



COWICHAN VALLEY SCHOOL DISTRICT

ACCESSIBILITY PLAN
2023



INTRODUCTION

The Cowichan Valley School District is committed to creating a school district free of barriers to participation, where every student and staff member can access and partake in all activities and bring their identities, create belonging, and forge connections. This work is supported and embedded in 'Beyond Education' – Strategic Plan 2020 - 2024 and is the subject of Policy, specifically Policy 25, Identity, Belonging, and Connection. This work is not just the purview of Inclusive Education, but is the responsibility of every staff member, student, and community member who is connected to our district.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

The Cowichan Valley School District acknowledges the historic and contemporary truths of the lands of the Hul'q'umi'num' speaking peoples, specifically the Quw'utsun, Malahat, Halalt, Penelakut, Stz'uminus, & Lyackson peoples, and the lands of the Ts'uubaa-asatx, Nuu-Chah-Nulth peoples that the district is part of and serves, and the unique truths and histories of the Métis and Inuit peoples who also live on these lands. We work with intent to create a school district free of barriers to participation, where every student and staff member can access and partake in all activities and bring their identities, create belonging, and forge connections.

DEFINITIONS

- **Accessibility:** The state of having programs, services and environments that allow all individuals to participate fully in society without encountering barriers.
- **Accessibility Committee:** An official group formed by one or more organizations in collaboration with people with disabilities, to create an accessibility plan and feedback mechanism.
- **Accessibility Plan:** A plan developed by an Accessibility Committee that identifies challenges and solutions for addressing accessibility barriers.
- **Barrier:** Anything that prevents a person with a disability from fully participating in all aspects of society because of their disability. This includes physical/environmental, attitudinal, information, communications, policy or practice, and technological barriers.
 - **TYPES OF BARRIERS:**
 - **Physical/Environmental Barrier:** A barrier resulting from building design, smells/sounds, lighting, the area adjacent to the building, shape of rooms, the size of doorways, and so on.
 - **Attitudinal Barrier:** A barrier that arises from the attitudes of staff, students and the school community, including discriminatory behaviours and a lack of disability awareness.
 - **Communication Barrier:** A barrier that arises from difficulties receiving information in person, by telephone or online, interacting with teachers, peers, receptionists or other staff, and receiving training.
 - **Information Barrier:** A barrier that arises from inadequate or incomprehensible signage, difficulties reading brochures, forms, manuals, websites, fax transmissions, equipment labels, computer screens, and so on.
 - **Policy or Practice Barrier:** Rules, regulations and protocols that prevent a person from performing their job satisfactorily or participating in society. Policy, practice, and procedures that prevent a student from accessing the curriculum and fully participating in the school community.
 - **Technological Barrier:** Barriers resulting from computers, photocopiers, fax machines, telephones and switches, including the lack of assistive technologies.
- **Disability:** The state of being unable to participate fully and equally in society as a result of the interaction between an impairment and a barrier. (For more information about disability and types of disability and support, refer to Appendix A: Disabilities.)
- **Impairment:** A physical, sensory, mental, intellectual, cognitive limitation, whether permanent, temporary or episodic.

COWICHAN VALLEY SCHOOL DISTRICT

CONTEXT

Over the last number of years, the Cowichan Valley School District has been on a journey to review and update service provisions to students with diverse needs. This update has been about provision of services to children who have been assessed and have an official designation. While this is important work, we know that there are many students and staff who may have diverse needs that are not visible, and this plan is being created to address barriers for those with diverse needs that are both visible and invisible.

Along with this work, the District has committed to creating a Culture of Care and embedded this in 'Beyond Education' – Strategic Plan 2020-2024. Creating this Culture of Care calls for us to:

Foster healthy, safe, and resilient communities that build on the unique identities of our learners allowing them to thrive.

And do this by

Creating healthy work and school environments that promote wellness.

Enhancing mental health opportunities and partnerships that support well-being.

Continue to create and promote safe and inclusive learning environments for our diverse community.

Creating this Accessibility Plan will align our work under these goals, as well as be one of our foundational documents as the district undergoes a Strategy Regeneration for the next iteration of the Strategic Plan.

Additionally, naming the ways in which we can improve our schools and workplaces for those with diverse needs that are both visible and invisible will guide our work with intention and focus. It will also help us focus on ways in which we can improve our compliance with Canadian legislation like the Employment Equity Act and the Accessible Canada Act. On a provincial level, this Accessibility plan will also ensure our district is meeting its obligations to all members of our community under the Accessible B.C. Act.

ABOUT OUR COMMITTEE

In alignment with the Accessible B.C. Act, our district established an Advisory Group to identify and prioritize potential barriers within our organization. This initial advisory group included parents of learners with diverse needs, Indigenous representation, individuals with visible and invisible disabilities, and individuals that represent the diversity of British Columbia. In addition, the group represented various stakeholder groups including parents, union groups, and administration.

The Cowichan Valley School District would like to thank all of the members of the advisory group for their dedicated work in the development of this initial plan.

In addition, through the processes established in our collective agreements, a formal committee has been identified. Membership of the committee continues to meet the following criteria:

- Indigenous community representation
- Individuals with that have disabilities or support individuals with disabilities
- Individuals that reflect the diversity of persons in B.C.

OUR CONSULTATION PROCESS

During the consultation process, the advisory group developed an extensive plan to authentically identify barriers in our organization experienced by various groups. Specifically, open surveys were promoted across the district to gather insights from parents and all employee groups. In addition, student voice was intentionally gathered through small interview groups and student representatives attended an advisory group meeting to provide current reflections and insights into their experiences in our organization.

This data was presented in full to the advisory group that synthesized and identified prioritized needs that informed the goals established in this initial plan. Ongoing feedback will be collected and shared with committee to inform next steps or needed refinements to our initial plan.

OUR THREE-YEAR PLAN

The Three-Year Plan has been developed by the Cowichan Valley School District's BC Accessibility Plan Advisory Group. This group consisted of management and union representation as well as parent representatives and was tasked with ensuring the development of this plan and process for continued progress was set. The Three-Year Plan will be overseen by the soon-to-be formed Advisory Committee.

The three goals that were distilled by the Advisory Group from the initial consultation phase of this plan are:

Attitudinal

- UDL – Increase the use of UDL (inclusive practices) and universal strategies across the district (board level, district level, school level, classroom) to reduce barriers and to model access and learning

Policy/practice

- Mental Health – Continued implementation of mental health resources in schools and classrooms (increasing staff confidence and knowledge - capacity) AP, Mental Health Framework

Physical

- Audit of facilities in the school district in order to prioritize changes needed to reduce barriers.

We acknowledge several additional barriers were defined. Addressing these priority areas will help the District attend to many of the other identified barriers. In addition, these three priority areas will be developed into initial action items by the Accessibility Committee during this three-year implementation.

MONITORING AND EVALUATION

One of the tasks of the soon-to-be formed Accessibility Committee will be to define the process for monitoring and evaluation of the priorities, as well as new information that will likely be shared once the Advisory Committee becomes known in the District.