Northern BC School District Accessibility Plan

September 1, 2026, to August 31, 2029

Contents

Introduction 2
The Organizations Represented in this Plan: 2
Territorial Acknowledgement 3
Messages from the Region 3
Definitions 4
Framework Guiding Our Work 5
About Our Committee 6
Overview of the Plan 6
Plan Priorities 6
Priority #1 – Barriers to Accessibility 7
Priority #2 - Accessibility and Inclusion Education 7
Feedback Mechanism 8
Monitoring 8
Evaluating 8
Appendix A: School District Links for Feedback 9
Appendix B: About Disability 10
Appendix C: Suggested References/Resources 18

Introduction

Thirteen school districts in northern British Columbia have connected around the important work of increasing all persons' ability to interact meaningful with each organization through the creation of this plan to identify, remove, and prevent barriers of engagement. The Northern BC School District Advisory Committee developed this plan with support from the Northern BC Accessibility Working Group, key contacts from each school district represented in this plan, and resource materials provided by the Disability Alliance of BC and Untapped Accessibility.

The Organizations Represented in this Plan:

- School District 27 Cariboo-Chilcotin
- School District 28 Quesnel
- School District 49 Central Coast
- School District 50 Haida Gwaii
- School District 52 Prince Rupert
- School District 54 Bulkley Valley
- School District 57 Prince George
- School District 59 Peace River South
- School District 60 Peace River North
- School District 82 Coast Mountains
- School District 87 Stikine
- School District 91 Nechako Lakes
- School District 92 Nisga'a

Territorial Acknowledgement

- SD 27 - Located on the traditional and unceded territories of the Secwepemc, Tsilhqot'in, and Dakelh First Nations
- SD 28 - Nazko, Lhtako,?Esdilagh, and Lhoosk'uz
- SD 49 - Nuxalk Nation, Wuikinuxv Nation, and Heiltsuk Nation
- SD 50 - Located on the traditional and unceded territory of the Haida Nation.
- SD 52 - Located on the traditional territory of the Ts'msyen and Sm'algyax speaking peoples
- SD 54 - Located on the traditional and unceded territory of the Witsuwit'en Nation
- SD 57 - Lheidli T'enneh, McLeod Lake Indian Band, and Simpcx First Nations
- SD 59 - Located on Treaty 8 Territory home of Saulteau First Nation and West Moberly First Nation, a strong Métis community and the many other First Nations and Inuit who have relocated here from across Canada.
- SD 60 - Located on the traditional territory of the Tsáá? Ché Ne Dane within Treaty 8
- SD 82 - Located on the traditional and unceded territories of the Gitxsan, Haisla, Nisga'a and Ts'msyen Nations
- SD 87 - Located on the unceded traditional territories of the Tāłtān, Kaska and Taku River Tlingit First Nations.
- SD 91 - Located on the unceded, ancestral territories of fourteen First Nations representing the Dakelh, Nedut'en and Wet'suwet'en peoples
- SD 92 - Nisga'a

Messages from the Region

The Northern Chapter of the British Columbia School Superintendents Association (BCSSA) recognizes that accessibility is about more than removing barriers, it is about ensuring every student, family, staff member, and community partner feels welcomed, valued, supported, and able to fully participate and experience success in learning and community life. In northern and rural communities, accessibility requires thoughtful collaboration, flexibility, and a deep understanding of local context.

As we continue this important work, this plan reflects our ongoing commitment and collective responsibility to strengthen inclusive, compassionate, and equitable learning environments for all.
~ Tracey MacMillan, BCSSA Northern Chapter Director

The BC Council of Administrators of Inclusive Support in Education (BCCAISE) works to promote inclusive learning environments for all learners. The Northern Chapter includes administrators who support learners with diverse abilities across northern British Columbia from Cariboo-Chilcotin to the Yukon border. We actively contribute to initiatives focused on enhancing accessibility and advancing strategies that support school districts and staff in identifying and addressing barriers that may impact individuals. We continue to prioritize the development of barrier-free environments that promote inclusion, celebrate diversity, support self-determination, and provide equitable access to education for all learners.
~ Leighan Rodger, BCCAISE Northern BC Regional Network Chair

Definitions

The following definitions are provided in the Accessible BC Act and the Developing Your First Accessibility Plan guide which was created as part of the Accessible Organization Project led by Disability Alliance BC.

Accessibility Plan	A plan to identify, remove, and prevent barriers to individuals in or interacting with the organization through the considerations of inclusion, adaptability, diversity, collaboration, self-determination, and universal design.
Adaptability	Disability and accessibility are evolving concepts that change as services, technology, and attitudes change.
Barriers	Anything that hinders the full and equal participation in society of a person with an impairment.
Collaboration	Promoting accessible communities is a shared responsibility and everyone has a role to play.

Disability	An inability to participate fully and equally in society due to the interaction of an impairment or a barrier.
Diversity	Every person is unique. People with disabilities are individuals with varied backgrounds. Individual characteristics including race, gender, sexual orientation religion, and lived experience inform the experiences of individuals.
Impairment	A physical, sensory, mental, intellectual, or cognitive impairment, which is permanent, temporary, or episodic.
Inclusion	All British Columbians, including persons with disabilities, should be able to participate fully and equally in their communities.
Self-Determination	Empowering 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.”

