

SOOKE DISTRICT ACCESSIBILITY PLAN

2023-2026

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Section A: Beliefs & Values

Introduction

About our School District Community

Adjacent to Victoria on southern Vancouver Island, the Sooke School District is the fastest growing school district on Vancouver Island and one of the fastest growing districts in BC. The district operates in five municipalities: Langford, Colwood, Metchosin, Sooke, and the Highlands and acknowledges the traditional territories of the Coast Salish: T'Sou-ke Nation and Scia'new Nation and Nuu-chah-nulth: Pacheedaht Nation. We also recognize some of our schools reside on the traditional territory of Esquimalt Nation and Songhees Nation. The district employs over 2,000 educators and support staff and serves over 13,000 students. Our leadership team includes a Superintendent, Deputy Superintendent, 2 Associate Superintendents, and over 70 Principals and Vice-Principals. There are 28 schools, of which 19 are elementary (kindergarten to Grade 5), 5 are middle (Grades 6-8), 3 are Secondary (Grades 9-12) and 1 is Alternate.

Our leadership team and staff share in the vision of honouring student voice and choice through engaging, purposeful, and experiential learning in a safe and respectful community. Our Strategic Plan focuses on the priorities of Learning, Engagement, and Growth. This district work is grounded in the values of relationships, choice, respect, integrity, trust, safety, diversity, and equity. From career preparation to languages, to arts, to athletic academies, our students have a wealth of programs from which to choose. Complimenting the core curriculum classes, programs are designed to meet the unique needs of each of our students, providing them with an array of options. Sooke School District is proud of its student-centered programming including Indigenous Education, International, Careers and Pathways, Academies, Early Learning, and Inclusive Education.

Sooke School District elects a Board of seven Trustees who oversee the governance of the district, establishing policy and setting the direction of the school district through its Strategic Plan. Public School Board meetings occur on the fourth Tuesday of each month.

A Message from the Superintendent

Sooke School District supports a safe, respectful, inclusive, and responsive learning community that recognizes the value of diversity. Through the development of the Accessibility Plan, we continue our commitment to providing learning and working environments that support students and staff while providing equitable access and opportunity for all. This three-year plan will serve as a guide for our district as we identify system needs, priorities, and action plans.

Our Accessibility Advisory Group is a diverse and multi-disciplinary team. We are grateful to this team who will meet regularly throughout the school year to affirm our commitment to accessibility by further refining our district priorities and developing recommendations that support the BC Accessible Act's principles of inclusion, adaptability, diversity, collaboration, self-determination, and universal design. Our Accessibility Plan will continue to evolve as the Accessibility Advisory Group draws on feedback from our school community to identify, remove, and prevent barriers that will improve accessibility for all individuals.

Sooke School District recognizes the importance of accessibility, not only for those with disabilities, but also for the benefit of the entire community. Through the actions in this Accessibility Plan, we commit to continuous improvements in developing an environment that supports all individuals in our School District 62 learning community.

Territorial Acknowledgement

Sooke School District acknowledges the traditional territories of the Coast Salish: T'Sou-ke Nation and Scia'new Nation and Nuuchahnulth: Pacheedaht Nation. We also recognize some of our schools reside on the traditional territory of Esquimalt Nation and Songhees Nation. We recognize the territory and nation. We thank them for sharing this beautiful land.

Hych'ka – Coast Salish

Kleco Kleco – Nuuchahnulth



Definitions

Accessibility: The state of having programs, services and environments that allow all individuals to participate fully in society without encountering barriers.

Accessibility Advisory Group: 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 advisory group that identifies barriers and describes actions for their removal.

Barrier: Anything that prevents a person with a disability from fully participating in all aspects of society. This includes physical/environmental, attitudinal, information, communication, policy or practice, and technological barriers.

Types of barriers:

Physical/Environmental Barrier: A barrier resulting from architectural design, which can include certain smells or sounds, internal lighting, configuration of class and meeting rooms, and the size or width of halls and doorways.

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.

Communication Barrier: A barrier that arises when communicating or delivering information in person, by telephone, or online; when interacting with teachers, peers, receptionists, or other staff; and when receiving training.

Information Barrier: A barrier that arises when using inaccessible signage, fonts, brochures, forms, manuals, websites, fax transmissions, equipment labels, and computer screens.

Policy or Practice Barrier: Rules, regulations and protocols that prevent a person from performing the essential requirements of their job or from participating in society. Policy, practice, and procedures that prevent a student from accessing the curriculum and fully participating in the school community.

Technological Barrier: Barriers that result from the use of inaccessible devices, platforms, software, and programs, including the lack of assistive technologies.

