

Accessibility

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Accessible B.C. Act Principles

The Accessible BC Act includes a list of principles to consider as organizations develop an accessibility plan. The Definitions are adapted from the foundational document [BC Framework for Accessibility Legislation](#)

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

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.

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 diversity within the disability community.

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

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

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.

Global, National and Provincial Context

The HCOS accessibility plan builds on global, national, provincial and HCOS 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 – 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.

BC Context - Accessible BC 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.

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 hinders the full and equal participation in society of a person navigating needs or disabilities. Types of barriers in the educational setting:

- Learning Barrier: any barrier that limits or prevents learning, whether it is through inadequate engagement, representation of the content, or expression of ideas and communication.
- Architectural and Physical Barrier: A barrier resulting from building design, the area adjacent to the building, shape of rooms, the size of doorways, lack of accessibility features, blocked paths of travel, 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.
- 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.
- Resource Barrier: Barriers resulting from inadequate technology, funding, staff, or tools.
- Temporal Barrier: Barriers that occur during a specific time, such as busy times of day or during special events.

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.

Our Commitment and Approach

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 HCOS, 44% of our student population have significant physical, developmental, learning, behavioural, health or mental challenges. 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, design, and effort in ensuring that barriers are removed and accessibility is increased.

Our school is committed to working collaboratively with the community to provide equitable treatment to 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 developing and reviewing its accessibility plan.
- Ensure that our school 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 HCOS, we believe that all community members have the right to be treated with dignity, allowed 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 June 2023, we began the process of establishing an accessibility committee and identifying barriers to accessibility in our school community. This process will eventually involve:

1. Calling for applications for members of the Accessibility Committee
2. Assessing the current online and curricular accessibility of our school.
3. Assessing the current physical and architectural accessibility of our school.
4. Conducting surveys and interviews to understand the issues, challenges, and priorities of stakeholders within our school community
 - a. Holding key discussions to identify barriers to accessibility
 - b. Developing a school feedback tool
 - c. Prioritization of actions to be taken
 - d. Establishing a monitoring and evaluation process

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

Accessibility Committee: Consultation, Feedback, Monitoring & Evaluation

Purpose of the Accessibility Committee

Under the Accessible BC 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 school 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 to the Accessibility Committee

Under the Accessible BC 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.

The current Accessibility Committee includes Sara Kraushar and _____, with our intention to grow the committee during the 23/24 school year and more fully represent the diverse needs of the school community.

Accessibility Committee

We would like to ask people interested in applying to join the Accessibility Committee to complete the form below. Applications will be reviewed annually at a regularly scheduled meeting.

Committee members will be asked to:

- To meet regularly to review feedback
- To create or ratify a comprehensive feedback survey
- To annually review HCOS' Accessibility plan and create recommendations for the Directors team.

Note: Accessibility Committee volunteers may be eligible for an annual stipend.

[Accessibility Committee: Expression of Interest Form](#)

Consultation

The Accessibility Committee plans to use the following barrier-identification methods:

School Physical Accessibility Audit (Annual)	An Assessment of School Physical Accessibility will be developed. An audit team will be identified and conduct the School Physical Accessibility Audit.
Accessibility Feedback Tool (Ongoing)	A feedback tool was developed and posted to this SOPHIE page. Information about the tool will be shared with school stakeholders (i.e., students, staff, outside professionals and parents/guardians).

Feedback

At HCOS, 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

Thank you for taking the time to alert the Accessibility Committee to any barriers you have noticed or areas of support that could be developed.

[Accessibility Feedback Form](#)

Monitoring and Evaluation

The Accessibility Planning Committee meets regularly 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.

Accomplishments

The guiding principles of inclusive practice inform HCOS programs, policies, practices, and services to reduce and minimize barriers to accessibility for people with disabilities. With 44% of our student population having some form of learning differences or challenges, we strive to create an environment that is accessible and to ensure continuous improvement in accessibility.

