DDSB

Ignite Learning

Accessibility Plan

Annual Status Report
2023

Prepared by: The Accessibility Working Group, Durham District School Board

PROFILE

The Durham District School Board (DDSB) is responsible for public education in the rural settings of Uxbridge, Brock and Scugog Townships and the urban settings of Ajax, Whitby, Pickering and Oshawa. The Board employs more than 10,000 teaching and educational services staff. With over 130 elementary and secondary schools and learning centres, the Board serves more than 70,000 regular day students and thousands more who take advantage of a wide variety of continuing education and adult credit courses. More information about the DDSB can be found on the Board's website at **ddsb.ca**.

OBJECTIVES

The DDSB has developed the Multi-Year Accessibility Plan in accordance with the Integrated Accessibility Standard, Ontario Regulation 191/11 under the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act, 2005 (AODA). The plan outlines the intentions of the Board to meet its obligations under the AODA and aligns with the Ontario Human Rights Code ("The Code"). This annual status report is provided to share our progress on the implementation of the plan.

PURPOSE

The DDSB is committed to providing services, employment and learning and working environments that centre Indigenous rights, human rights and equity and that are welcoming, respectful, safe, inclusive, equitable, accessible and free from all forms of discrimination. To support this commitment, the DDSB will:

- **Uphold the principles of and responsibilities under:**

  - The Code and the AODA

  - The DDSB's Indigenous Education Policy, Human Rights, Anti-Discrimination and Anti-Racism Policy, Safe and Respectful Workplace and Harassment Prevention Policy and related procedures

- **Work collaboratively with DDSB community members to:**

  - Raise awareness, share information, enhance learning and build capacity about accessibility, ableism and inclusion.

  - Identify, prevent and address accessibility barriers in schools/classrooms, teaching and learning, workplaces and operational, employment and corporate policies, procedures, processes and practices using the principles of inclusive design and, for students, Universal Design for Learning, culturally relevant and responsive pedagogy and differentiated instruction, assessment and evaluation.

  - Explore individualized options and solutions to respond to accessibility needs and to meet the duty to accommodate under the Code in ways that maximize dignity, respect, independence, participation and integration.

  - Engage, consult with and seek input from DDSB students, families, employees and community partners (including the Special Education Advisory Committee) about their experiences, and adjust practices as required to respond to feedback and continually improve accessibility.

GUIDING PRINCIPLES

The development and implementation of the DDSB's Accessibility Plan is grounded in intentional actions to address ableism and intersectional discrimination and to uphold, affirm and or support:

1. The distinct rights of Indigenous Peoples.

2. Students' right to education and employees' right to employment without discrimination under the Code and AODA, where everyone is treated with dignity and respect.

3. Equitable experiences, access, opportunities and outcomes for all DDSB community members.

4. Student, parent/guardian, employee and community input/voice and feedback to help inform decision making.

5. Transparent processes to address accessibility and accommodation issues and complaints.

6. Data collection (quantitative and qualitative, including student, parent/caregiver, and community input/voice), analysis and reporting to measure progress and to identify and address accessibility issues and trends.

7. Individual and shared organizational roles, responsibilities and accountability for accessibility.

This plan aligns with the DDSB Ignite Learning Strategic Plan.

Information and Communications

The Information and Communications Standards of the AODA list rules for organizations to create, provide, and receive information and communications that people with disabilities can access. The standards give all people an equal chance to learn and be active in their communities.

GOAL 1

All Public Facing Documents and Websites Meet AODA/WCAG Compliance

- Accessible documents training has been developed, and training facilitated in collaboration with Abilities Centre for staff in Inclusive Student Services, Innovative Education, Early Years and Communications.

- The training includes information on accessible and inclusive formats when sharing communication such as presentations, documents, social media content, and emails. Recorded versions of the training are available and quick demonstration videos will soon be available as well. 385 participants (School Administrators, Head Secretaries and Education Centre Staff) completed Introduction to Digital Accessibility Training. 95 Education Centre Staff participated in accessibility training for Microsoft software and PDFs.

- The Accessibility page on the DDSB website has been updated to provide accessible information on the AODA standards, Accessibility Policies and Procedures, as well as how to request alternative formats and accommodations for public events. The Accessibility page and Human Rights Policy page are linked for easy access.

- Our websites are being monitored for compliance with AODA/WCAG compliance using an external software tool.

- The Technology Approval Process application is being redesigned to ensure all new software or hardware is AODA compliant, including project software.

GOAL 2

All Staff Use Accessible and Inclusive Communication and Information Format

- An accessibility toolkit for leaders is being developed, focusing on planning and hosting accessible meetings and inclusive events including checklists and information on external resources available.

- Content on the DDSB website and school sites can be translated into multiple languages using the select language tab available on all sites.

Employment

The Employment Standard requires that employers must make their workplace and employment practices accessible to potential or current employees with disabilities.

GOAL 3

Increase Diversity of Workforce Through a Universal Design Approach to Recruitment and Retainment

- In partnership with Equitek Employment Equity Solutions, a national diversity outreach strategy, we proactively network with employment specialists through the distribution of our job opportunities to Job Counsellors across Canada.

