Accessibility Plan

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Section 1: Introduction

About our Organization

Welcome to the Nicola Similkameen School District where we work and learn within the traditional, ancestral and unceded territories of the *Nłeʔkepmux and Syilx peoples.*

Caring and passionate district and school personnel have developed strong relationships and partnerships with parents and the community, resulting in innovative, supportive educational programs. Our unique multicultural community fosters acceptance, cooperation and inclusivity.

Our Accessibility Story

Facing barriers to access is a reality for 1 in 5 Canadians and 24.7% of BC residents identify as having one or more disabilities. The Accessibility Plan challenges all members of the Nicola Similkameen School District community to step into the work that is ahead. Implementing a plan for accessibility requires strong commitment and the willingness to systematically assess and address the impacts of all initiatives (policies, programs, services or decisions) on people with disabilities;

The mandate is to identify barriers and actively engage everyone in our schools and communities in removing those barriers. Our actions must be guided by our responsibility to firstly, change ourselves, our systems and our structures to be inclusive and just, and secondly by the legislative requirements.

Message from our Leadership

The leadership of Nicola Similkameen School District is committed to excellence in education and recognizes the value and inherent worth of every member of our school community. Many of our students, parents, and community members face challenges that are both seen and unseen as they attempt to access a broad range of services. We are fully committed to identifying, removing, and preventing all barriers to full and equitable participation for all students, employees, and community members. This will be achieved through the ongoing development of genuinely accessible learning, working, and community spaces that foster dignified accessibility in every aspect of our Schools and buildings. Join us on this journey as we embrace and continue to build an environment of inclusion and empowerment.

Message from our Accessibility Committee

The Accessibility Committee at Nicola Similkameen School District wholeheartedly welcomes the Accessible BC legislation, recognizing the immense opportunity it brings to identify and eliminate barriers to access within our institution. We firmly believe in the power of collective learning, and thus, each member of our committee has actively contributed to the creation of a comprehensive accessibility plan. Through collaborative discussions, sharing expertise, listening to lived experiences, and embracing diverse perspectives, we have developed an inclusive approach that aims to enhance accessibility throughout our schools. We aim to address both visible and invisible barriers that hinder the full participation and engagement of individuals with disabilities and ensure equal opportunities are dedicated to creating an inclusive learning environment where everyone can thrive academically, professionally, and personally.

Territorial Acknowledgement

We acknowledge that we work and learn within the traditional, ancestral and unceded territories of the *Nłeʔkepmux and Syilx peoples,* stewards of this land since time immemorial. We acknowledge members of Indigenous groups whose ancestors originated on traditional Turtle Island (lands now known as Canada) outside of *Nłeʔkepmux and Syilx* territory and who currently reside on these lands. We also acknowledge the traditional teachings of Elders and the wisdom and sharing of Indigenous Culture.

Definitions

For the purposes of this Plan the following definitions will be used:

Ableism – A belief system, analogous to racism, sexism or ageism that sees persons with accessibility needs as being less worthy of respect and consideration, less able to contribute and participate, or of less inherent value than others. Ableism may be conscious or unconscious and may be embedded in institutions, systems or the broader culture of a society.

Accessibility – The degree of ease that something (for example, device, service, physical environment, and information) can be accessed, used, and enjoyed by persons with specific needs due to physical or mental requirements. The term implies conscious planning, design and/or effort to make sure something is barrier-free.

Adaptability - often refers to design, which will accommodate changes, including reduced ability, without the need to substantially modify the existing structure. This means that the space is readily adjustable and easily retrofitted. In terms of service, adaptability means that the service provided can be adjusted to meet the needs of someone requiring some additional support or alternate format.

Barrier – Anything that hinders the full and equal participation of a person with an impairment.

Collaboration - Persons with disabilities must be involved in the development and design of [laws], policies, programs, services and structures;

Disability – Disability is a complex phenomenon, reflecting an interaction between features of a person's body and mind and features of the society in which they live. A disability can occur at any time in a person's life; some people are born with a disability, while others develop a disability later in life. It can be permanent, temporary or episodic. Disability can steadily worsen, remain the same, or improve. It can be very mild to very severe. It can be the cause, as well as the result, of disease, illness, injury, or substance abuse. Federal Disability Reference Guide https://www.canada.ca/en/employment-social-development/programs/disability/arc/reference-guide.html

Diversity - acknowledges that each person is unique, and their individual differences are respected.

