



ACCESSIBILITY PLAN

2023-2028

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Message from the Board Chair and Director

At the Near North District School Board (NNDSB), our mission is to provide opportunities that empower all learners to develop their potential by providing diverse pathways which lead students to become model citizens who achieve life goals and contribute to the betterment of society. In its renewed Multi-Year Accessibility Plan, NNDSB seeks to put accessibility at the forefront of this mission.

In consideration of the previous plan and existing practices, NNDSB recognized that, while accessibility has often been considered, it has not been a guiding factor in its decision-making processes. When thinking about the goals for accessibility in this updated plan, the Accessibility Committee unanimously agreed that it would like accessibility to be the standard, not the exception. Rather than have an individual self-identify with an accessibility need, our goal is to create an environment that makes decisions and establishes practices that are accessible by default and incorporate these considerations in our daily activities to a point where they become second nature. To this effect, NNDSB strives to create a truly accessible environment for everyone. By creating such an environment, we hope it inspires the students who learn and grow in our schools to become accessibility champions who can inspire positive generational change as they become contributing members of our communities.

While these goals sound ambitious, and we recognize that there will be limitations to what can realistically be accomplished, we will endeavour to push ourselves to find solutions, drawing on internal and external expertise to accomplish our accessibility goals within available resources.

We invite you to review our updated Accessibility Plan 2023-2028 and would welcome any questions or feedback.

Sincerely,

Craig Myles
Director of Education

Erika Lougheed
Board Chair

Disability Defined

Defining disability is a complex, evolving matter. A disability is a physical, mental or neurological condition that limits a person's movements, senses, or activities. This term covers a broad range and degree of conditions. A disability may have been present at birth, caused by an accident, or developed over time.

Disabilities can include, but are not limited to, the following:

- Lack of mobility such as paralysis, amputation, difficulty with balance or coordination
- Reliance on a mobility device
- Reliance on a service dog
- Blindness or low vision
- Non-verbal
- Non-vocal
- Speech impairment
- Deafness or hearing impairment
- Brain injury
- Epilepsy
- Intellectual disability
- Learning disability
- Mental health challenges

As you can see, disabilities can take many forms. This revised Multi-Year Accessibility Plan (the Plan) seeks to create an inclusive environment for every individual that interacts with the Near North District School Board, so that everyone feels welcome and able to participate in all that we have to offer.

Commitment to Accessibility

The Near North District School Board (NNDSB) is committed to fulfilling its responsibilities under the Ontario Human Rights Code and under the *Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act (AODA)*, 2005 in a way that ensures equitable access to its buildings, programs, services, policies, and resources for all the students, families, employees and members of the public who collectively make up the NNDSB community.

NNDSB further commits to achieving its accessibility goals by addressing the right to equal opportunity and inclusion for persons with disabilities throughout society by identifying, removing, and preventing barriers to access.

The NNDSB is committed to:

- addressing any current accessibility barriers and preventing and removing future barriers;
- ensuring, where possible, that Board policies, procedures, and practices are consistent with the principles of accessibility and inclusive/universal design;
- identifying barriers that require more immediate changes to make premises accessible;
- meeting quarterly to discuss the progress in implementing and achieving the objectives detailed in the Multi-Year Accessibility Plan;
- drafting an annual report of accomplishments of the Multi-Year Accessibility Plan to be presented before the Board;
- Reviewing and updating the Multi-Year Accessibility Plan on a regular 5-year cycle.

The NNDSB Accessibility Plan outlines the steps that will be undertaken in order to identify and remove structural, attitudinal, systemic and communication barriers to access for persons with disabilities. The plan also sets out the steps the NNDSB will take to achieve these goals, specifying implementation targets for each goal.

About the Near North District School Board

The Near North District School Board is responsible for the public education of over 10,000 learners across the geographic regions of Almaguin, North Bay and Parry Sound. This Board was formed in 1998 as a result of a government initiative to amalgamate boards in the province of Ontario. The Board currently operates twenty-six elementary schools, seven secondary schools and related programs and services. The Board of Trustees includes nine Trustees and two Student Trustees. They establish the strategic directions and priorities of the Board and monitor our progress. Trustees approve an annual budget, and review and approve Board policies.

