



Central Okanagan  
Public Schools

Together We Learn

# ACCESSIBILITY PLAN

2023-2026

This document is available in alternate formats upon request.

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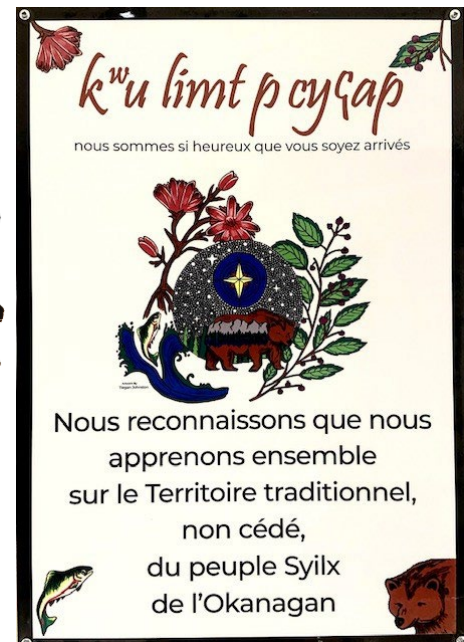
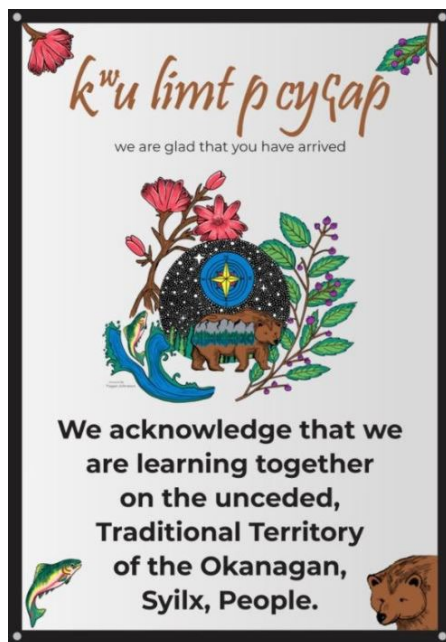
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This image shows some of the valleys, lakes, and mountains in the Okanagan region.



This image shows a poster which is displayed in the entrance of every school building and at the School Board office. The poster is a land acknowledgment which reads, "We are glad you have arrived," in nsyilxcən, the language of the Okanagan, Syilx, People. This welcome is followed by the words, "We acknowledge that we are learning together on the unceded, Traditional Territory of the Okanagan Syilx, People." This same message is presented in French on a second poster. The images show the Four Food Chiefs: Chief Black Bear, Chief Salmon, Chief Bitter Root, and Chief Saskatoon Berry.

## MESSAGE FROM THE BOARD CHAIR

We appreciate your time and interest in reviewing our Accessibility Plan 2023–2026. This plan outlines the actions we are taking to deepen our commitment to accessibility and inclusion. Guided by our District Vision, *Together We Learn*, we aim to reflect the values that define Central Okanagan Public Schools. By fostering ongoing progress in accessibility, equity, diversity, and inclusion, we create stronger, more caring communities and better outcomes for all learners.

The Board of Education is proud to support the work of our leaders, staff, and community as we fulfill our responsibilities under the Accessible British Columbia Act. We've seen how removing barriers for individuals with disabilities enhances the entire school system, and this plan represents the next step in advancing accessibility and inclusion across the district.

Achieving equitable access requires collaboration, including the insights of individuals with disabilities and the support of allies across the community. From creating accessible learning environments to improving communication in virtual spaces, our focus is on ensuring that accessibility is woven into every aspect of our schools.

We invite students, families, staff, and community members to share their questions and feedback as we implement the Accessibility Plan 2023–2026. Together, we can build a more inclusive future for everyone in the Central Okanagan.

Julia Fraser  
Board Chair

## MESSAGE FROM THE SUPERINTENDENT/CEO

In Central Okanagan Public Schools, we create safe, inclusive learning environments where each student can thrive and pursue their dreams. Our Accessibility Plan is a key component of ensuring those opportunities continue to exist for everyone.

