

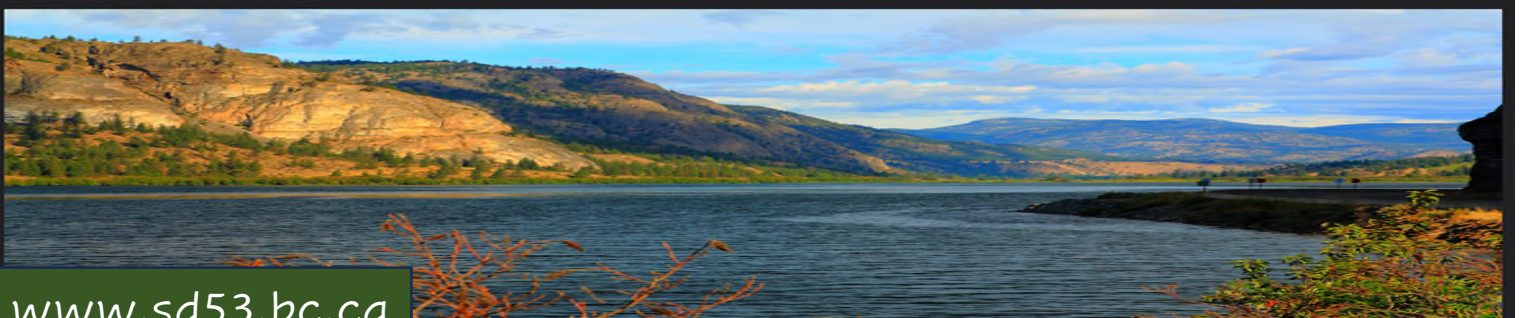


Okanagan
Similkameen
SD53

Okanagan
Similkameen
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Accessibility Plan



www.sd53.bc.ca

June 2025

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Section 1: Introduction

a. About our School District Community

School District No. 53 (Okanagan Similkameen) serves approximately 2400 kindergarten to grade 12 students, plus early learners. We are a rural school district serving the communities of Osoyoos, Oliver, Keremeos, Cawston, Hedley, Olalla, and Okanagan Falls and three First Nations including Okanagan Indian Band, Lower Similkameen Indian Band, and Upper Similkameen Indian Band.



Our leadership team and staff are very committed to providing a positive educational environment that fosters each child's learning in an accessible and inclusive environment. Our leadership team includes a superintendent, an assistant superintendent, secretary treasurer, manager of human resources, a district principal of student support services, a vice-principal of early learning, and 15 school principals/vice-principals. We have approximately 500 employees including teachers, support staff, principals, vice-principals and management staff.

The District elects a Board of seven trustees who establish policies and direction of the District. Board meetings occur on the fourth Wednesday of every month.

b. Territorial Acknowledgement

School District No. 53 Okanagan Similkameen is grateful to be on the shared, unceded territory of the Sukənaquin and Sməłqmix Nation and their peoples. We respect and commit to deep consideration of their history, culture, stewardship, and voice.

c. 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:
 - a. **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.
 - b. **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.
 - c. **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.
 - d. **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.
 - e. **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.
- **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.

Section 2: Framework Guiding our Work

Our district's accessibility plan builds on global, national, provincial, and school district specific actions to promote and support accessibility.

a. 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 CRPD 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.”

b. Canadian Context and Legislation – 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. Persons with disabilities 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 people with disabilities.



c. BC Context and Legislation – 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.

d. Principles of the Accessible BC Act

The *Accessible B.C. 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](#).



- **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 the 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.

e. 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.



Our district is committed to providing an environment that is accessible and practical for our diverse community. We recognize the importance of conscious planning, design, and effort in ensuring that barriers are removed, and accessibility is increased.

Our district is committed to working collaboratively 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 the development and review of its accessibility plan.
- Enhance the accessibility of information and communication for all individuals, including those with disabilities.
- Determine, prioritize, and provide suggestions and actionable items to improve the accessibility of the physical and architectural environment for all individuals, including those with disabilities.
- Continually improve accessibility for people with disabilities in our school community.

f. Our Approach

Our district believes that all members of our community have the right to be treated with dignity, given an opportunity 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 April 2023, we began the process of establishing an initial accessibility committee and lay the groundwork for the identification of barriers to accessibility in our school district community. This process involved planning for future:

- Assessment of the accessibility of our school district community.
- Information gathering approaches to understand the issues, challenges, and priorities of stakeholders within our school district community.
- Development of a feedback tool.
- Prioritization of actions to be taken.
- Establishing a monitoring and evaluation process.

Our approach is designed to recognize the gaps and opportunities to improve accessibility in our community. By engaging in thoughtful planning, meaningful engagement, training, and direct action, we aim to deliver lasting accessibility improvements for all members of our community.