Disability: The state of being unable to participate fully and equally in society because 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 B: Setting the Stage

Framework Guiding Our Work

The Sooke School District Accessibility Plan builds on global, national, provincial, and school district specific actions to promote and support accessibility.

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. 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 it as follows:

“The Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities is an international human rights 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.”

Canadian Context and Legislation

In 1985, disability was included in the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms. 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 consider 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. People 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

BC Context and Legislation

The Accessible British Columbia Regulation, under the Accessible British Columbia Act, came into force on September 1, 2022. These regulations identify schools as prescribed organizations, and school districts and independent schools are required to have an Accessibility Advisory Group, an Accessibility Plan, and a tool to receive feedback 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.

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.

Our Commitment to Accessibility

At Sooke School District, we are committed to providing an environment that is accessible and practical for all members of our diverse community. We recognize the importance of conscious planning, design, and effort in ensuring that barriers are identified and removed.

Our school district is committed to working collaboratively with the community 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.
- Ensure that 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.
- Continually improve accessibility for people with disabilities in our school community.

Our Approach

Sooke School District believes that all members of our district have the right to be treated with dignity, be given an opportunity to participate, and be 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 March 2023, we began the process of establishing an accessibility advisory group and identifying barriers to accessibility in our school district community. This process involved:

- Collaborating with an external agency to conduct a Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion audit for the school district.
- Conducting surveys and interviews to understand the issues, challenges, and priorities of stakeholders within our school district community.
- Holding stakeholder focus group sessions to identify barriers and more fully understand their lived experiences within the district community.
- Developing a district-wide feedback tool.
- Establishing foundational Accessibility Advisory Group membership.

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 C: Process

About Our Advisory Group

Purpose of the Accessibility Advisory Group

Under the Accessible B.C. Act, districts must establish an Accessibility Advisory Group to assist with identifying and preventing barriers to individuals in or interacting with the organization. The purpose of the Accessibility Advisory Group 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 Advisory Group also advises the District Accessibility Working Group on strategies to reduce social, physical, sensory, and other barriers that prevent people from fully participating in all aspects of school community life.

Recruitment of the Accessibility Advisory Group Members

Under the Accessible B.C. Act, the selection of accessibility advisory 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.

In June 2023, a foundational advisory group was selected to reflect a diverse representation as outlined in the Accessible B.C. Act. As needed, this team will then determine further recruitment needs and appropriate methodologies to extend group membership.

Accessibility Advisory Group Membership

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

- Janine Brooks, District Principal of Inclusive Education
- Alyssa Richard, District Inclusion Coach/Teacher of Students with Visual Impairments
- Stacey Veitch, District EA Mentor
- Christine Merner, Manager of Occupational Health and Safety
- Rae Koot, Indigenous EA, and community member
- Amy Lindsay, Parent/guardian of Sooke School District student(s)
- Monica Braniff, Associate Superintendent

Consultation Conducted

Barrier Identification Methodologies

We are in the initial consultation process where we are establishing mechanisms to identify where barriers exist, who is responsible for each methodology, and a timeline for each.

The Accessibility Advisory Group will use the following methods to identify barriers:

- Review of the district surveys and focus group data from the spring 2023 Diversity Equity Inclusion (DEI) audit will be conducted in the fall of 2023. Supplemental accessibility and inclusion surveys may be developed, if needed, after the review of this DEI data.
- Review of current policies and practices that promote accessibility and inclusion will be conducted by key staff by April 2024.
- An assessment for our schools and facilities' physical accessibility will be developed in the fall of 2023 for implementation in the spring of 2024.
- An online feedback tool, email and phone number will be posted to the district website and broadly shared in the fall of 2023.
- The Accessibility Advisory Group will be reviewing the input and feedback from the surveys, assessment, and feedback tool. The group will collaborate to suggest priority areas to target in the Accessibility Plan. These recommendations will be shared with the Accessibility Working Group who will give final approval of priority areas and action plans.

Feedback Mechanism

Feedback Mechanism Development

Sooke School District has developed an online feedback tool that includes a series of questions about accessibility experiences that students, staff, and members of the school district community can complete. The tool is posted to the district website, along with email, phone,

and mailing address information. Feedback can be anonymous, or people can add their name and contact information if they wish to be contacted.

The following are the contents of the online Accessibility Feedback Tool. People may also choose to submit their feedback through email, phone, or letter. The link to the district's Accessibility Feedback webpage will continue to be available to identify current or future accessibility issues: [Accessibility Feedback Tool](#)

Report an Accessibility Barrier

At the Sooke School District, we want to learn about specific barriers that people face when they are trying to:

- Access a school program, building or school information
- Receive a service or support

Your responses to the questions below will be reviewed by the Sooke District Accessibility Advisory Group for their consideration. This information can be submitted anonymously, or you can provide your contact details at the bottom of this form if you wish to be contacted.