Vision

We strive to ensure all members of our educational community contribute to a thriving and inclusive culture of student achievement and well-being.

Mission

To provide opportunities that empower all learners to develop their potential by providing diverse pathways which lead students to become model citizens who achieve life goals and contribute to the betterment of society.

Values

We value respectful and welcoming teaching and learning environments that support diverse learning needs and promote achievement and well-being for all.

We value the teachings and principles of Indigenous cultures.

We value equity in our diverse educational community and are accountable to the success and well-being of all.

We value community partnerships that support us.

We value your confidence in us and strive to maintain it through the delivery of excellent educational opportunities for all.

Priorities

NNDSB's four overarching priorities are:

1. Excellence in Teaching and Learning
2. Excellence in Innovation
3. Excellence in Relationships
4. Excellence in Communication

Accessibility Committee and Developing the 2023-2028 Plan

In February 2023, the NNDSB Accessibility Committee began meeting with the goal of reviewing the previous Accessibility Plan and to plan the NNDSB accessibility work for the next iteration of the plan. Over the course of the project, the committee welcomed guest representatives from various departments as well as external consultants and community members.

The committee consulted the following groups/individuals to provide feedback and input regarding the updated Accessibility Plan: Special Education Advisory Committee (SEAC), Equity Advisory Circle (EAC), First Nations Advisory Committee (FNAC), Indigenous Youth Circle (IYC), Student Senate, School Councils, the Mental Health Lead, Federation Partners, Special Education Team and Specialty Teachers.

These efforts combined with a new group of committee members have resulted in a refreshed vision of accessibility and a detailed plan to further improve accessibility for the NNDSB and community that it serves.

The NNDSB Multi-Year Accessibility Plan outlines the steps that will be undertaken to identify and remove structural, attitudinal, systemic, and communication barriers to access for persons with disabilities. The plan also sets out the steps that the NNDSB will take to achieve these goals, how we envision the outcomes of our efforts, and how we will measure our progress.

The Multi-Year Accessibility Plan and updates to the Plan will be posted on the Board's website at www.nearnorthschools.ca/board/accessibility-standards-for-customer-service/. The NNDSB will provide accessible formats of the Plan upon request.

The Accessibility Committee members are noted below.

Name	Role
Seija Van Haesendonck	Superintendent of Business - Chair
Kim Pauli	Principal of Special Education
Lisa Lamoureux	Principal of Equity and Well-Being
Various Staff	Human Resources
Glenn Morrison	IT Manager
James Coventry	Manager, Facilities & Operations
Marianne Speirs	Capital Projects Manager
Deb Bartlett	Communication Officer
Saxon Yanta	Acting Executive Assistant, Superintendent of Business – Recording Secretary

Accessibility Accomplishments

The NNDSB has made progress in achieving the plan laid out in the previous iteration of the NNDSB Accessibility Plan. The following represents the accessibility enhancements that have occurred since 2013 in the areas of Customer Service, Employment, Information and Communication, Physical Environment, and Transportation.

Employment

The NNDSB's internal and external recruitment, assessment, and selection processes have been standardized to include a notification to participants of the availability of accommodations. New and existing employees are informed of the availability of accommodations in the workplace.

The job posting, invitation for an interview, and the documentation to the hiring team includes a notification that accommodations are available upon request. If an accommodation is requested at any stage of the recruitment process, applicants are consulted regarding necessary arrangements to account for individual accessibility needs. New hire conditional offers of employment include a link to the "How May I Help You?" online video where employees must indicate they have viewed the material prior to commencing work to ensure compliance with the AODA.

