



The York Region District School Board's

Annual Accessibility Planning: Year One Report

Supporting Ontarians with Disabilities

***Prepared by the
Initial Working Group
September 30, 2003***

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References:

This Working Document was developed by the York Region District School Board's Accessibility Planning Initial Working Group. The document is based on the following publications:

A Guide to Annual Accessibility Planning under the *Ontarians with Disabilities Act, 2001*
Accessibility Directorate of Ontario, Ministry of Citizenship. August 2002

Annual Accessibility Planning for School Boards under the *Ontarians with Disabilities Act: Guidelines and Toolkit*, Ontario School Boards. Spring 2003

Understanding Barriers, York Region's First Annual Accessibility Plan, Consultation Draft. May 2003

Ontarians with Disabilities Act, 2001

Introduction

This report was prepared by the York Region District School Board's Accessibility Planning Initial Working Group in consultation with board staff having portfolios that directly impact the removal of key barriers including: physical, architectural, communication, information, attitudinal, technological, and policy/practice.

In this first year report, the working group intended this as a transitional plan, and as the beginning of a longer-term process. This first year report starts to bring together the diverse pieces and initiatives on accessibility that are already occurring and, to gather information on existing barriers that have already been identified. The document starts to plan for the following year and sets some longer-term priorities for ongoing barrier removal and prevention.

The working document is available on our Board's website at: www.yrdsb.edu.on.ca
Questions with regards to the working document may be directed to the Director of Education,
The York Region District School Board at:
60 Wellington Street, West
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This working document is the York Region District School Board's response to the *Ontarians with Disabilities Act, 2001* available at:
www.gov.on.ca/citizenship/accessibility/english/act2001.htm or Ontario e-laws at www.e-laws.gov.on.ca. Questions with regards to the Act may be directed to the Accessibility Directorate of Ontario at:
3rd Floor, 400 University Ave
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Section 1

Framework for Accessibility Planning for Ontario School Boards

Framework for Accessibility Planning for Ontario School Boards

Removing Barriers to Full Participation

By 2020, Statistics Canada estimates that 20% of the population will have disabilities.

People with disabilities represent a significant and growing part of our population. According to Statistics Canada, about 1.9 million Ontarians have disabilities - about 16% of the population. Disability tends to increase with age and as such, it is estimated that 20% of the population will have disabilities within the next two decades. York Region is the fastest growing region in Ontario adding 40,000 new residents to its 830,000 population every year (December 31, 2002). York Region is culturally diverse. Immigrants to Canada are accounting for a larger proportion of the Region's total population (39.1% in 2001). In the 2003-04 school year, the York Region District School Board enjoyed a student population approaching 100,000 with an expected 3,500 new students each year. In the same school year, staffing numbers approached 7,700.

Enhancing the ability of people with disabilities to live independently and contribute to the community will not only have positive effects on the future prosperity of Ontario but will contribute toward the overall quality of life of persons with disabilities and their communities.

Discrimination against people with disabilities is widespread; in fact, the largest category of complaints to the Ontario Human Rights Commission (OHRC) in 2001-2002 was disability discrimination.¹ People with disabilities face unnecessary barriers almost everywhere: at home, in parks, in recreational facilities, in the streets, in theatres, in stores and in restaurants.

The ODA adopts the broad definition for "disability" that is set out in the Ontario *Human Rights Code*. This can include limitations that are physical, hearing, speech, vision, smell, taste, touch, intellectual, learning or mental health, as well as from other conditions, accidents, illnesses or diseases. This broad definition is complementary to the broad categories of exceptionality identified in the *Education Act*.

Inclusive Design: A way of designing and environments so they are usable by and appealing to everyone regardless of age, ability or circumstance by working with users to remove barriers in the social, technical, political and economic processes underpinning building and design

¹ The Ontario *Human Rights Code* (the "Code") prohibits discrimination against people with disabilities and requires businesses, employers, and service providers to accommodate people with disabilities, short of undue hardship. The Code is administered and enforced by the Ontario Human Rights Commission ("OHRC").

In March 2001, the OHRC published *Policy and Guidelines on Disability and the Duty to Accommodate*. The guidelines include standards for accommodation, the definition of disability, the general principles of the duty to accommodate and undue hardship, and duties and responsibilities in the accommodation process. The guidelines state: "Under the [Code], everyone has the right to be free from discrimination because of disability or perceived disability in the social areas of employment, services, goods, facilities..." These documents are available on the OHRC's website at: <http://www.ohrc.on.ca>.

Under the ODA, a “**barrier**” is anything that prevents a person with a disability from fully participating in all aspects of society because of his or her disability, including a physical barrier, an architectural barrier, an information or communications barrier, an attitudinal barrier, a technological barrier, a policy or a practice.