There are several initiatives at HCOS to identify, remove and prevent barriers for people with challenges or disabilities. The following is a synopsis of some of the major achievements noted in the feedback:

Learning

1. Teachers work to accommodate all students, including those with diverse needs and disabilities, in their online and in-person classes. This includes supports such as extra time, flexible deadlines, alternative ways of accessing information (e.g. video), alternative ways of demonstrating learning, technology that allows for speech-to-text or text-to-speech and supports such as weighted animals, time timers, fidgets made available in classes.
2. HCOS ensures that the Learning Commons offers an excellent selection of audio and digital books, particularly ensuring that any books that are used in courses or in book clubs are offered as audiobooks or graphic novels. This includes recommended resources on Universal Design for Learning (UDL).
3. The Learning Commons (LC) also offers subscriptions that support our diverse learners, including Hearbuilder, Touch Type Read and Spell (TTRS), RAZ-Plus, Read&Write, and Grammarly. Susan Barton is an Orton-Gillingham-based program that we also offer through our LC. Other subscriptions offered through the LC offer a variety of learning modalities - videos, games, the option to simply content or enlarge print. Additionally, the LC highlights supportive resources in each of their monthly newsletters.
4. The Student Support Centre offers the regular online support of multiple numeracy and literacy specialist Education Assistants to any HCOS student. Students can book up to 2 hours a week per specialist and receive one-on-one support in their comprehension or executive functioning skills.
5. The Inclusive Education division at HCOS also provides SEED, an online program that offers additional support - more teacher time, interaction, and scaffolding - for students requiring it.
6. Learning Groups (LG) work with teachers to facilitate individual student needs, noting effective supports that benefit learning. LG has also intentionally partnered with the Inclusive Education division to offer Learning Camps like "Hello, Anxiety" and "Virtual Voices" and Executive Functioning classes.
7. Study Forge, the HCOS curriculum department, is working to ensure that all their video content is close-captioned.
8. HCOS also offers regular training to teachers and EAs, to build their supportive practice. Past training has included MANDT, Play is the Way, Dan Duncan (ADHD and Executive Functioning), and Non-violent Crisis Intervention. The Learning Support team also offers regular one-on-one coaching to teachers to help grow their skills and tool kit.
9. HCOS offers graduation and staff meetings in alternative formats, for those who may be unable to attend in-person - offering an excellent online graduation and an in-person graduation experience and similarly offer online versions of in-person teacher/staff meetings; even Christmas parties have an online option. Students, in particular, have mentioned that they were thrilled to attend an online event where their health/mental health/finances/location/schedule would have made attending in-person unrealistic or impossible.
10. HCOS has also recently updated the <https://onlineschool.ca> and <https://flex.academy> websites to increase simplicity and accessibility. This continues to be a work in progress, with the main website, Learning Groups site and a revamp of the Learning Commons website underway.
11. Accessibility is part of the planning process for the new Flex Academy campus. This is illustrated by the inclusion of structures in the new playground that allow those with physical disabilities to participate in play with their classmates.

12. HCOS Inclusive Education (IE) Teachers collaborate with MCFD navigators to develop transition plans starting in grade 9 for students with developmental disabilities and develop a transition plan for all IE students in grades 9-12 as a part of their Individualized Education Plan.

3-Year Accessibility Plan

Overview

Heritage Christian Online School (HCOS) is an independent school authority that serves approximately 4500+ K-grade 12 students across the Province of British Columbia. The authority operates a Christian province-wide online school (HCOS), with in-person learning opportunities (“Community Connections” and “Learning Camps”) and a cross-enrollment arm (British Columbia Online School - BCOS, with approximately ___ (ask Craig) seats) as well as Flex Academy, a Hybrid campus with approximately 180 students, on a physical campus, in Kelowna.

Land Acknowledgement

HCOS is grateful to be on the traditional, ancestral and unceded territories of the many Indigenous peoples across British Columbia, who have stewarded these lands for millennia. We respect and commit to a deep consideration of their history, culture, stewardship, and voice.

Accessibility Plan

This Accessibility Plan outlines the measures HCOS will take to remove and prevent barriers and to promote inclusion for individuals with disabilities in our school community. The plan is based on the Accessibility Principles of Adaptability, Collaboration, Diversity, Inclusion, Self-Determination, and Universal Design, as set out in the Accessible B.C. Act.

Priorities

Based on the feedback 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 community.

Strategic Priority #1: Consultation

HCOS resonates with the belief that the first step of wisdom is the humility to know what we do not know and is committed to the Accessibility principle of “Nothing for us without us”. We feel the first step of our plan needs to be to intentionally build an Accessibility Committee and engage in consultation with stakeholders and to more thoroughly evaluate our existing structures, policies and practices.

Objectives & Timeline	Actions
Build Accessibility Committee 2023/24	Create an invitation to our diverse community, encouraging participation in the committee.

