

Richmond School District

Accessibility Plan

2023-2025

Table of Contents

Introduction.....	3
About Our School District Community.....	3
Territorial Acknowledgement	3
Definitions.....	3
Framework Guiding our Work	4
Global Context – United Nations	4
Canadian Context and Legislation – Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms	4
B.C. Context and Legislation – Accessible B.C. Act.....	5
Principles of the Accessible B.C. Act	5
Our Commitment to Accessibility	6
Our Approach	6
About our Committee.....	6
Purpose of the Accessibility Committee	6
Recruitment of the Accessibility Committee Members.....	6
Our Consultation Process	7
Barrier Identification Methodologies	7
How to Give Feedback.....	7
Feedback Mechanism Development	7
Report an Accessibility Barrier	7
Accessibility Accomplishments and Barriers	8
Key Discussion Themes – Accessibility Accomplishments	8
Key Discussion Themes – Accessibility Barriers	8
Our Three-Year Plan	9
Overview	9
Accessibility Priorities	9
Monitoring and Evaluation	10
How to Give Us Feedback.....	10

Introduction

About Our School District Community

The Richmond School District is a vibrant learning community that fosters student engagement, creativity, and well-being in *inclusive and caring learning environments*. Our district is committed to providing opportunities for all students to help them develop the attitudes, skills and knowledge which will prepare them for an exciting and productive future.

Our district lies within the boundaries of the City of Richmond, located on an island at the mouth of the Fraser River. Our community's shared history began thousands of years ago as a place where the First Peoples gathered and lived. Today, Richmond is a community of over 200,000 people from all over the world who have chosen to live here. Our district celebrates and embraces diversity and continues to develop *positive awareness of and respect for all members of our community*.

Territorial Acknowledgement

The Richmond School District is located on the unceded traditional territories of the peoples of the hə́nqəmihəm language group on which we teach, learn, and live.

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 soon.
- 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. (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.

Framework Guiding our Work

The Richmond School District 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 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 11 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 of 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.

1. **Adaptability:** Accessibility plans should reflect that disability and accessibility are evolving concepts that change as services, technology, and attitudes change.
2. **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.
3. **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.
4. **Inclusion:** All British Columbians, including persons with disabilities, should be able to participate fully and equally in their communities.
5. **Self-Determination:** Accessibility plans should seek to empower people with disabilities to make their own choices and pursue the lives they wish to live.
6. **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

In the Richmond School District, we want all individuals to be able to fully participate and enjoy our facilities, services, and programs. We are committed to providing an accessible environment for all members of our diverse community and we recognize that this requires listening, learning, conscious planning, and effort to ensure barriers are removed and accessibility is increased.

Our school district is committed to working collaboratively with our community to ensure the lived experience and voices of people with disabilities are respected, heard, and valued.

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

- Engage with staff, community members, and people with disabilities through the establishment and ongoing work of the Accessibility Advisory Committee.
- Ensure our school board policies and procedures align with the principles of accessibility.
- Continually improve access to facilities, programs, and services for students, staff, families, and community members.

Our Approach

Our approach is grounded in the core provincial principles of accessibility; adaptability, collaboration, diversity, inclusion, self-determination, and universal design.

In January 2023, we established an Accessibility Working Group comprised of senior district leaders from Learning Services, Facilities, Communications and Human Resources. This group established the terms of reference for Accessibility Working Group and Accessibility Advisory Committee.

Our interdisciplinary approach is designed to identify and recognize gaps and opportunities to improve accessibility across our district. By engaging in thoughtful planning, meaningful collaboration, shared learning, 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 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

In January 2023, we established an Accessibility Working Group comprised of senior district staff from Learning Services, Facilities, Communications and Human Resources. This group established the terms of reference for Accessibility Working Group and Accessibility Advisory Committee.

In May 2023, we began the initial call out for committee members from our community. As per our Terms of Reference, we aim to include at least one staff member, student, parent, and community member on the Accessibility Advisory Committee. We are committed to ensuring our members reflect the diversity of persons in B.C. and that at least half are persons with disabilities (PWD) or are individuals from disability serving organizations.

Together, the Accessibility Working Group and the Accessibility Advisory Committee will form the collaborative team that will review feedback, identify barriers within our organization, and set accessibility priorities.

This current plan sets out our initial intentions and plans for the Accessibility Working Group and Advisory Committee.

Our Consultation Process

Barrier Identification Methodologies

The Accessibility Working Group used the following sources to identify barriers for this initial plan:

- Physical Accessibility Audit – Facilities staff completed an initial audit of our school buildings to begin to identify physical accessibility barriers. Completion date: May 2022
- Communications Accessibility Audit – Communications staff completed an accessibility audit of our district website. Completion date: November 2022

In addition to the above, our Accessibility Working Group reviewed the goals and objectives in our District Strategic Plan to identify projects and initiatives that would provide an opportunity for identifying barriers and accessibility opportunities. We also consulted the District Equity Scan (2022) and the Anti-Racism Audit (2022).

How to Give Feedback

Feedback Mechanism Development

The Accessibility Working Group has developed several ways for members of our community to provide feedback about their accessibility experience. Feedback can be submitted using writing, voice recording, photo or video, or over the phone.

