School District No. 5 (Southeast Kootenay)

BC Accessibility Plan

2024 - 2027

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Territory Acknowledgement

We respectfully acknowledge that we live, work, and learn on the unceded traditional territory of the Ktunaxa and the chosen homeland of the Metis.

We are committed to listening, learning, and honouring the rich cultures, histories, and contributions of Indigenous peoples.

Introduction

School District No. 05 (Southeast Kootenay) has an enrolment of approximately 6606 students in 16 brick and mortar schools plus Kootenay Discovery School, Kootenay Education Services, and Kootenay Learning Campus located in the communities of Cranbrook, Jaffray, Fernie, Sparwood, and Elkford. We have nine Elementary Schools, four Secondary Schools, one Elementary Junior Secondary School, two Middle Schools, one Alternative School, and one Blended Distance Learning School.

We strive to create an innovative and academically enriched educational environment where our students can thrive, and we encourage our students to participate in a wide array of co-curricular activities.

Our leadership team and staff are actively working to foster and embrace diversity, and are committed to continue to work toward fostering an atmosphere that encourages personal growth.

Aim of the Accessibility Plan

The District's Accessibility Plan is developed in accordance with the Accessible British Columbia Act, 2021 as it applies to prescribed organizations including school districts as of September 1, 2023. In alignment with the Act, the plan aims to support the identification, prevention, and removal of barriers that persons with disabilities face in their day-to-day lives.

The plan also sets out the steps that we will take to achieve these goals.

Mount Baker Secondary School Special Olympics 2024

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, etcetera.
- **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, or other staff, and receiving training.
- **Informational Barrier**: A barrier that arises from inadequate or incomprehensible signage, difficulties reading brochures, forms, manuals, websites, equipment labels, computer screens, etcetera.
- **Policy or Practice Barrier**: Rules, regulations, and protocols that prevent a person from performing their job satisfactorily or participating in society, and 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, 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.

Impairment: A physical, sensory, mental, intellectual, cognitive limitation, whether permanent, temporary, or episodic.

Guiding Framework

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 are required to have an Accessibility Committee, an Accessibility Plan, and a tool to receive feedback on accessibility.

Principles in the Accessible British Columbia Act:

The Accessible British Columbia Act includes a list of principles that must be considered as organizations develop an accessibility plan. The definitions are adapted from the foundational document BC Framework for Accessibility Legislation.

01 **Adaptability**

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

02 **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.

03 **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.

04 **Inclusion**

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

05 **Self-Determination**

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

06 **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."

Commitment to Accessibility

The book "Street Data: A Next-Generation Model for Equity, Pedagogy, and School Transformation" by Shane Safir and Jamila Dugan emphasizes the significance of embracing human stories and experiences to foster knowledge and comprehension. In alignment with this perspective, the Accessibility Committee is dedicated to actively listening to the narratives shared by our students, families, and employees.

School District No. 05 is committed to providing an environment that is engaging for all members of our diverse community, including people with disabilities. We recognize the importance of conscious planning, design, and effort in ensuring that barriers are removed, and full accessibility is created.

Our district is committed to working collaboratively with the community to provide equitable treatment for 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 the development and review of our accessibility plan.
- Increase opportunities for staff to learn about disabilities/diverse abilities and how to remove and prevent barriers.
- Ensure that our school board policies and procedures align with the principles of accessibility.
- Continually improve accessibility for people with disabilities/diverse abilities in our school community.

Last year, we began the process of establishing an accessibility committee and to begin the process for identifying barriers to accessibility in our school district community. This process involved:

- Making a plan to assess the current physical and architectural accessibility of our schools.
- Conducting a survey to understand the issues, challenges, and priorities within our school district community.
- Forming an Accessibility Committee.
- Developing a district-wide feedback tool.
- Establishing a monitoring and evaluation process.

Accessibility Committee

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 Board on strategies to reduce social, physical, sensory, and other barriers that prevent people from fully participating in all aspects of school community life. The Committee makes recommendations regarding issues that have been identified.

Recruitment of the Accessibility Committee Members

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 persons with disabilities;
- At least one member is Indigenous; and
- Members reflect the diversity of persons in BC.

Accessibility Committee Membership

We would like to thank the following committee members for their time and commitment to accessibility and inclusion:

Doug McPhee, SD5 Board Chair
Wendy Turner, SD5 Trustee
Larry Dureski, Union President, CDTA
Adrienne Demers, Union President, CFTA
Isabel Craig, Parent
Kaley Wasylowich, District Principal of Learning Services
Pam Drydale, Vice Principal, Parkland Middle School
Jaslene Atwal, District Vice Principal of Health and Safety and Human Resources
Krysten Tzakis, Teacher for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing
Jodi Lode, Counsellor, Mount Baker Secondary
Kim McKeown, Learning Services Coordinator, Elk Valley and Jaffray
Julie Russchen, Learning Services Coordinator, Cranbrook

The Accessibility Committee used the following methods to identify barriers:

- **Survey**: An accessibility and inclusion survey was developed and distributed to staff and parents. Completed: April 2023.
- The survey input was reviewed and an **Accessibility Committee** and **Accessibility Plan** were developed. Completed: December 2024.
- **District Accessibility Feedback Tool**: A feedback tool was developed and posted to the district website. Information about the tool will be shared with district and school partners including students, staff, and parents/guardians. Projected Completion: January 2025.

Report an Accessibility Barrier

We want to learn about specific barriers that people face when they are trying to access a school program, building, or school information. A public mechanism will be developed to elicit feedback about the Accessibility Plan and experiences within the organization related to accessibility. This information will be relayed via the online feedback tool that will be posted on our district website or by email at accessibility@sd5.bc.ca. The Committee will review feedback to better understand and identify the issues, challenges, and priorities of stakeholders within our school district community.

PSYCHOLOGICAL BENEFITS OF ACCESSIBILITY

① REDUCED ANXIETY

② IMPROVED SELF-ESTEEM

③ ENHANCED WELL-BEING

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