Accessibility

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Accessibility Plan 2026-2029

Developed in accordance with the Accessible British Columbia Act, this Accessibility Plan outlines the ongoing measures Heritage Christian Online School (HCOS) and Flex Academy are taking to identify, remove, and prevent accessibility barriers within our school community.

NOTE

Accessibility extends beyond physical spaces. Barriers may arise from practices, policies, information, communication, technology, learning environments, and the design of school activities and events. This plan builds on the 2023–2026 planning cycle.

STATUS UPDATES

2023–2026 Priorities

First, a look back at where we landed on our 2023–2026 priorities.

OBJECTIVE	TIMELINE	ACTIONS	STATUS
PRIORITY 1 **CONSULTATION**			
Build Accessibility Committee	2023/24	Create an invitation to our diverse community, encouraging participation in the committee.	Achieved
PRIORITY 2 **LEARNING**			
Equip teachers in Universal Design for Learning (UDL) principles	Ongoing	Provide Pro-D on UDL; provide collaboration and Learning Support coaching time to increase teacher capacity to use UDL lesson planning.	Ongoing

OBJECTIVE	TIMELINE	ACTIONS	STATUS
Continue to develop Universal Supports	Ongoing	Develop U/U+ Toolkits to equip teachers with resources and strategies for supporting K-12 students; invest in a schoolwide Learning Support Coaching program to build skills in universal supports.	Ongoing
Continue to evaluate StudyForge content through the lens of UDL	Ongoing	Task to StudyForge team member; annual report to Accessibility Committee.	Ongoing
Increase training in the use of accessible format materials	Ongoing	Provide staff training on accessible materials available; train students on the use of accessible book and website formats	Ongoing
Develop and implement an accessible Learning Commons website	2023/24	Conduct a website audit; create a website improvement plan; launch a new website.	Achieved
PRIORITY 3 **PHYSICAL AND ARCHITECTURAL**			
Review physical and architectural plans through an accessibility lens	Beginning 2024	Work with Inclusive Education and Leadership teams to evaluate future Flex Academy building plans and make recommendations that accommodate Universal Design principles (sound fields, lighting, and alternative learning spaces).	Achieved
Create a plan and budget to meet identified accessibility needs	Beginning 2025	Create a plan and budget to address the identified physical and architectural needs.	Achieved

What we heard, what we did, and what comes next.

01 · BARRIERS

What we heard.

02 · ACHIEVEMENTS

What we did.

03 · ACTION PLAN

What we will focus on.

04 · FEEDBACK

How to share feedback.

01 · Barriers

HCOS and Flex Academy identified barriers through community feedback, internal collaboration, event-specific surveys, and the review of learning resources and physical environments. Our formal web-based feedback mechanism received minimal engagement, but direct communication with families and staff provided valuable insight. We have integrated this feedback directly into our 2026–2029 planning.

SENSORY & ENVIRONMENTAL OVERLOAD

The scale and density of large gatherings (specifically RenewED, our annual schoolwide conference) created sensory barriers. Staff reported feeling overwhelmed by the 8:30 AM to 5:00 PM schedule, high volume levels during sessions, and crowded spaces that lacked quiet areas for regulation.

SPATIAL & NAVIGATIONAL CONSTRAINTS

The physical layout of main events, particularly the use of large tables, created a crowded, difficult-to-navigate environment that restricted movement and isolated individuals.

LIMITED ACCESS TO QUIET SPACES

People with neurodivergent profiles (such as autism, ADHD, or auditory sensitivities) faced barriers due to a lack of designated quiet seating, alternative spaces for meals, and lower-volume streaming options for main sessions.

02 · Achievements

Event Accessibility (RenewED)

In response to community feedback about sensory overload, crowding, and barriers to participation, we introduced several accessibility supports at RenewED 2026:

SPATIAL EXPANSION

Expanded the event across two buildings instead of one and maintained outdoor tents to provide additional spaces for meals and networking.

OPTIMIZED SEATING

Replaced large tables with rows of chairs in the main conference room, improving navigation, safety, and comfort.