1. Please provide the date the barrier was experienced.
2. Please select the location the barrier was experienced.
3. What were you or someone you know trying to access?
4. Accessibility Barrier Details (Be as specific as possible).
5. Do you have any recommendations for what would make it better?
6. Please provide your name and email or phone number if you would like to be contacted. (optional)

Thank you for providing your valuable feedback! You will be contacted shortly if you have provided your contact details.

Section D: Plan

Accessibility Accomplishments and Barriers

Sooke School District has several initiatives that identify, remove, and prevent barriers for people with disabilities. It is the responsibility of the Accessibility Advisory Group to conduct full scans of the data and develop recommendations for prioritizing initiatives and action plans. The following Key Themes are a synopsis of some of the accomplishments and barriers noted through conversations with members of the Accessibility Advisory Group.

Key Themes—Accessibility Accomplishments

Included below are initial discussion themes on accessibility accomplishments. These will be expanded upon when the surveys, physical and architectural audits, and feedback mechanism results are available.

Information and Communication

- Our district website includes accessibility features.
- New positions have been created within International/English Language Learners (ELL) department to support newcomers.
- The leadership team has been provided information on the Accessibility Act.
- Our district communication bulletin includes information on accessibility and inclusion.

Physical Environment

- Our district has an increased number of accessible buses for student transportation.
- Assessment of student and staff accommodation for physical barriers happens on a case-by-case basis.
- New school builds all incorporate accessibility design principles.

Attitudinal Accomplishments

- Our district has a variety of initiatives to improve student and staff mental health and well-being, and reduce the stigma associated with mental illness.

Technology

- Schools have improved student access to technology for learning support.

- Our district secures digital access to the district’s Competency Based Individual Education Plan recommendations/supports for all appropriate staff.
- There are online learning hubs in each secondary school.
- Hybrid meeting and workshop styles incorporate digital and in-person formats.

School Policy and Practice

- Our district provides enhanced early learning supports through Early Childhood Educators and the District Principal for Early Learning.
- Our district provides comprehensive transition processes for students identified by externally supported childcare agencies.
- Our district emphasizes universal design for learning as a standard approach to education.

Key Themes—Accessibility Barriers

Listed below are barriers that our initial discussion brought to light. These will be expanded upon with available survey, physical and architectural audit, and feedback mechanism results.

Information and Communication

- Internal communication through the district hub is not always intuitive and accessible.
- Website accessibility is not consistent or inclusive for all webpages and documents.
- Communication with parents/guardians and staff is not always consistently done at a language level or frequency to allow full engagement in their child’s learning.

Physical and Architecture Environment

- The district growth is resulting in space pressures within neighbourhood schools, limiting multipurpose areas for student programming and small group work.
- Older buildings have sensory and structural barriers that impact accessibility.
- Some sites have geographic barriers as they are in remote communities.

Attitudinal Barriers

- Some students report that they do not feel safe or a sense of belonging within their neighbourhood school.
- Some students express that they feel misunderstood by staff who express an assumption based on student presentation of behaviour.
- There is a need to increase awareness and create stigma-free cultures.

Technology

- There is not consistent training of accessibility features on district/school devices such as voice-to-text, text-to-voice, and web readers.

School Policy and Practice

- Some policies have not been reviewed with an accessibility lens.
- Emergency evacuation protocols are not consistently reviewed for students with individual plans.

Our Three-Year Plan

Overview

This Accessibility Plan outlines the measures that the Sooke School District will take to remove and prevent barriers and to promote inclusion for individuals with disabilities in our school district. 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.

Accessibility Priorities

As part of their work in the fall of 2023, the Accessibility Advisory Group will review and gather information from the DEI audit, physical accessibility scan, policies and practices, and feedback mechanism tool. The Advisory Group will then identify the top three priorities for improving accessibility in the school district community and advise the Accessibility Working Group on recommended initiatives and action plans. Accessibility priorities will be based on the themes of Information and Communication, Physical and Architecture Environment, Attitudinal Barriers, Technology, and School Policy and Practice.

Section E: Next Steps

Monitoring and Evaluation

Sooke District's Accessibility Advisory Group will meet a minimum of three times during the school year (September-June) to review feedback and to make recommendations to the Accessibility Working Group. Additional meetings may be scheduled as needed. The advisory group will evaluate the effectiveness of the plan's implementation and make suggestions for possible adjustments that will increase accessibility across the district. The full Accessibility Plan will be reviewed and updated every three years in consultation with persons with disabilities.