Duty to Accommodate - The duty to accommodate refers to steps SD58 must take to treat all people equally in regard to their accessibility needs. It requires the school district to take all reasonable steps, to the point of undue hardship, to ensure that its spaces and services are accessible to all.

Inclusion - is an organizational effort and practice ensuring different groups and/or individuals having different backgrounds are culturally and socially accepted and welcomed.

Inclusive Design – Concepts which underlie and support a mindset and practice of "design that considers the full range of human diversity with respect to ability, language, culture, gender, age and other forms of human difference."

Self-determination - All people must have meaningful options and be free to make their own choices, with support if they desire, regardless of their disabilities. (Accessible Canada Act (justice.gc.ca)

Undue Hardship – A point in providing an accessible environment where the requirements to provide that environment are too difficult or expensive to reasonably meet.

Universal design - Universal design is 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.

Seven principles of universal design are:

> *Principle one*: Equitable use - The design is useful and marketable to people with diverse abilities.

> *Principle two*: Flexibility in use - The design accommodates a wide range of individual preferences and abilities.

Principle three: Simple and intuitive use of the design - is easy to understand, regardless of the user's experience, knowledge, language skills, or current concentration level.

Principle four: Perceptible information - The design communicates necessary information effectively to the user, regardless of ambient conditions or the user's sensory abilities.

Principle five: Tolerance for error - The design minimizes hazards and the adverse consequences of accidental or unintended actions.

Principle six: Low physical effort - The design can be used efficiently and comfortably and with a minimum of fatigue.

Principle seven: Size and space for approach and use Appropriate size and space - is provided for approach, reach, manipulation, and use regardless of user's body size, posture, or mobility.

Section 2: Framework Guiding our Work

Accessible BC Act – Principles

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

Other Legislation

The Accessible Canada Act – This Act is to make Canada barrier-free by January 1, 2040. This involves identifying, removing and preventing barriers within the federal jurisdiction.

The Act is to be implemented in recognition of, and in accordance with, the following principles:

- everyone must be treated with dignity
- everyone must have the same opportunity to make for themselves the life they are able and wish to have
- everyone must be able to participate fully and equally in society
- everyone must have meaningful options and be free to make their own choices, with support if they desire
- laws, policies, programs, services, and structures must take into account the ways that different kinds of barriers and discrimination intersect
- persons with disabilities must be involved in the development and design of laws, policies, programs, services, and structures, and
- accessibility standards and regulations must be made with the goal of achieving the highest level of accessibility

To find out more about the Act please visit: https://www.canada.ca/en/employment-social-development/programs/accessible-canada/act-summary.html

Strategic Plan – Alignment

The Strategic Plan aligns with our Accessibility Plan to ensure that everyone will be heard, can contribute and has a safe adaptive environment in which to achieve their goals.

The District's Strategic plan is built on three goal areas of: meaning/purpose, appreciation/respect and connection. These include:

- Having a support system that is easy to access
- Personalized Learning
- Everyone is acknowledged and heard
- Collaboration

We encourage you to review the plan
to explore our path towards the District's vision of Success for ALL Learners ~ Today and Tomorrow.

https://www.sd58.bc.ca/wp-content/uploads/2021/06/Strategic-Plan-2021-scaled-1.jpg

Our Approach

The Advisory Committee is 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 – Accessibility Inventory Through the development of surveys, online feedback forms, working groups, etc., each district will gather information to identify attitudinal, physical, communication, systemic, technology, and sensory barriers to develop strategies, action plans, and timelines to prevent and remove barriers that people with disabilities face when interacting in and with our organizations.

Priority #2 - Policies and Practices Scan Through the development of surveys, focus groups, online feedback forms, working groups, etc., each district will review existing policies and practices to:

• understand to what extent current policies and practices align with the principles of accessibility,

• identify gaps in staff training or knowledge on accessibility issues,

• summarize and celebrate existing accessibility practices, and

• inform actions and timelines for improvement.