The process for employee assessment and the subsequent development of accommodation plans has been documented. Individual plans are kept confidential within the Human Resources Department. Plans are shared with the employee, manager, and union to facilitate the implementation of recommended accommodation plans. The Human Resources Department supports staff returning to work and supports them through the development of an individual accommodation plan.

Customer Service

The NNDSB has made notable improvements to a number of areas associated with Customer Service. The NNDSB provides mandatory training to staff on the Customer Service Standards supporting the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act (AODA).

The training enhances staff understanding of the standards and provides better support and services for all stakeholders. Additional training on the Ontario Human Rights Code (Code) supplements AODA training.

The NNDSB uses a number of feedback mechanisms to provide opportunities for those engaged with schools, departments or on behalf of stakeholder groups. The NNDSB

solicits community feedback about its administrative guidelines, thereby providing an opportunity to identify operational or systemic barriers, resulting in access to the full spectrum of opportunities and outcomes. Stakeholder feedback is gathered through the email address accessibility@nearnorthschools.ca.

Information and Communication

As one of the key pillars of the 2021-2026 Multi-Year Strategic Plan, NNDSB is committed to improving communications and access to information with our stakeholders. From how we communicate with our community to how we offer training to our employees, we remain focused on continuing to ensure that our information and communications are available and accessible to everyone in our community.

NNDSB uses a variety of communications tools to share information and communicate with students and families. Edsby is a cloud-based software platform that offers real-time access to student's attendance, schedules, activities, and classroom work. Edsby also provides resources to connect families with teachers and the latest school news and information. Brightspace LMS is a cloud-based learning management system (LMS) for online teaching and learning that many educators use to deliver, collect, and score assignments online. Both Edsby and Brightspace LMS allows NNDSB to communicate and share information with a variety of stakeholders in an accessible format.

Our libraries employ a variety of strategies to ensure content is available in numerous formats. The SORA Library offers NNDSB students digital library collections which have integrated accessibility tools that support the reading and voice playback of the resources. This also includes the magnification of text, to ensure that those with limited sight can consume the content they offer, without barriers. In addition, this database includes audiobooks, translation functionality, the ability to adjust font size as well as highlight and annotate. Additionally, 50% of the libraries' educational video streaming platforms, which includes Curio, ONCore, and Learn360, are currently available with closed captioning, with the goal of being 100% closed captioned in the near future.

Letters to Families are shared on a monthly basis, which highlight events, activities, information and resources available to students and caregivers alike.

The NNDSB has also undertaken the redevelopment of the corporate and school websites to achieve compliance with the Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG) 2.0. Compliance with these guidelines will provide greater opportunities for all stakeholders to engage with the web content provided via the NNDSB web properties.

Feedback, both from our community and our staff, continues to help shape our approach to increasing the accessibility of our information and communications.

Physical Environment

From 2013 to 2022, the NNDSB made significant improvements to its facilities, focusing primarily on mobility accessibility. Since 2020, barrier free washroom upgrades have been completed at 13 schools, bringing the total percentage of barrier free washrooms within the schools to 71%. NNDSB has 14 fully accessible schools. 91% of schools have barrier free access to the building from parking areas, and 100% of schools have designated parking. 86% of schools have barrier free accessible exterior and vestibule doors.

When planning capital projects, Facilities and Capital Planning consider accessibility features into their designs wherever possible. While funding for projects can be constrained, this approach allows NNDSB to continue to incorporate accessibility enhancements into its projects at every opportunity.

School based staff work closely with Special Education Staff, and staff from Facilities and Operations to identify on-site supports to students. This information is maintained by the Special Education Department and allows the NNDSB to provide individual accommodations to students in a timely manner thus ensuring every student can experience an inclusive learning environment at the NNDSB.

Transportation

Nipissing-Parry Sound Student Transportation Services (NPSSTS) is a non-profit corporation that supports student transportation across four school boards including NNDSB. The Superintendents of Business of each Board sit on the NPSSTS Board of Directors, with the Superintended of Business for NNDSB acting as the Board Chair for 2023-2024. NPSSTS ensures students' needs are met according to those identified by the school.