Section 3: About our Committee

a. Purpose of the Accessibility Committee

Under the *Accessible B.C. 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 district 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.

b. Recruitment of the Accessibility Committee Members

Under the Accessible B.C. 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 Accessibility Committee was formally constituted in March 2023. Current members of the Accessibility Coordinating Committee are listed below, and membership will be reviewed on a regular basis.

c. Accessibility Committee Membership

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

- | | |
|------------------|--|
| • Heather Rose | Director of Student Support Services (she/her) |
| • Susan Trower | Manager Human Resources (she/her) |
| • Debby Sansome | Director of Facilities (she/her) |
| • Michael Willms | School Counsellor (he/him) |
| • Melissa Visser | Speech Language Assistant (she/her) |
| • Jeremy Crow | Counsellor (he/him) |
| • Stacey Smith | Administrator (she/her) |

Section 4: Our Consultation Process

a. Barrier Identification Methodologies

The Accessibility Committee plans to use the following methods to identify barriers:

- o District Accessibility Feedback Tool – A feedback tool will be posted to the district website and shared with district and school stakeholders. Completion Date: September 2023.
- o Accessibility Scan – Accessibility barriers in our district will be identified and brought forward to applicable departments or work sites on an ongoing basis.
- o Accessibility Committee – The Accessibility Committee will review information and data on an as needed basis. The committee will provide suggested priority areas to target in the Accessibility Plan.

Section 5: How to Give Feedback

a. Feedback Mechanism Development

Our district developed an online feedback tool that includes questions about



accessibility experiences that students, staff, and members of the school district community can complete. The tool is posted on the district website and an information announcement about the tool will be provided to students, staff, and parents/guardians. Feedback can be anonymous, or people can add their name and contact information if they wish to be contacted. There is also an option for people to email a video or photo(s) to accessibility@sd53.bc.ca.

b. 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. This information can be relayed via the online feedback tool that will be posted on our district website or by email at accessibility@sd53.bc.ca.

Section 6: Information Gathered and Action Taken

a. To Follow

Section 7: Our 3 Year Plan

a. Overview

This Accessibility Plan outlines the measures that our district will take to remove and prevent barriers and to promote inclusion for individuals with disabilities in our school district community. The plan is based on the accessibility principles of adaptability, collaboration, diversity, inclusion, self-determination, and universal design, as set out in the *Accessible B.C. Act*.



b. Accessibility Priorities

The Accessibility Committee has identified the following areas as the initial top priorities for improving accessibility in the school district community.

Priority #1: Information and Communication

Enhance the accessibility of information and communication for all individuals, including those with disabilities, through the following actions:

- Review district and school websites to ensure they are clear and easy-to-navigate.
- Work to ensure that communication to staff, students, and parents/guardians is written in plain language and available in alternate formats upon request.
- Improve the number and type of accessible format resources for students with disabilities.
- Increase staff and student training in the use of accessible format materials (e.g., speech to text).

Priority #2 Physical and Architectural

We will complete school and district scans of physical and architectural environments and determine, prioritize, and provide suggestions and actionable items to improve the accessibility of the physical and architectural environment for all individuals, including those with disabilities.

Section 8: Monitoring and Evaluation

The Accessibility Planning Committee or designate(s) will review progress and evaluate the effectiveness of the plan's implementation and plan for increased accessibility throughout the school and district.

The committee will ensure the following steps are taken regarding the Three-Year Accessibility Plan:

- i. Review and update the Three-Year Accessibility plan every three years.



Section 9: How to Give Us Feedback

Staff, students, or the public are encouraged to provide the Accessibility Committee with feedback on any barriers they experience, witness, or notice at our schools or other facilities. Feedback can be provided using our Feedback Form at [Accessibility Feedback Form | Okanagan Similkameen \(SD53\)](#) or by email to accessiblity@sd53.bc.ca.

Section 10: Appendices

Appendix A: 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, 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 you 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. Refrain from engaging with the animal.
- If you are giving directions or verbal information, be precise and clear. For example, if you're approaching a door or an obstacle, say so. Do not 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 emails, 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 clean 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 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’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 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 body language.

Here are some suggestions to help you interact with people with learning or cognitive 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 everyone else. You will not 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, 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.

Deafblind 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 deafblind people have some sight or hearing, while others have neither.
- Avoid referring to the disability or using phrases like “handicapped”.
- A deafblind 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 person who is deafblind.
- 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 deafblind person without permission.

Appendix B: Suggest 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](#)
- [Accessibility | Canadian Hearing Services](#)
- [Auditory Outreach Provincial Resource Program](#)
- [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 \(BC Children's Hospital\)](#)
- [Gifted Children's Association of BC](#)