Priority #3 - Accessibility and Inclusion Education In the fall of 2023, school districts will publicize their commitment to removing barriers to accessibility through the creation of the Northern BC School District Advisory Committee and the Northern BC School District Accessibility Plan and invite students, staff, and the public to provide feedback using the online feedback tools provided.

Based on ongoing feedback provided, districts will develop strategies to:

• increase visibility of those with disabilities

• develop targeted education and training programs

• increase meaningful inclusion in schools

Section 3: About our Committee

The Nicola Similkameen School District Accessibility Committee has seven members all of whom represent persons with varying physical, sensory and neurodivergent abilities. Three of the seven members are Indigenous, two members identify as having a disability, two members support family members with disabilities and three members work with key contacts within the community, including NVIT.

Section 4: Feedback Mechanism

The school district has developed an online feedback form that includes a series of questions about accessibility including the accessibility experiences that members of the school communities and the public can complete.

The feedback we receive will be shared with our Accessibility Advisory Committee. We will also share feedback to relevant department or school leaders and stakeholders.

Section 5: Barriers Identified

Information, Communication or Technical Barriers

 Websites do not meet accessibility guidelines for web content (including closed captions)

 Signage:

▪ Signs to show all are welcome

▪ Braille on all signs

▪ Signs to indicate accessible entrances

 Technology support for families is needed:

▪ Help for parents ▪ Online permission forms

▪ Support for ELL families with online communication

▪ Financial support for families with technology needs

⬜ Technology in schools:

▪ Better understanding and training for staff and students on speech to text and other accessibility tech features to replace the demands of physical writing

▪ Insufficient technology available

▪ Increased Wi-Fi access required throughout buildings so communication can occur in all the ordinary spaces

▪ Students feel stigmatized if they're the sole tech user in their class

▪ Universal supports include the use of technology Physical, Architecture or Environmental Barriers

⬜ Classrooms:

▪ Noise or light issues for those with sensitivities

▪ No sound fields to support hearing differences or attention issues

▪ Rooms are too crowded when considerations aren't made for mobility aids and EAs

⬜ Schools:

▪ Sounds systems in large spaces aren't effective at amplifying for clear sound

▪ Need for all genders washrooms, single stall washrooms, change rooms

▪ Toilets are too low, need accessible stalls

▪ Guardrails need two-toned contrast paint

▪ Extending adapted PE curriculum and equipment

▪ Many classrooms not accessible from the outside door for mobility aids

▪ Ramp landings are difficult to maneuver, not large enough

▪ Plan for wheelchairs in assemblies, so not blocking views or having to be at the back

▪ More quiet spaces needed for calming and sensory regulation

▪ Accessible desks in classrooms (adjustable)

▪ Use of low lighting (for calming) when seeing and reading is required

▪ Auditory supports beyond the classroom, like gym and outside

⬜ Outdoors:

▪ Fields are not accessible for those with mobility considerations

▪ Consistent and appropriate handicap parking stalls that are accessible from all sides

▪ More sidewalk dips needed for mobility aids, curbs need more yellow paint

▪ Service vehicles can NOT park in front of sidewalk dips

▪ Accessible paths from bus stops to school doors

▪ Exterior doors often have steps to individual classrooms

▪ Poorly maintained concrete and grounds with holes are difficult or not possible for all to traverse or navigate safely Attitudinal Barriers

 Training:

▪ Better understanding for ALL in district on visible/invisible disabilities

▪ Better understanding of adapting based on student needs, differentiation to meet all student needs for those with disabilities

 ▪ Better understanding of replacement curriculum

▪ More education for students and families on disabilities, barriers, and limitations, i.e., so ambulatory wheelchair users aren't accused of being a fraud

▪ Strength-based practice is not being used at all times

▪ Clarification on modifications vs. adaptations

 ▪ Clarification on Evergreen vs. Dogwood degree

▪ More training for Augmented and Alternative Communication (AAC) use

School Policy and Practice Barriers

 More consistent EA support, how to avoid chronic turnover Student need for supports exceeds allocated resources

 Support for teachers regarding assessment and reporting for students with disabilities Key Barriers Identified as Priorities for our Initial Focus: The barriers identified for the initial priorities for our accessibility plan were determined by the accessibility committee. Understanding of actions being low cost or high cost, as well as short term or long term was considered in the identification of the priorities. The committee members believe that all the identified barriers are important, but that prioritization is necessary to create a plan of action. This plan is intended to provide advisement on possible actions for addressing these barriers.