Strategic Priority #2: Learning

HCOS will continue to enhance the accessibility of access to learning for all individuals, including those with disabilities, through the following actions:

Objectives & Timeline	Actions
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Continue to equip teachers to design lessons using UDL principles (Ongoing)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide professional development for educators on UDL • Provide collaboration time and Learning Support coaching to increase teacher capacity to use UDL lesson planning
Continue to develop relevant Universal Supports at HCOS (Ongoing)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Annual discussion between Learning Commons, Learning Supports, Accessibility Committee to determine gaps in resources or opportunities to build additional supports.
Continue to evaluate Study Forge content through the lens of UDL. (Ongoing)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tasked to Study Forge team member • Annual report to the Accessibility Committee
Increase training in the use of accessible format materials. (Ongoing)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide staff training on the various types of accessible materials available and how to use them • Learning Commons and teachers train students on the use of accessible book and website formats • Part of Middle School curriculum in 2023/24 - Google classroom material (Using Read&Write etc.)
Develop and implement a clear and easy-to-navigate Learning Commons website. (2023/24)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Conduct a website audit • Create a website improvement plan • Create a new website

Strategic Priority #3: Physical and Architectural

HCOS is currently working on a re-build of the hybrid (Flex Academy) location. This process will work to improve the accessibility of the physical and architectural environment for all individuals, including those with disabilities.

Objectives & Timeline	Actions
Review all planning through an "Accessibility" lens. (Beginning in 2024)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Work with the Inclusive Education and leadership of Flex to analyze, evaluate building plans and make recommendations that accommodate Universal Design principles. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◦ Considering getting consultant to review. <p><u>Factors to consider include:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide sound fields in all classrooms to support students with hearing impairments and attention issues. • Assess noise and lighting issues or sensitivities and determine solutions in classrooms and other areas of the school • Determine the current needs of students who may require alternate learning spaces from time to time • Conduct an audit of current alternate learning spaces that can meet the identified needs • Create a plan and budget for the provision of additional alternative learning spaces or accommodations to address the needs identified

Create a plan and budget to meet identified needs.

(Beginning in 2025)

- Create a plan and budget for the provision of additional alternative learning spaces or accommodations to address the needs identified

Understanding the Word "Disability"

The Disability Continuum

Although there is no universally accepted meaning for the word "disability". However, the Ontario Human Rights Code provides definitions of disability that form our guiding principles. Definitions of disability can be placed on a continuum. At one end, disability is explained in terms of medical conditions (medical model). At the opposite end, disability is explained in terms of the social and physical contexts in which it occurs (environmental model).

The medical model focuses on deficiencies, symptoms and treatments. The World Health Organization's (WHO) 1976 definition for disability, for example, is "any restriction or lack (resulting from an impairment) of ability to perform an activity in the manner or within the range considered normal for a human being." Medical model definitions promote the idea that disability is a deviation from the norm.

Many people with disabilities are troubled by definitions that regard disability as abnormal, preferring instead to portray disability as commonplace, natural, and in fact, inevitable. As people age, they experience gradual declines in visual acuity, auditory sensitivity, range of motion, bodily strength and mental powers. Significant functional limitations affect almost half of people between the ages of 55 and 79, and over 70% of people over 80 (World Health Organization (WHO) report titled "Ageing and health", 2015). Beyond middle age, disability is the norm.

The environmental model explains disability in relation to social and physical contexts. In this view, the environment, not an individual's medical condition, causes disability. For example, during an electrical blackout, a person who is completely blind can effortlessly navigate around the home, hammer nails, and, if a Braille user, read a novel.

A sighted person would be unable to perform these tasks easily, if at all. In this example, the environment disables the sighted person.

The environmental model emphasizes that people with disabilities are capable individuals, and it is the barriers in the built and human environments, not their medical conditions, that create disability. Disability occurs when the world is designed only for a certain way of living, without considering the natural variation among human beings. Barriers are created by humans, and modifying how we live, the tools we use, and our understanding of the proper way to do things can eliminate or minimize design problems that cause barriers. Systematic barriers can be eliminated by modifying policies, plans, and processes. Attitudes that cause barriers can be addressed through disability awareness, respect, and positive interactions with people with disabilities.

Types of Disability and Functional Limitations

A person's disability may make it physically or cognitively challenging to perform everyday tasks such as operating a keyboard, reading a sign, differentiating colours, distinguishing sounds, climbing stairs, grasping small items, remembering words, or doing arithmetic.

There are many kinds of disabilities, including physical, sensory, hearing, mental health, developmental and learning. Disabilities can be visible or invisible.