This document renews our commitment to our responsibilities as both a public education system and public sector employer, as set out by the Accessible British Columbia Act. It aligns with our Strategic Plan, where our Purpose is "to educate students in a safe, inclusive, equitable, and inspirational learning environment where each learner develops the attributes and competencies to flourish in a global community."

From how we recruit staff to how we provide educational programming, our work to improve accessibility continues to benefit our schools, workplaces, and community. While past improvements prove the importance of creating accessible and welcoming spaces, we know our work is not finished. The Accessibility Plan 2023-2026 will guide our district as we continue this journey.

Led by our Accessibility Committee, the work outlined in the Plan will require collaboration with senior leadership, staff, students, and community partners to ensure we recognize and remove systemic barriers in our system.

Central Okanagan Public Schools remains dedicated to ensuring equitable access to our buildings, programs, and services for all students, families, employees, and community members. We are grateful to all who will join us as we continue this journey. We invite your input to the Accessibility Plan 2023-2026 because together, we learn.

Kevin Kaardal  
Superintendent of School/CEO

# COMMITMENT TO ACCESSIBILITY

## Commitment to Accessibility:

Central Okanagan Public Schools is committed to fulfilling its responsibilities under the Accessible British Columbia Act in a way that ensures equitable access to its buildings, programs and services for all of the students, families, employees, and members of the public who collectively make up the Central Okanagan Public Schools community. Central Okanagan Public Schools further commits to achieving its accessibility goals in a way that promotes and ensures respect for every person's human rights, dignity, and independence.

## Aim of the Accessibility Plan:

The District's Accessibility Plan is developed in accordance with the Accessible British Columbia Act, 2021 as it applies to prescribed organizations including school districts as of September 1, 2023. In alignment with the Act, the plan aims to support the identification, prevention, and removal of barriers that persons with disabilities face in their day-to-day lives. The plan also sets out the steps that we will take to achieve these goals.

## GLOSSARY

The District recognizes that language preferences are ever evolving and acknowledges that preferences to describe identity and disability should be made on an individual basis. For the purpose of this Accessibility Plan, the District has chosen to default to the language and terminology used in the legislation. Similarly, when speaking about the disability community in general, the District has chosen to follow the BC Government and other government bodies in Canada by defaulting to person-first language in this plan.

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- **Barrier:** anything that hinders the full and equal participation in society of a person with a disability
    - a) caused by environments, attitudes, practices, policies, information, communications, or technologies, and
    - b) affected by intersecting forms of discrimination.
  - **Disability:** an inability to participate fully and equally in society as a result of the interaction between an impairment and a barrier.
  - **Impairment:** includes a physical, sensory, mental, intellectual, or cognitive impairment, whether permanent, temporary, or episodic.
  - **Prescribed Organization:** an organization designated by the Regulations.
-

## DISTRICT BACKGROUND

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Central Okanagan Public Schools (School District 23) is the 5<sup>th</sup> largest school district in British Columbia, serving approximately 24,000 students in the municipalities of Peachland, West Kelowna, Kelowna, and Lake Country. The school district is located on the unceded, Traditional Territory of the Okanagan, Syilx, People, and consists of 46 schools – 32 elementary, 8 middle, 5 secondary, and 1 alternative school operating on 4 campuses. The Board of Education Trustees includes 7 elected members who are accountable to the BC Ministry of Education and Childcare, and the people of the Regional District of Central Okanagan. They establish the strategic direction and priorities of the Board, and monitor our progress. Trustees approve an annual budget, and review and approve Board policies.

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**District Vision:** Together we Learn

**District Purpose:** To educate students in a safe, inclusive, equitable, and inspirational learning environment where each learner develops the attributes and competencies to flourish in a global community.

**District Overarching Goal:** Our learners will develop foundational skills and core curricular competencies so that they can be empowered to follow their passions and strengths and thrive holistically as resilient and engaged global citizens.