Section 6: Our 3 Year Plan (2023 – 2026)

The 2023-2026 Three-Year Plan consists of four key priority areas of focus. For each area, there are details about the actions that will be undertaken and the timeline over the next three years. While there are distinct priority areas to the plan, no one area stands alone or above another. There is connectedness and synergy between all areas, with the work in any one area supporting the work in the other areas. Key Priorities: (Please note that the position in bold under Key Departments is the lead person on the project).

⊕ **Priority #1: Physical**

Objectives	Actions	Key Departments	Outcomes
MPSD sports fields are accessible for all people with mobility considerations	Conduct an environmental scan to determine the needs at each school site	⊕ **Principals and Vice Principals (PVP)** ⊕ Facilities	Site specific field access information collected and stored centrally
	Assess Site specific field access information to create project plan	⊕ **Director of Instruction, Student Services** ⊕ Facilities ⊕ Finance	A prioritized plan created with timeline
MPSD playground spaces are accessible for all children and youth at every elementary and middle school	Conduct a detailed inclusive playground scan to determine the needs at each school site	⊕ **Director of Instruction, Student Services** ⊕ Students ⊕ PVP ⊕ Facilities ⊕ Finance	Site specific accessible playground information collected and stored centrally
	Research options for accessible designs and playground equipment	⊕ **Inclusive Mentor Teachers / Physiotherapist** ⊕ PVP ⊕ Director of Instruction, Student Services ⊕ Parents	At least one play structure at each site
MPSD will continue with contrast painting throughout all district property for curbs, railings, columns, and edges	Continue to identify and address contrast painting needs at each school site	⊕ **Facilities** ⊕ PVP	All curbs, railings, columns, and edges will have contrast painting

⊕ **Priority #2: School Policy and Practices**

Objectives	Actions	Key Departments	Outcomes
MPSD will optimize supports for all students with diverse needs and disabilities	Increase in-service in Universal Design for learning	⊕ **Student Services** ⊕ School Staff	All teachers will have taken at least one session on UDL
	Work collaboratively with Curriculum, Indigenous Education, and Student Services to provide resources to schools to support student learning	⊕ **Assistant Superintendent** ⊕ Mentor Teachers ⊕ Siwal Si'wes ⊕ Student Services	All schools will have an inventory of inclusive resources that contain representation from the disability community
	Maximize meaningful in class supports with resource staff (EA, ILW, LST, YCW, etc.) when feasible	⊕ **School Resource Staff** ⊕ PVP	Evidence of classroom teachers and resource staff and therapists
	Offer/Recruit practicum placements for EAs and teachers for increased professional reciprocity and growth	⊕ **Human Resources** ⊕ PVP	Practicum students working and learning alongside our MPSD employees
MPSD will provide reporting order in-service for staff and parents to promote universal, specific, and targeted assessment supports for students	Create assessment documents for teachers and families	⊕ **Assessment Leads** ⊕ Mentor Teachers ⊕ PVP ⊕ Teachers ⊕ Curriculum ⊕ Student Services	Assessment Information Materials created for staff and families
	Provide in-service and training on reporting considering assessment support needs	⊕ **Assessment Leads** ⊕ Mentor Teachers ⊕ PVP ⊕ Teachers ⊕ School Resource Staff ⊕ Student Services	Assessment workshops offered for staff
MPSD will seek to hire a diverse workforce	Work with assistive community-based organizations to connect more people from the disability community to employment opportunities within MPSD	⊕ **Human Resources** ⊕ Student Services ⊕ Equity Leads	A more diverse work force in MPSD
	Create an open and inclusive environment for staff with disabilities	⊕ **Human Resources** ⊕ Student Services ⊕ Equity Leads	A collaborative network for staff with disabilities to connect