Visual Disabilities

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

Here are some suggestions to help you interact with people with visual disabilities:

- Identify yourself when you approach the person and speak directly to them.
- Speak normally and clearly.
- Avoid referring to the disability or using phrases like "handicapped".
- Unless it is an emergency, only touch the person if you have been given permission.
- If you offer assistance, wait until you receive permission.
- Offer your arm (the elbow) to guide the person and walk slowly.
- Service animals are working and have to pay attention at all times. Refrain from engaging with the animal.
- If you're giving directions or verbal information, be precise and clear. For example, if you're approaching a door or an obstacle, say so. Don't just assume the individual can't see you.
- When entering a room, show the individual to a chair, or guide them to a comfortable location.
- Identify landmarks or other details to orient the person to the environment around them.
- Ensure you say good-bye prior to leaving the individual.
- Be patient. Things may take a little longer.

Hard of Hearing and Deafness

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

Here are some suggestions to help you interact with people who are deaf or hard of hearing:

- Always ask how you can help. Don't shout.
- Avoid referring to the disability or using phrases like "handicapped".
- Attract the person's attention before speaking. The best way is a gentle touch on the shoulder or gently waving your hand.
- Make sure you are in a well-lighted area where the person can see your face.
- Look at and speak directly to the person. Address the person, not their interpreter.
- If necessary, ask if another method of communicating would be easier, for example a pen and paper.
- Keep your face clearly visible when speaking.
- Be clear and precise when giving directions and repeat or rephrase if necessary. Make sure you have been understood.
- Service animals are working and have to pay attention at all times. Refrain from engaging with the animal.
- Any personal (e.g., financial) matters should be discussed in a private room to avoid other people overhearing.
- Be patient. Communication for people who are deaf is different because their first language may not be English. It may be American Sign Language (ASL).
- If the person uses a hearing aid, try to speak in an area with few competing sounds.

Physical Disabilities

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

Here are some suggestions to help you interact with people with physical disabilities:

- Speak normally and directly to the person rather than someone who is with them.
- People with physical disabilities often have their own ways of doing things. Ask before you help.
- Avoid referring to the disability or using phrases like “handicapped”.
- Be patient and be sure you understand their needs.
- Unless it is an emergency, refrain from touching any assistive devices, including wheelchairs.
- Provide the person with information about accessible features of their immediate environment (automatic doors, accessible washrooms, etc.).

Intellectual Disabilities

People with intellectual or developmental disabilities may have difficulty doing many things most of us take for granted. These disabilities can mildly or profoundly limit one’s

ability to learn. You may not be able to know that someone has one of these disabilities unless you are told, or you notice the way people act, ask questions or body language.

Here are some suggestions to help you interact with people with intellectual disabilities:

As much as possible, treat the person with an intellectual disability like anyone else. They may understand more than you think, and they will appreciate you treating them with respect.

- Don’t assume what a person can or cannot do.
- Avoid referring to the disability or using phrases like “handicapped”.
- Use simple words and short sentences.
- Make sure the person understands what you’ve said.
- If you can’t understand what’s being said, ask again.
- Give one piece of information at a time.
- Be polite and patient.
- Speak directly to the person, not to someone who is with the person.

Learning or Cognitive Disabilities

Learning or cognitive disabilities can result in a host of different communication difficulties for people. They can be subtle, as in having difficulty reading, or more pronounced, but they can interfere with the person’s ability to receive, express or process information. You may not be able to know that someone has one of these disabilities unless you are told, or you notice the way people act, ask questions or body language.

Here are some suggestions to help you interact with people with learning disabilities or disabilities:

- Patience and a willingness to find a way to communicate are your best tools.
- Recognize that some people with communication difficulties use augmentative communication systems such as Signed English and Picture Exchange System.
- When you know that someone with a learning disability needs help, ask how you can best help.
- Speak normally and clearly, and directly to the person
- Take some time — people with some kinds of disabilities may take a little longer to understand and respond.
- Try to find ways to provide information in a way that works best for them. For example, have a paper and pen handy.
- If you’re dealing with a child, be patient, encouraging and supportive.
- Avoid referring to the disability or using phrases like “handicapped”.
- Be courteous and patient and the person will let you know how to best provide service in a way that works for them.

Mental Health Disabilities

People with mental health disabilities look like anyone else. You won't know that the person has a mental health disability unless you're informed of it. But if someone is experiencing difficulty in controlling their symptoms or is in a crisis, you may need to help out. Be calm and professional and let the person tell you how you can best help.