SENSORY ACCOMMODATIONS

Provided earplugs at check-in and turned down worship volume.

SCHEDULE

Implemented shorter conference days to reduce cognitive fatigue and introduced flexible networking sessions and booths.

EXEMPTIONS & REMOTE ACCESS

Provided exemptions to those who were unable to attend in person due to health concerns or other extenuating circumstances discussed with their supervisor. We provided session recordings and slide decks online so staff could access the resources virtually.

Accessibility Committee

In September 2026, we officially formalized our Accessibility Committee to govern the 2026–2029 cycle, ensuring oversight of our ongoing initiatives.

COMMITTEE MEMBERS

- Toni Boer, Indigenous Family Liaison
- Kat Grootjes, Director of Inclusive Education
- Matthew Knegt, Office Manager
- Sara Kraushar, Head of Schools
- Spencer Moore, Inclusive Education Manager

Learning

ACCESSIBILITY-RELATED PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Delivered an extensive suite of targeted professional development sessions focused on removing barriers and supporting diverse needs. Recent training initiatives include:

- **Neurodiversity & Executive Functioning:** training to support specific cognitive profiles (e.g., Supporting Neurodivergent Students in the Classroom; Understanding and Navigating PDA; ADHD: Education & Toolkit Resources; Supporting Students with Executive Functioning)

- **Inclusive Education & Individualized Supports:** sessions focused on specialized learning frameworks (e.g., Competency-Based IEPs Goal Writing & Supports; Empowering Every Learner: Inclusive Ed Tech for Case Managers; Strong Foundations: Creating Individual SLPs)
- **Universal Supports & Differentiated Instruction:** expanding UDL principles across the curriculum (e.g., Diversifying Instruction for Different Learners; Universal Supports Training (Toolkits); Digital Tools for Classroom Use & Student Supports)
- **Regulation, Trauma, & Supportive Learning Environments:** ensuring emotionally and physically safe spaces (e.g., Trauma-Informed Practice in Educational Settings; Beyond the Desk: Movement for Regulation and Physical Literacy; Classroom Behaviour & Culture Training - Making Classrooms a Safe & Supportive Space for Students)

DIGITAL PLATFORM

Completed accessibility evaluations and updates for StudyForge, our digital curriculum platform:

- **Text and Visual Accessibility:** font and background colour combinations have been tested for contrast against WCAG standards, and legible fonts have been selected to support readability.
- **Video Closed-Captioning & Transcripts:** video content includes closed captions, with an option for students to access the captions as a transcript.
- **Text-Based Video Alternatives:** high-use, high-impact mathematics courses are being updated to include reading alternatives to video lessons, allowing students to access the same instructional content in a textbook-style format.
- **Accessibility Mode:** accessibility settings are provided within lessons, including options to improve text visibility for individuals with different types of colour blindness.
- **Accessible Quizzes:** quiz features are designed with accessibility in mind.

RESOURCE ACCESS

Redesigned the Learning Commons website to improve navigation and provided staff with training on accessible digital formats and tools, such as Read&Write.

Physical Environment (Flex Academy)

CAMPUS ACCESSIBILITY IMPROVEMENTS

Facilities and Operations completed a series of improvements to support accessibility, mobility, and pedestrian safety across the Flex Academy campus, including:

- **Entrances & ramps:** upgraded or added ramps at the 905 Building entrance, the temporary classrooms, and the 907 Building gymnasium

- **Parking & pedestrian safety:** clearly designated accessible and expectant-mother parking, an accessible loading zone, new crosswalks, and improved visibility of stairways, curbs, and railings
- **Lifts & elevators:** safety and mechanical upgrades to the 907 Building lift and 905 Building elevator
- **Accessible washrooms:** automatic-flush toilet (907), and new flooring and a baby-change station (905)

COMPLETED PROPOSAL FOR NOAH'S PLACE: CALM & KINDNESS

- **Noah's Place:** finalized plans for a dedicated 118 sq. ft. Multi-Sensory Counselling Suite for sensory regulation and play therapy, giving students a safe space to process, regulate, and recalibrate