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*For more information about programs and services: <https://www.sd23.bc.ca>*

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## ACCESSIBILITY COMMITTEE 2023-2026

The key themes of the Accessibility British Columbia Act include identifying and removing barriers, promoting fairness and equity, and advancing human rights. These themes align with the mandate of the District's Human Rights Committee: "Supporting culturally safe and discrimination-free learning and working environments in Central Okanagan Public Schools. We strive for equity through the promotion of understanding, acceptance, inclusiveness, and harmony". As such, under the direction of the Human Rights Committee, an Accessibility Sub-Committee has been formed to support the meaningful implementation of the Act, and to help the District to continue our work to identify, remove and prevent barriers experienced by persons with disabilities.

Under the Accessible British Columbia Act, the selection of accessibility committee members must, to the extent possible, align with the following goals:

- At least half of the members are persons with disabilities (PWD), or individuals who support or are from organizations that support persons with disabilities;
- At least one member is an Indigenous person; and
- Members reflect the diversity of persons in B.C.

Current Membership includes the following:

| Committee Member | Role/Department/Representation                           |
|------------------|----------------------------------------------------------|
| Randy Horne      | Chair, Director - Inclusive Education Services           |
| Michelle Kaupp   | District Principal - Inclusive Education Services        |
| Jesse Bruce      | Director of Instruction - Indigenous Education           |
| Kristyn Marshall | District Inclusive Education Consultant (COTA)           |
| Tasha Carmichael | District Physical Therapist - Inclusive Education (COTA) |
| Kayla Malito     | Certified Education Assistant / ASL Instructor (CUPE)    |
| Sarena Smith     | Parent – Partners for Inclusive Education                |

## Accessibility Committee Roles & Responsibilities:

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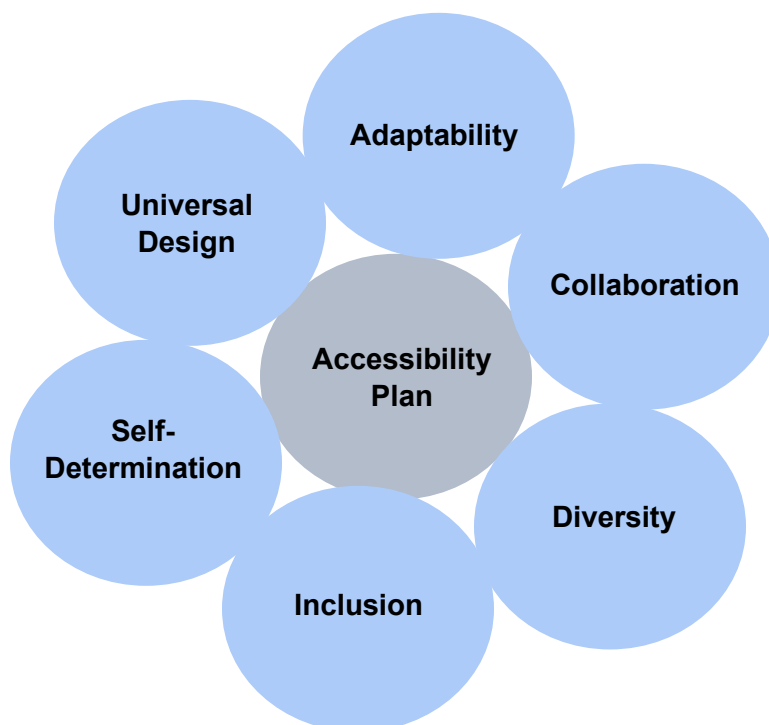
- Develop a plan to identify, remove, and prevent barriers to individuals in or interacting with the District.
  - Establish a process for receiving feedback from the public on the Accessibility Plan and on barriers to individuals in or interacting with the organization.
  - Review feedback to better understand and identify the issues, challenges, and priorities of stakeholders within our school district community.
  - Assist the organization in reviewing and updating its Accessibility Plan based on the feedback, at least once every three years.
-

## GUIDING FRAMEWORK

Accessibility has been and continues to be an important subject on a global, national and provincial scale for decades. On a global scale, the United Nations (UN) has played an integral role in increasing awareness about disability and leading efforts to increase diversity, equity and inclusion in the workplace and greater global community. At a national level, accessibility legislation began in 1985 including disability in the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms. Soon thereafter, Persons with Disabilities (PWDs) were included in the federal Employment Equity Act. More recently, the Accessible Canada Act (ACA) came into effect in 2019 with the primary goal to work toward a barrier-free Canada by 2040.