Here are some suggestions to help you interact with people with mental health disabilities:

- Treat people with a mental health disability with the same respect and consideration you have for everyone else.
- Be confident and reassuring and listen to persons with a mental health disability and their needs.
- If someone appears to be in a crisis, ask him or her to tell you the best way to help.
- Take the person with a mental health disability seriously, and work with them to meet their needs.

Speech and Language Disabilities

Some people have communication challenges. It could be the result of cerebral palsy, hearing loss, or another condition that makes it difficult to pronounce words, causes slurring or stuttering, or not being able to express oneself or understand written or spoken language. Some people who have severe difficulties may use communication boards, sign language or other assistive devices.

Here are some suggestions to help you interact with people with speech and language disabilities:

- Just because a person has one disability doesn't mean they have another. For example, if a person has difficulty speaking; make no assumption they have an intellectual disability as well.
- If you don't understand, ask the person to repeat the information.
- Avoid referring to the disability or using phrases like "handicapped".
- If you are able, ask questions that can be answered 'yes' or 'no'.
- Take some time. Be patient and polite and give the person whatever time they need to get their point across.
- Allow the individual to finish their sentences themselves without interruption.
- Patience, respect and a willingness to find a way to communicate are your best tools.

Deaf-Blind Disabilities

A person who is deafblind cannot see or hear to some extent. This results in greater difficulties in accessing information and managing daily activities. Most people who are deafblind will be accompanied by an intervener, a professional who helps with communicating. Interveners are trained in special sign language that involves touching the hands of the client in a two-hand, manual alphabet or finger spelling, and may guide and interpret for their client.

Here are some suggestions to help you interact with people who are deafblind:

- Make no assumptions about what a person can or cannot do. Some deaf-blind people have some sight or hearing, while others have neither.
- Avoid referring to the disability or using phrases like "handicapped".
- A deaf-blind person is likely to explain to you how to communicate with them or give you an assistance card or a note explaining how to communicate with them.
- Speak directly to the person, as you normally would, not to the intervener.
- Identify yourself to the intervener when you approach the person who is deaf-blind.
- Don't touch service animals – they are working and have to pay attention at all times.
- Unless it's an emergency, refrain from touching a deaf-blind person without permission.

Suggested References & Resources

Global, Canadian and Local Accessibility Context and Legislation

- [United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities](#)
- [Canada Ratifies the 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](#)
- [Developing Your First Accessibility Plan: A Guide for BC Prescribed Organizations](#)
- [Creating an Accessibility Committee](#)
- [Universal Design](#)
- [Inclusive 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 \(CNIB\)](#)
- [Provincial Resource Centre for the Visually Impaired](#) (PRCVI)
- [Canadian Hard of Hearing Association](#)
- [Canadian Hearing Services](#)
- [Provincial Outreach Program for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing \(POPDHH\)](#)
- [Auditory Outreach Provincial Resource Program](#)
- [Provincial Outreach Program for Students with Deafblindness](#)
- [Provincial Inclusion Outreach Program](#) (Complex Needs)
- [Provincial Outreach Program for Autism and Related Disorders](#)
- [Provincial Outreach Program for Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder](#)
- [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](#)
- [Specialist Association of Gifted Educators in BC](#)

Identifying Accessibility Barriers

Below are potential accessibility barriers found in schools across BC.

Learning Barriers

1. Educators do not consistently allow for alternative ways for students to represent their learning.
2. Communication with students and guardians about assignments was provided inconsistently in various classes, resulting in some students not knowing or understanding what they needed to do for homework.
3. Some community members identified that it was difficult to navigate the school website and to locate information they hoped to access.

Physical and Architecture Environment Barriers

1. Many classrooms have noise issues that make it difficult for some students due to auditory sensitivities.
2. Most classrooms do not have sound fields to support students with hearing impairments or attention issues.
3. Some larger spaces within the school have sound echo issues.

Attitudinal Barriers

- Some students identified that they felt misunderstood by staff who made assumptions that they were lazy or uncooperative or lacked motivation.

Resource Barriers

- Teachers and students are not familiar with the accessibility features on school laptops/computers such as voice to text, text to voice, web readers and other features.

School Policy and Practice Barriers

1. Guardians and staff identified a gap in staff training on a variety of disabilities and accessibility issues.
2. Systematic transition planning processes are not evident for all students with disabilities.
3. Emergency evacuation protocols, individual plans and evacuation equipment are not in place for students with physical disabilities.