By Email: accessibilityfeedback@sd38.bc.ca

By Phone: 604-668-6000, please ask to speak to the Director of Instruction – Inclusive Learning

By Mail: Director of Instruction – Inclusive Learning, 7811 Granville Avenue, Richmond, B.C. V6Y 3E3

Report an Accessibility Barrier

At the Richmond School District, we want to learn about specific barriers that people face when they are trying to:

- Access a school program, facility, or district information.

- Receive a service or support.

Your feedback is important to us and will be reviewed by the Accessibility Working Group and Advisory Committee. This information can be submitted anonymously, or you can provide your contact details if you wish to be contacted regarding your submission.

When submitting feedback, please consider including the following:

1. The date(s) the barrier was experienced.
2. The location(s) the barrier was experienced.
3. What were you or someone you know trying to access?
4. Accessibility barrier details (be as specific as possible).
5. Do you have any recommendations that would make it better?
6. Attach files that may provide additional information (e.g. photo, screen shot, voice recording, video).

Accessibility Accomplishments and Barriers

Key Discussion Themes – Accessibility Accomplishments

There are several initiatives currently underway in our district to identify, remove and prevent barriers for people with disabilities. The following is a synopsis of some of the major achievements noted by the Accessibility Working Group:

- Providing assistive technology for students is a priority for our district. Learning Services works closely with students and school teams to ensure that suitable devices, software, and technology tools are available for communication and learning needs.
- The district and schools continue to build staff capacity in the understanding and implementation of universal strategies and adaptations for all students, as well as individualized adaptations for students where needed.
- Ongoing training opportunities are provided for all district staff in the areas of Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion. Objectives of these opportunities is to learn about and identify unconscious bias, understand privilege, and address systemic discrimination and marginalization.
- The district has invested in several upgrades to existing facilities to support more accessible physical environments for students at school sites. These have been targeted to upgrade washroom accessibility, playground accessibility, and parking/curb cut enhancements.

Key Discussion Themes – Accessibility Barriers

The Accessibility Working Group has identified the following initial barriers:

Physical/Environmental Barriers

- Many schools have physical barriers including stairs, curbs, or lack of sidewalk space.
- Not all outdoor classrooms and playgrounds are physically accessible.

Attitudinal Barriers

- Some students and staff have identified they feel misunderstood or judged by asking for

accommodations in order to reduce barriers they are facing.

Communication Barriers

- Community members have identified that our school and district websites can be difficult to navigate and that all websites need to have translation options for multiple languages.
- School and district websites need to have more built-in accessibility tools for those requiring different font sizes or text to speech options.
- Availability of translators for home and school meetings can be challenging.

Information Barriers

- Written communication on websites and emails to community members are not always written in plain language that is easy to understand.

Policy or Practice Barriers

- Some district policies are not written in inclusive language and/or do not include accessibility considerations.
- Universal strategies for adaptations and accommodations are not implemented consistently in all schools and classrooms.
- Many district job descriptions and postings do not include accessibility considerations or inclusive language.

Technological Barriers

- More training is required on the accessibility features built in for students and staff on district laptops, computers, and iPads.
- Greater awareness, understanding, and implementation of accessible curricular materials and texts for students is needed.

Our Three-Year Plan

Overview

This Accessibility Plan outlines the initial measures that the Richmond School District will take to remove and prevent barriers for all. The plan is based on the Accessibility Principles (Adaptability, Collaboration, Diversity, Inclusion, Self-Determination, Universal Design) as set out in the Accessible B.C. Act.

Accessibility Priorities

Based on the barriers and sources identified above, the following areas were identified as top priorities for improving accessibility in this initial Accessibility Plan.

1. Physical/Environmental – Develop a more in depth understanding of physical barriers in our facilities, with particular attention and direct action to make all playgrounds and outdoor learning spaces accessible.
 - a. Complete a robust physical building accessibility audit for all district sites (school and non-school) by December 2024.

- b. Complete a playground and outdoor learning spaces audit for school sites by June 2024.
2. Information and Communication – Enhance and improve accessibility of information and communication sources for students, staff and community.
 - a. Ensure all district and school websites have built-in translation features for multiple languages by September 2024.
 - b. Complete an upgrade of accessibility tools on district website following current Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG) by September 2024.
 - c. Develop and share plain language guidelines for written communications for all district staff by December 2024.
3. Policy and Human Resources – Review and revise all policies to ensure they align with the principles of accessibility. In addition, review and revise job descriptions to ensure they include information about accessibility for applicants.
 - a. Conduct a review of district policies for alignment with principles of accessibility, including recommendations for revisions, by December 2024.
 - b. Conduct a review of district job descriptions for alignment with principles of accessibility, including recommendations for revisions, by December 2024.
4. Practice - Identify and address identified gaps in staff training, knowledge and implementation of adaptations, accommodations, and universal strategies to support accessibility.
 - a. Develop and share a universal strategies document to support accessibility in the classroom for school staff by December 2023.
 - b. Conduct focus groups of students at schools to identify barriers faced in their learning by December 2024.
 - c. Provide professional learning and training opportunities for staff focused on assistive technology, built-in accessibility tools, and accessible curricular materials (eg. ARC-BC) on an ongoing and annual basis.

Monitoring and Evaluation

The Accessibility Working Group and Accessibility Advisory Committee will meet at least twice per year to review progress and evaluate the effectiveness of the plan's implementation.

How to Give Us Feedback

The Richmond School District has several ways for members of our community to provide feedback about their accessibility experience. Feedback can be submitted using writing, voice recording, photo or video, or over the phone.

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