Provincially, the Accessible British Columbia Act received royal assent on June 17, 2021. The Act applies to prescribed organizations including school districts as of September 1, 2023. The Accessible British Columbia Act aims to support the identification, prevention, and removal of barriers that persons with disabilities face in their day-to-day lives. The Act requires that each school district establish an accessibility committee, an accessibility plan, and a mechanism to receive feedback on the plan and how accessible its institution is generally.

The Accessible British Columbia Act also includes a list of six principles that must be considered in the development of the Accessibility Plan. These same principles were used to develop the legislation itself and are an integral part of the development and future revisions of Central Okanagan Public Schools' Accessibility Plan.



This image shows each of the six principles, in the Accessible British Columbia Act, that will be considered in our Accessibility Plan. These include universal Design, adaptability, collaboration, diversity, inclusion, and self-determination.

These same principles were used to develop the legislation itself and are an integral part of the development and future revisions of Central Okanagan Public Schools' Accessibility Plan.

- **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 wish to interact with the Organization.

## METHODOLOGY

### Phase 1: Initial Planning & Research – February 2023 – September 2023

In February 2023, Central Okanagan Public Schools began the process of establishing an accessibility committee and conducting the initial research phase for the early development of a draft accessibility plan template. This initial research phase included reviewing: The Accessible British Columbia Act, accessibility legislation on a national and global scale, standards, policies, sample plans, and best practices across the country. This phase also included initial consultation and collaboration with other school districts, Untapped Accessibility, BC Council of Administrators of Inclusive Support in Education (BC CAISE), and Disability Alliance BC.

### Phase 2: Data Collection & Establishing Goals, Initiatives, and Actions - October 2023 – June 2025

Our first priority in the plan implementation is to ensure that people with lived experience have voice in the development of the plan. The second phase of this plan development will therefore center around consultation and soliciting feedback from stakeholders including staff, students, parents/guardians, Indigenous groups, and members of the greater district community. This consultation phase will begin in the fall of 2023 and continue until December 2024. The aim of this consultation will be to gain insights from the stakeholders including:

- Personal experiences of barriers to accessibility;
- Experiences supporting individuals with disabilities;
- The barriers they have witnessed for individuals interacting with the district; or
- Any other comments or observations on the draft plan and/or accessibility in our district.

#### Data Collection:

Barrier identification is through any process or methodology used to determine what barriers exist and where the barriers are located. The Accessibility Sub-Committee *may* use the following methods to identify barriers to accessibility in our district:

- Audit of policies and practices that promote accessibility and inclusion
- Survey to Staff – An accessibility and inclusion survey or thought exchange
- Survey to Parents/Guardians/Caregivers
- Survey to members of the public who interact with the District
- Survey to Students
- Physical Accessibility Audit

- District Accessibility Feedback Tool
- Accessibility Sub-Committee

Following the initial consultation process, the Accessibility Sub-Committee will update the current accessibility plan to include an informative section on "What We Heard". This feedback will be used to inform priorities, and to establish specific goals, initiatives and actions to be taken. The updated plan will be posted to our district website by June 2024.

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### Phase 3: Monitoring and Reporting December 2024 – June 2026

The Accessibility Sub-Committee will continue the cycle of reviewing feedback from stakeholders via the feedback mechanism and updating the plan accordingly. An annual status report with the progress of our Three-Year Accessibility Plan will be posted to the District website. Ongoing feedback of the initial plan, status reports and updates, plan revisions, or any general feedback can be provided via the feedback mechanism on an ongoing basis.