- Our interview processes include sharing interview information in advance and the proactive offering and providing necessary accommodation. Accommodations may include the use of online tools to share questions for virtual interviews, closed captioning, ASL interpreters where requested, and accessible interview locations.

- Employees Emergency Plans are developed, maintained and communicated to ensure that employees who have mobility or communication needs are accommodated and supported during emergencies.

- The number of applicants who self-identified as having a disability, and who were shortlisted, interviewed and hired, increased in 2022/23 compared to 2021/22, with those hired increasing by 47%. This information is obtained through a voluntary self-identification survey on our hiring website, Apply to Education.

GOAL 4

Develop Plans and Strategies to Increase Diversity and Disability Representation at Leadership Levels, Through Recruitment and Succession

- Leadership candidates are provided with voluntary self-identification questions related to Human Rights Code protected grounds, including disability, as part of the application process. Accommodations are offered and available at all stages of the hiring process.

Transportation

The Transportation Standard of the AODA requires transportation service providers to make the features and equipment on routes and vehicles accessible to passengers with disabilities.

GOAL 5

Transportation Accessibility is Continuously Improved to Meet Needs of Our Stakeholder

- Traffic study groups are well-established and involve collaboration with Planning, Facilities, and Durham Student Transportation Services to identify where improvements are required to ensure safety and accessibility.

- A review of the DSTS Transportation Policy is being initiated including a review on accessibility. This process will include the DSTS Governance Committee.

- Individual transportation plans are fully integrated with the DSTS routing software, ensuring that individual transportation plans are included in any routing decisions. This work is done in collaboration with Inclusive Student Services.

Design of Public Spaces

The Design of Public Spaces Standard describes ways to make communal spaces more accessible.

GOAL 6

Facility Accessibility is Continuously Improved On, Along with Accessible Technologies to Meet the Needs of Stakeholders

- Facilities Services is developing a digital form to request accessibility reviews and prioritize work orders that are related to accessibility.

- Facilities Services and Inclusive Student Services collaborate at school sites to review individual and/or student group accessibility requests.

- New school designs include purpose-built special education classrooms located on the ground floor with a kitchen and washroom for accessibility to support programming and life skills.

- Larger, accessible lockers are integrated into new school designs to further support independence and organization for students.

- Second-floor music rooms are being designed with built-in sound buffers mitigating sound transference into surrounding locations, reducing sensory impacts for students throughout the learning spaces.

- Several open touch-down spaces have been introduced in new school designs, located throughout second floors, providing flexible use of space to support universal design for learning as well as collaboration, ranging from student group work to quiet individual study.

Customer Service

The Customer Service Standard mandates that service providers must find ways to break down barriers that prevent customers with disabilities from accessing the services they need.

GOAL 7

Provide Multiple Opportunities for Internal and External Stakeholders to Share Feedback Via a Range of Methods

- Contact information for requesting alternative formats and providing feedback has been made available on the DDSB Accessibility page of the website.

- A survey was conducted through the Special Education Advisory Committee (SEAC) to inform our approach to consultation, communication, and engagement with community members with disabilities. This will help inform action plans to improve avenues for communication and feedback.

GOAL 8

All Employees Complete Mandatory Accessibility Training

- A new employee onboarding system has been implemented and assists in monitoring the completion of the mandatory accessibility training.

- We are reviewing alternative options for best practices in AODA training including research into what other boards are using, as well as other community organizations. The Abilities Centre is assisting us in researching and identifying best practices and education sector appropriate training materials.

GOAL 9

Accessibility Requirements Are Included in Service, Equipment, and Technology Procurement Processes. (Assistive Device Funding and Administrative Processes Are Streamlined, Removing Barriers to Students Accessing Them in a Timely Manner)

- The Purchasing department has included wheelchair accessible desks as a standard item in our Furniture Catalogue to expedite the ordering of required accessible equipment and resources.

- Daily orders are placed in response to purchase orders requested through Inclusive Student Services to ensure timely ordering and delivery of necessary equipment and resources.

- Accessibility related criteria is included in all Request for Proposal (RFP) postings, ensuring that all service providers comply with accessibility requirements.

Universal Design for Learning (UDL)

Universal Design for Learning (UDL) means finding ways to teach that benefit the widest variety of learners. UDL means designing learning goals, materials, and activities in ways that make them accessible to learners with a variety of abilities.

GOAL 10

The DDSB is Committed to Learning and Working Environments That Centre Human Rights and Equity and Are Safe, Welcoming, Respectful, Equitable, Inclusive, Accessible and Free from Discrimination, Oppression, Harassment, and Harm

- UDL principles are embedded within staff training as a model for staff to lead the implementation at their schools and within their classrooms.

- We focus on and are committed to humanizing the learning environment by centring students' strengths and interests in program pathway planning for student achievement and success.

- All leaders participated in professional learning on UDL principles and received resources for their schools and departments for building action plans to support inclusive design, and accessibility.

- UDL is applied to staff training and professional development by offering various options to engage, enabling captioning, and use of voice amplification systems to ensure accessibility and to model UDL principals consistently

- A system wide professional development session on UDL is planned for August 2024 when staff come back together for the new school year.