Overview of Objectives

NNDSB aims to achieve the following objectives during the period of 2023-2028:

Employment

Objectives	Actions/Outcomes	Implementation
Improve documentation surrounding available accessible formats	Development of clear documentation outlining available accessible formats as it relates to recruitment, job accommodations, return to work plans, etc.	Year 1
Accurate training records for all staff	Develop a repository of staff training records and a well-documented cyclical training schedule for staff training which accounts for budgetary considerations	Year 1-2
Accessibility training for volunteers	Develop a procedure which outlines the process to ensure all volunteers receive accessibility training. Develop a repository of volunteer training records.	Year 2-3
Ongoing staff training	Develop a training schedule to ensure staff receive updated training as AODA standards change.	Year 3-4

Customer Services

Objectives	Actions/Outcomes	Implementation
Update Accessibility Standards webpage and related information	Update the Accessibility Standards for Customer Service webpage	Year 1
Include a notice about audited financial statements being available in an accessible format upon request	Update audited financial statements being available in an accessible format upon request	Year 1
Improve public feedback processes on the website	Expand on options available to receive feedback from the public with regards to accessibility	Year 1-2
Engage the public in feedback on the Accessibility Plan	Issue a survey to members of the public to obtain their feedback	Annually

	regarding our accessibility accomplishments and challenges	
Update Administrative Guidelines relating to accessibility	Update all the Administrative Guidelines for Accessibility Standards including Monitoring and Feedback on Accessible Customer Service Standards, Notification of Disruption of Service, Use of Support Person by the General Public, Use of Assistive Devices by the General Public, and Use of Service Animals by the General Public.	Year 2-3

Information and Communication

Objectives	Actions/Outcomes	Implementation
Offer closed captioning on all videos, including live streamed meetings	Utilize media and broadcasting platforms that allow participants to have the video or live stream media closed captioned.	Year 1-2
Links to all public meetings available on website	Ensure that notices of all upcoming public meetings are made available on the Board website, including links to stream these sessions whenever applicable.	Year 1-2
Accessible Word and PDF documents	Develop a procedure that outlines how to use accessibility checkers built into software programs prior to document distribution to ensure that all documents have been reviewed for accessibility.	Year 1-2
Update website information relating to accessibility	Provide current accessibility information on the dedicated Board webpage for accessibility	Year 1-2
Include accessibility policy statement on the website	Support the Board of Trustees in the development of this policy statement	Year 2
Oversight of website to ensure accessible content	Create a procedure to outline whose responsibility this is, how often checks are completed, how information is communicated, etc.	Year 2
Develop a formalized procedure for notification of disruption of service	Following updates to the Administrative Guideline for Accessibility Standards for Customer	Year 2-3

	Service Notification of Disruption of Service, develop a procedure which guides the notification process for disruption of service	
Make the internal staff portal accessible	Redesign staff portal to meet accessibility standards	Year 2-3

Physical Environment

Objectives	Actions/Outcomes	Implementation
Develop a standard for accessible outdoor play/education spaces	Establish a guideline or practice for assessing outdoor play and education spaces. Establish an accessibility standard for new or updated outdoor play and education spaces.	Year 2-3
Conduct a survey of all Board locations	Conduct a survey of all indoor education and outdoors play/education spaces to identify physical barriers.	Year 2-3
Provide individualized accessibility features of each school on the Board website	Using the results of the above noted survey, develop a detailed list of accessibility features at each school that can easily be referenced on the Board website	Year 3-4
Increase accessibility of facilities	Using the results of the above noted survey, continue to develop capital plans which consider accessibility as a priority factor.	Year 3-4

Transportation

Objectives	Actions	Implementation
Support the process by which NPSSTS gathers information for special transportation needs	NNDSB Special Education Staff and Principal Advisory Committee members participate in a review panel along with representatives from the three other school boards to support the NPSSTS initiative to update special transportation needs students/families/schools	Year 1-2