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### Types of Disabilities:

The Accessible British Columbia Act defines *disability* as: "an inability to participate fully and equally in society as a result of the interaction of an impairment and a barrier". An *impairment*, according to the Act, includes: a physical, sensory, mental, intellectual or cognitive impairment, whether permanent, temporary, or episodic. In the development of this plan, the District has considered the functional limitations associated with several different kinds of disability and the effects of these limitations on an individual's ability to perform everyday tasks:

- Physical Impairment
- Hearing Loss
- Speech Loss
- Vision Loss
- Deaf-Blind
- Smell or Taste Limitation
- Touch
- Intellectual
- Mental Health
- Learning

- Other – resulting from an accident, illness, or disease
- 

## Types of Barriers:

The Accessible British Columbia Act defines a *barrier* as: anything that hinders the full and equal participation in society of a person with a disability

- a) caused by environments, attitudes, practices, policies, information, communications, or technologies, and
- b) affected by intersecting forms of discrimination.

The following types of barriers have been considered in the initial development of this plan:

- Architectural Barriers
  - Communication Barriers
  - Information Barriers
  - Physical Barriers
  - Systemic Barriers
  - Technological Barriers
  - Environmental Barriers
- 
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## FEEDBACK TOOL

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In addition to the various consultation methods outlined in the development of the initial accessibility plan, Central Okanagan Public Schools has developed an online feedback tool to further solicit important feedback about accessibility in our district community. This feedback tool includes a series of questions about accessibility experiences that students, staff, and members of the greater school district community can complete anonymously. The [Accessibility Tool](#), along with information regarding other ways feedback may be provided, can be accessed by selecting the 'Accessibility' button on the main page of the district website. An information announcement about the tool will be provided to students, staff, and parents/guardians in the fall 2023.

The Accessibility Feedback Tool will continue to be available to identify current or future accessibility issues. The Accessibility Committee will regularly review and monitor the feedback.

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## ACCESSIBILITY PLAN – ACTIONS & IMPLEMENTATION

As outlined in Phase 2 of our methodology, the District will develop specific goals, initiatives, and actions based on the consultation and feedback from stakeholders within the district community. Domain areas of focus may include: Information and Communication, Transportation, Employment, the Built Environment, Education, and Systemic.

### Domain Area: Facilities and Spaces

**What We Heard:** The feedback received identified barriers across the built environment including: issues with accessible parking, and structural access to buildings and playgrounds.

**Goal:** Continue to improve the universal access of all school district facilities and spaces within our community.

| Initiatives<br><i>(simple terms for what this means)</i> | Actions<br><i>(how are we going to get there)</i> | Outcomes & Measurement to<br>be considered |
|----------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------|
|                                                          |                                                   |                                            |
|                                                          |                                                   |                                            |
|                                                          |                                                   |                                            |

## Domain Area: Education

**What We Heard:** The feedback received identified barriers to accessing specialized interventions to support students' individualized learning.

**Goal:** Continue to provide support so that each student has equitable access to the curriculum, instruction and assessment that meets the student's unique learning needs.

| Initiatives<br><i>(simple terms for what this means)</i> | Actions<br><i>(how are we going to get there)</i> | Outcomes & Measurement to<br>be considered |
|----------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------|
|                                                          |                                                   |                                            |
|                                                          |                                                   |                                            |
|                                                          |                                                   |                                            |

## Domain Area: Accessibility Awareness and Advocacy

**What We Heard:** The feedback received identified a limited awareness and understanding of persons with disabilities, the barriers they encounter, and how to support and celebrate diverse abilities.

**Goal:** Continue to increase awareness of disability, accessibility, and barriers, and foster greater inclusion across the district.

| Initiatives<br><i>(simple terms for what this means)</i> | Actions<br><i>(how are we going to get there)</i> | Outcomes & Measurement to<br>be considered |
|----------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------|
|                                                          |                                                   |                                            |
|                                                          |                                                   |                                            |
|                                                          |                                                   |                                            |
|                                                          |                                                   |                                            |



## APPENDIX A – REFERENCES & RESOURCES

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- [United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities](#)
  - [Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms](#)
  - [British Columbia Framework for Accessibility Legislation](#)
  - [Accessible British Columbia Act](#)
  - [Disability Alliance of BC](#)
  - [Untapped Accessibility](#)
  - [BC Accessibility Hub](#)
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