How To Give Us Feedback

In addition to the public availability of the plan, Sooke District will continue to post an annual status report on the progress of the Three-Year Accessibility Plan on the district website. Accessible formats of the plan will be made available upon request. Questions, comments, or feedback regarding the Accessibility Plan may be directed to:

Sooke District Accessibility Advisory Group
accessibility@sd62.bc.ca
250-474-9800

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 easily perform these tasks, 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.
- 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 must always pay attention. Refrain from engaging with the animal.
- If you're giving directions or verbal information, be precise and clear. For example, if you're approaching a door or obstacle, say so.
- 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. Don't shout.
- 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-lighted 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 been understood.
- Service animals are working and must always 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.
- 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 (e.g., automatic doors or accessible washrooms).

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 present body language.

Here are some suggestions to help you interact with people with intellectual disabilities:

- 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.
- Don't assume what a person can or cannot do.
- Use simple words and short sentences.
- Make sure the person understands what you've said.
- If you can't 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, and 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 present body language.

Here are some suggestions to help you interact with people with learning disabilities 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're dealing with a child, be patient, encouraging and supportive.
- 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 won't know that the person has a mental health disability unless you are informed of it. But if someone is experiencing difficulty in 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 appears to be in a crisis, ask them 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 causes difficulty in expressing oneself or understanding 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 doesn't mean they have another. For example, if a person has difficulty speaking; make no assumption they have an intellectual disability as well.
- If you don't understand, ask the person to repeat the information.
- 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 deaf-blind cannot see or hear to some extent. This results in greater difficulties in accessing information and managing daily activities. Most people who are deaf-blind 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 deaf-blind:

- Make no assumptions about what a person can or cannot do. Some deaf-blind people have some sight or hearing, while others have neither.
- 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 the person who is deaf-blind.
- Don't touch service animals – they are working and must always pay attention.
- Unless it's an emergency, refrain from touching a deaf-blind person without permission.

Appendix B: Suggested 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 \(SETBC\)](#)
- [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](#)
- [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](#)

Appendix C: Terms of Reference (Accessibility Advisory Group)

Vision

The Sooke School District is committed to supporting an inclusive education system that recognizes the value of diversity and provides equity of access, opportunity, and achievement for each learner. The Accessibility Advisory Group assists the district by ensuring that this mandate is at the heart of its work to improve the experiences of people with disabilities.

Purpose

The Advisory Group will function alongside the Accessibility Working Group to identify, remove, and prevent barriers that will improve accessibility for individuals interacting with the district. The Advisory Group shall review feedback received through the district's Feedback Mechanism and shall be consulted in the Working Group's updating of the District Accessibility Plan.

Membership

The Advisory Group will have a maximum of 12 members. Its composition is governed by the Act as follows:

Members must, to the extent possible, be selected in accordance with the following goals:

- At least half the members are:
 - Persons with disabilities, or
 - Persons who support, or are from organizations that support, persons with disabilities.
- Membership should reflect the diversity of British Columbia and include at least one member who is an Indigenous person.

The district will review membership annually to ensure broad representation from the school community, including the following:

- Parent/guardian of a Sooke School District student (with lived experience)
- Indigenous community representative
- Inclusive Education Services PVP
- District EA Mentor
- District Inclusion Coach
- HR/Health and Safety representative

The Advisory Group will operate under the principles of inclusion, adaptability, diversity, collaboration, self-determination, and universal design. Members are expected to act with integrity and honesty, be tolerant of others' opinions, and interact with others in a respectful and inclusive manner.

Members of the Accessibility Working Group will be designated by the Associate Superintendent.

Scope of Work

As outlined in Section 9 of the *Accessible British Columbia Act*, the Advisory Group shall:

- Assist the organization to identify barriers to individuals in or interacting with the organization, and
- Advise the organization on how to remove and prevent barriers to individuals in or interacting with the organization.

The Accessibility Advisory Group shall advise in the following manner:

- Provide guidance and recommendations on the District Accessibility Plan.
- Identify barriers to accessibility in areas such as attitudinal, physical, sensory, information/communication, systemic and technology.
- Make recommendations on how to remove and prevent barriers for individuals who have disabilities in the aforementioned areas.
- Advise on the District feedback mechanism to receive information from the Sooke School District and community about accessibility.
- Review the District Accessibility Plan every three years.

Meetings

The Accessibility Advisory Group shall meet a minimum of three times during each school year (September – June). Additional meetings may be scheduled as needed.

Reporting

The Advisory Group reports to and provides advice to the Accessibility Working Group. Minutes from each of the group's meetings shall be presented to the Accessibility Working Group through the Associate Superintendent who acts as chair.

The Terms of Reference will be reviewed annually by the Accessibility Advisory Group and advice will be provided to the Working Group.