Framework Guiding our Work

The Accessible BC Act outlines six principles that must be considered by the committee in the development, content, and form of the accessibility plan: inclusion, adaptability, diversity, collaboration, self-determination, and universal design. In addition to these principles, the committee will adopt three key objectives in the development of the plan as outlined in the Accessible BC Act: Guidance for the K-12 Sector (Harris & Company LLP):

- Increase meaningful participation in school communities
- Develop standards for improved service delivery in areas such as education including critical infrastructure like entranceways, playgrounds, sidewalks, accessible transportation, and employment opportunities
- Harmonize with other jurisdictions

About the Northern BC School District Accessibility Advisory Committee

The Committee aims to include diverse perspectives and lived experiences in its volunteer membership, including people with disabilities and Indigenous representation. School District representatives also serve on the Northern BC School District Accessibility Working Group, which supports the Committee and connects with the districts represented in this plan. Districts review membership annually to address representation gaps and support inclusive participation.

Overview of the Plan

The school districts represented in this plan are committed to ensuring all members of our communities are treated with dignity, given the opportunity for meaningful participation, and are provided equitable access to learning. The priorities outlined in this plan represent our commitment to:

- Engage with staff, community members and people with disabilities in the development and review of our accessibility plan.
- Ensure our school board 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.
- Respond to feedback for improving accessibility for people with disabilities in our school communities.

Plan Priorities

The Advisory Committee and the thirteen school districts in northern BC represented in this plan are committed to priorities that align with the principles of accessibility. The following priorities focus on gathering

information based on the lived experience of people with disabilities to better understand the scope of work required to reduce social, physical, sensory, and other barriers that prevent people from meaningful interactions in and with our organizations.

Priority #1 – Barriers to Accessibility

After collecting feedback from Northern districts, it was determined that continuing barrier identification is a priority. Most feedback cited physical and attitudinal barriers as the most visible, although technology, systemic, sensory, and communication barriers were also identified.

Strategy: Use a framework to strategize priorities by collecting local data on barriers, assess the data to determine the issue, impact and urgency, adapt and determine immediate solutions and long-term solutions, then communicate and celebrate updated changes in local school districts.

Action Plan: Each district will continue to examine their policies and practices to identify barriers that people with disabilities, both visible and invisible, face when interacting with our organizations. Each district will identify and plan to prevent and/or remove:

- Physical barriers (e.g. accessible schools and facilities)
- Attitudinal barriers (e.g. attitudes towards people with disabilities)
- Sensory barriers (e.g. sounds, scents, lighting etc.)
- Systemic barriers (e.g. Policies and practices)
- Technology barriers (e.g. access to learning technology)
- Communication barriers (e.g. inaccessible documents or websites)

Priority #2 - Accessibility and Inclusion Education

In the spring of 2026, feedback was collected on the Northern BC School District Accessibility Plan using an Accessibility Survey form that school districts made available to stakeholders. In May 2026, the feedback will be presented to the Northern BC School District Advisory Committee for input. In the fall of 2026, school districts will communicate feedback

from the survey to stakeholders and plan to action priorities. Furthermore, school districts will publicize their commitment to removing barriers and strengthening education around inclusion.

Strategy: Use available educational tools, communication pathways, and collaboration amongst districts to provide staff, students, and community education for inclusion and accessibility.

Action Plan: Each district will:

- educate school communities on physical and attitudinal barriers
- educate school communities on accessibility/disability awareness
- celebrate and share positive accessibility and inclusion practices

Feedback Mechanism

Each school district represented in this plan has developed an online feedback form that includes a series of questions about the accessibility plan and the accessibility experiences that members of the school communities and the public can complete. Please find the link for the school district in your area in Appendix A. Once you get to the school district website, you will find a link to an accessibility page that will provide accessibility information and access to the feedback form.

Monitoring and Evaluating

Each school district will report yearly on progress toward identified priorities through a shared report submitted to the working group by the end of June. Districts will also share an annual survey with the school community. Key themes and feedback from the reports and surveys will be reviewed by the Committee at the first meeting of the new school year, and Committee feedback will be shared with the Working Group for further consideration. Each district will also share actions and timelines specific to its local priorities and needs at a district level. The Committee will conduct a review and evaluation of the accessibility plan every three years.

Appendix A: School District Links for Feedback

Please find the link listed below for the school district in your area. On the school district website, you will find a link to accessibility information and a Feedback Form.

- School District 27 Cariboo-Chilcotin
- School District 28 Quesnel
- School District 49 Central Coast
- School District 50 Haida Gwaii
- School District 52 Prince Rupert
- School District 54 Bulkley Valley
- School District 57 Prince George
- School District 59 Peace River South
- School District 60 Peace River North
- School District 82 Coast Mountains
- School District 87 Stikine
- School District 91 Nechako Lakes
- School District 92 Nisga'a

Appendix B: About Disability

The Disability Continuum

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, which 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 want to help, wait until you receive permission.
- Offer your arm (the elbow) to guide the person and walk slowly.
- Service animals are working and must pay attention. Refrain from engaging with the animal.
- If you are giving directions or verbal information, be precise and clear. For example, if you are approaching a door or an obstacle, say so. Do not just assume the individual cannot 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. Do not 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-lit 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 understood.
- Service animals are working and must pay attention. 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 the 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.
- Do not 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 have said.
- If you cannot understand what is 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 many 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 use 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 are 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 will not know that the person has a mental health disability unless you are informed of it. But if someone is having difficulty controlling their symptoms or is in a crisis, you may need to help. 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 people with a mental health disability and their needs.

- If someone is 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 does not mean they have another. For example, if a person has difficulty speaking; make no assumption they have an intellectual disability as well.
- If you do not 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 a person who is deaf-blind.
- Do not touch service animals – they are working and must always pay attention.
- Unless it is an emergency, refrain from touching a deaf-blind person without permission.

Appendix C: Suggested References/Resources

Global, Canadian and Local Accessibility Context and Legislation

- United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities
- Canada Ratifies 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
- Universal Design
- Special 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)
- Canadian Hard of Hearing Association
- Canadian Hearing Services
- Provincial Inclusion Outreach Program (Complex Needs)
- 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)