Rights Code. “Disability” is:

- A. Any degree of physical disability, infirmity, malformation or disfigurement that is caused by bodily injury, birth defect or illness and, without limiting the generality of the foregoing, includes diabetes mellitus, epilepsy, a brain injury, any degree or paralysis, amputation, lack of physical co-ordination, blindness or visual impediment, deafness or hearing impairment, muteness or speech impediment, or physical reliance on a guide dog or other animal or on a wheelchair or other remedial appliance or device;
- B. A condition of mental impairment or a developmental disability;
- C. A learning disability, or a dysfunction in one or more of the processes involved in understanding or using symbols or spoken language;
- D. A mental disorder; or
- E. An injury or disability for which benefits were claimed or received under the insurance plan established under the Workplace Safety and Insurance Act, 1997.

Definition of a Barrier: A “barrier” is anything that prevents a person with a disability from fully participating in all aspects of society because of their disability, including a physical barrier, an architectural barrier, an informational or communications barrier, an attitudinal barrier, a technological barrier, a policy or a practice.

Physical Barrier: Objects added to the environment – doors, windows, elevators, furniture, etc. Architectural Barrier: building design, area adjacent to the building, shape of room, size of doorways, etc.

Information Barrier: Inadequate or incomprehensible signage, difficulties reading brochures, forms, manuals, websites, fax transmissions, equipment labels, computer screens, etc.

Communication Barrier: Difficulties receiving information in person or by telephone, difficulties interacting with receptionists or other staff, difficulties receiving training.

Attitudinal Barrier: results when people do not know how to communicate with people with disabilities; discriminatory behaviours. Behaviours or perceptions that prevent people from communicating properly. Attitudes are commonly formed by an individual’s opinions or personal feelings on a subject.

Technological Barrier: Computers, printers, photocopiers, fax machines, telephones and assistive technologies.

Policy or Practice Barrier: Rules, regulations and protocols that prevent one from performing their job satisfactorily, or from serving the public, or that restrict participation.

Appendix C

RESOURCES

Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act

Accessibility Rules for educational institutions

Accessibility Ontario – Guide to Annual Accessibility Planning

Adaptive Technology Resource Centre

B480-02 Customer Service Standard for People with Disabilities

B6521-95 Barrier-Free Design

Canadian Hearing Services

Human Resources Development Canada, A Way With Words

Ontario Human Rights Commission - Policy and Guidelines on Disability and the Duty to Accommodate

The Ontarians with Disabilities Act, 2001

Playability Tool Kit: Building Accessible Play Spaces

Standards Council of Canada

KEY ONTARIO ORGANIZATIONS

AboutFace International

Association Canadian Mental Health Association – Ontario

Association for Bright Children

Autism Ontario

Canadian Hearing Society (CHS)

Canadian National Institute for the Blind (CNIB)

The Easter Seal Society – Ontario

Learning Disabilities Association of Ontario

Little People of Ontario

Multiple Sclerosis Society of Canada – Ont. Division

Niagara Down Syndrome Association

Ontario Brain Injury Association

Ontario March of Dimes

Le Phénix

Spinal Cord Injury – Ontario

Tourette Syndrome Association of Ontario

Voice for Deaf and Hard of Hearing Children



Learning

LEARNING AND GROWTH



Belonging

EQUITY, INCLUSION AND HUMAN RIGHTS



Thriving

MENTAL HEALTH AND WELL-BEING



Walking Together

FIRST NATION, INUIT AND MÉTIS EDUCATION AND VOICE



Spaces

LEARNING ENVIRONMENTS



**redefining
excellence**
DSBN 2023-2028 STRATEGIC PLAN

Learning and Growing Together