✛ **Priority #3: Attitudinal**

Objectives	Actions	Key Departments	Outcomes
MPSD will increase understanding for ALL in the district on visible/invisible disabilities	Provide Inservice training to all staff	✛ **Student Services** ✛ PVP ✛ School Resource Staff	All staff will have taken at least one session on the stereotyping, stigma, and discrimination as it relates to accessibility
	Review school act and legal requirements regarding responsibilities regarding IEPs and their implementation	✛ **Director of Instruction, Student Services** ✛ PVP	Included in orientations and opening week activities is materials pertaining to responsibility for students with diverse needs
	Panels of presenters representing the disability community at professional development	✛ **Director of Instruction, Student Services** ✛ PVP ✛ Student Services	A panel presentation occurring at a major MPSD sanctioned professional development day
	Survey school librarians on inclusive resources and materials	✛ **District Mentor Teacher** ✛ **Teacher Librarian** ✛ Student Services ✛ Curriculum	A summary of available resources by site

	With representation, seek out inclusive resources for schools and libraries	✦ **Curriculum** ✦ Student Services ✦ District Mentor Teacher Librarian	A collection of inclusive resources is developed and recommended for each site
MPSD will improve understanding of differentiated instruction for adapting curriculum to meet the learning needs of all students	Have school staff take universal supports and identify 5 things they do well, but also 5 things they could work on	✦ **PVP** ✦ Student Services	Each school completes this activity every three years as a method of identifying training and capacity
	Use interviews with students from Competency Based IEPs to learn more about student learning or support needs	✦ **School Resource Staff** ✦ Classroom Teachers	Students report a balance of shared responsibility when advocating or accessing their support needs
MPSD will actively create an environment where 2SLGBTQ+ people feel safe, valued, and respected at all times	Include a module during onboarding to recognize our commitment to equity, diversity, and inclusion	✦ **SOGI Leads** ✦ Human Resources ✦ PVP ✦ Senior Management	2SLGBTQ+ people will report
	Provide Inservice training for all staff	✦ **SOGI Leads** ✦ Human Resources ✦ PVP ✦ Senior Management	All staff will have taken at least one session on the stereotyping, stigma, and discrimination as it relates to 2SLGBTQ+
	Create positions for developing actions and resources related to SOGI spaces and education	✦ **SOGI Leads** ✦ Human Resources ✦ PVP ✦ Senior Management	A paid position or position with release time created for SOGI
	Visible signage welcoming 2SLGBTQ+ people	✦ **SOGI Leads** ✦ Human Resources ✦ PVP ✦ Senior Management	Welcoming Signage in all school foyers

✧ **Priority #4: Technical**

Objectives	Actions	Key Departments	Outcomes
MPSD will increase the use of technology in classrooms specifically to support students benefiting from a reader or scribe	Provide District-wide in-service required on accessibility through technology	✧ **Technology** ✧ Finance ✧ Student Services	Annual training for accessibility offered
	Increase the number of devices available for student use	✧ **Technology** ✧ Finance ✧ PVP ✧ Parent Advisory Council (PAC)	School and families report sufficient device allocation has been achieved at each site
MPSD will increase availability of technology for universal use in classrooms	Conduct a detailed technology survey to determine the needs at each school site	✧ **PVP** ✧ Technology ✧ School Resource Staff	A comprehensive list is created at each site outlining technology support needs
	Ensure student accessibility needs are addressed in district technology plan	✧ **Technology** ✧ Mentor Teachers ✧ Superintendent	Tech plan includes student accessibility goals
MPSD will upgrade District and School Websites for improved accessibility	Consider accessibility when choosing platforms when upgrading communication channels or websites	✧ **Senior Management Team** ✧ Technology	Accessibility is included in the decision-making process for any new process

Section 7: Monitoring and Evaluation

a. Monitoring
A monitoring report will be produced on an [annual] basis and be delivered at the [first accessibility committee meeting of the fiscal year].

b. Evaluating
The organization will conduct a review and evaluation of the accessibility plan every three years from adoption [2025]. This plan will be made public on our website within [timeline].

Section 8: Conclusion

Section 9: How to give us feedback

In addition to the public availably of the plan, the Nicola Similkameen School District will continue to post a status report on the progress of the Three-Year Accessibility Plan on the district's website. We will accommodate requests for accessible formats of the Plan. Questions, comments, or feedback regarding the Accessibility Plan may be directed to:

Director of Instruction – Inclusive Education, Misty Sheldon msheldon@365.sd58.bc.c

Director of Human Resources – Barb McLean bmclean@365.sd58.bc.ca

Superintendent – Courtney Lawrance clawrance@365.sd58.bc.ca