COMPLETED PROPOSAL FOR JOJO'S ZONE: BELONGING & CONNECTION

- **JoJo's Zone:** finalized plans for a central, active space in the Village featuring comfortable seating, device charging stations, and integrated digital tools (interactive media displays and a campus-wide PA system) for students to gather and linger and to keep remote/hybrid learners connected to live events

03 · Accessibility Priorities & Action Plan 2026-2029

HCOS and Flex Academy will continue to identify, remove, and prevent barriers through the following priorities and actions, in consultation with the Accessibility Committee.

OBJECTIVE	TIMELINE	PROPOSED ACTIONS
PRIORITY 1 **CONSULTATION & ACCOUNTABILITY**		
Maintain an Accessibility Committee	Annually	Committee meets regularly and reports on progress; committee reviews feedback to inform future improvements and priorities
Review and update the plan	At least once every 3 years	Review progress regularly and update the plan at least once every three years
PRIORITY 2 **LEARNING & EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES**		

OBJECTIVE	TIMELINE	PROPOSED ACTIONS
Strengthen UDL and universal supports	Ongoing	Continue UDL professional development; review and develop Universal Supports to address learning barriers (annual review); continue evaluating StudyForge content for accessibility
Improve access to accessible-format materials	Ongoing	Improve access to accessible-format materials and support staff and students in using them through ongoing training
Review policies and practices	Ongoing	Review policies and practices for accessibility, including exemptions and accommodations
PRIORITY 3 **PHYSICAL ENVIRONMENTS & EVENTS**		
Sensory-friendly staff events	2027/28, then review each year	Use RenewED and other staff event feedback to implement practical sensory and participation supports: quiet room with streamed worship and quiet lunch space; low-stimulation seating labelled “quiet seating”; written agendas or note-taking outlines in advance; built-in movement breaks
Physical and architectural	2027/28, then review each year	Review Flex Academy's physical environment for remaining barriers, assessing lighting, sound, washroom accessibility, navigation, and alternative learning spaces; develop action plans and budgets for alternative learning space proposals
PRIORITY 4 **COMMUNICATION & PARTICIPATION**		
Gather and welcome community feedback	Ongoing	Continue gathering feedback from families, staff, and community members; maintain a visible, accessible feedback mechanism and welcome feedback through direct communication and existing school surveys
Plan communications and events with accessibility in mind	Ongoing	Consider accessibility when planning communications, professional development, meetings, and schoolwide events

04 · Feedback

HCOS and Flex Academy welcome feedback on this Accessibility Plan and on barriers that affect individuals interacting with the school. Community members can share feedback through the school's accessibility feedback form or by contacting the Accessibility Committee members. We also consider feedback received through relevant surveys (such as RenewED event surveys).

Share Accessibility Feedback

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.

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 your 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. Refrainfrom 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 theimmediate 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 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 andPicture 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, causesslurring or stuttering, or not being able to express oneself or understand written or spokenlanguage. 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 personwho 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.

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.

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. disabilities.

Our Approach

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
    1. Holding key discussions to identify barriers to accessibility
    2. Developing a school feedback tool
    3. Prioritization of actions to be taken
    4. 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 (2026-2029) includes:

- Toni Boer, Indigenous Family Liaison
- Kat Grootjes, Director of Inclusive Education
- Matthew Knegt, Office Manager
- Sara Kraushar, Head of Schools
- Spencer Moore, Inclusive Education Manager

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 our organizations 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

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.

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.

Accomplishments

The guiding principles of inclusive practice inform our 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 within our organization 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:

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 and Flex Academy 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 Success Centre offers the regular online support of multiple numeracy and literacy specialist Education Assistants to any HCOS and Flex Academy 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 and Flex Academy 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 and Flex Academy 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 and Flex Academy 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 and Flex Academy 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 and Flex Academy 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.

Global, National and Provincial Context

Our accessibility plan builds on global, national, provincial and our organizations 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 CPRD 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.

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