Barriers prevent people with disabilities from going to school and to work. According to the 1991 Health and Activity Limitations Survey only 6% of adults with disabilities in Ontario have a university degree, compared to 15% of adults without a disability; and only 49% of working age people with disabilities were employed.

Barrier-removal is the process by which disabling conditions are eliminated. When barriers pass unnoticed and are not removed, people with disabilities are prevented from participating fully, and stereotypes about what people with disabilities can and cannot do are perpetuated.

Barrier-removal is the process by which disabling conditions are eliminated.

Many people with disabilities identify attitude as the major barrier they encounter. People with disabilities experience attitudinal barriers as stigma and prejudice. Attitudinal barriers, when unchallenged, serve to legitimize discrimination. See Section 6 of this document for references and resource materials that provide additional information on types of disability and related barriers.

At the heart of many communities, and as providers of education, school boards play a crucial role in ensuring that persons with disabilities have access to education and the opportunities that it provides. Universal accessibility is important to the community life of schools. It is also important to ensure the equality of opportunity and access for all employees. All Ontario school boards are currently demonstrating leadership in working with people with disabilities through their many activities and services, including providing specialized education programs and services to students with special needs, and ensuring that buildings and facilities are accessible to all. However, barriers still exist.

The Benefits Of Barrier Removal And Prevention

Positive outcomes for barrier removal include:

- creating accessible school communities for our students, staff, other partners and stakeholders.
- drawing from a larger pool of skilled employees.
- meeting the needs of a wide range of people, including people with disabilities, by improving access to our services, policies, procedures and practices.

The Ontarians with Disabilities Act, 2001

**“The purpose of this Act is to improve opportunities for persons with disabilities and to provide for their involvement in the identification, removal and prevention of barriers to their full participation in the life of the province.”
(Ontarians with Disabilities Act, 2001: Section 1)**

The Government of Ontario launched its Vision and Framework for Change for Persons with Disabilities in November 2001, when the *Ontarians with Disabilities Act, 2001* (ODA) was tabled in the Legislature.

In its vision for independence and opportunity for persons with disabilities, the government reaffirmed its commitment to building an inclusive Ontario for persons with disabilities. In implementing this vision, the government pledged to work in partnership with Ontarians to build on what has already been achieved, moving steadily towards a province in which no new barriers to persons with disabilities are created and existing ones are removed over time. Partners are expected to improve accessibility over time, and the government committed to working with them and sharing the responsibility for developing shared solutions.

Improving accessibility is a shared responsibility – with every social and economic sector, every region, every government, every organization, institution and association, and every person in Ontario. The *Ontarians with Disabilities Act* includes requirements that would result in all sectors becoming increasingly accountable to the public for the inclusion of persons with disabilities. It provides a flexible approach to promote locally driven solutions in tandem with provincial leadership and support.

The ODA sets out requirements for the provincial and municipal governments and key broader public sector organizations, including school boards, public transportation providers, hospitals, colleges, and universities as employers and as service providers. Broader public sector organizations are required to review their policies, programs, facilities and services through the development of annual accessibility plans, in consultation with people with disabilities. Plans must identify the barriers faced by persons with disabilities and the actions that would be taken to address them. Plans would set out improvement goals, as well as describing progress made in the previous year.

School boards must prepare annual accessibility plans, in consultation with people with disabilities, and make them available to the public.

The Act received Royal Assent on December 14, 2001. Section 15, which sets out requirements for school boards², was proclaimed on September 30, 2002.

ODA Requirements

“The accessibility plan shall address the identification, removal and prevention of barriers to persons with disabilities in the [school board’s] by-laws, if any, and in its policies, programs, practices and services.” (ODA; s. 15 (2))

² School Boards are defined in the Schedule to the Act as: “Every district school board as defined in section 1 of the *Education Act* and every board established under section 68 of that Act.” The full text of the ODA is available at: www.gov.on.ca/citizenship/accessibility/english/act2001.htm.

The ODA requires that school boards prepare annual accessibility plans (section 15(2)), in consultation with persons with disabilities and others, that address barriers in the following ways:

1. Report on the measures that the school board has taken to identify, remove and prevent barriers to people with disabilities.
2. Describe the measures in place to ensure that the school board assesses its proposals for by-laws, policies, programs, practices and services to determine their effect on accessibility for people with disabilities.
3. List the by-laws, policies, programs, practices and services that the school board will review in the coming year to identify barriers to people with disabilities.
4. Describe the measures the school board intends to take in the coming year to identify, remove and prevent barriers to people with disabilities.
5. Any other information that the regulations prescribe for the purpose of the plan (no such regulations have yet been developed).
6. Make the accessibility plan available to the public.

Joint Accessibility Plans

School boards may submit joint accessibility plans with other organizations affected by the Act, as long as each organization's individual obligations are met (s. 17)

Key Dates:

December 14, 2001	<i>Ontarians with Disabilities Act, 2001</i> given Royal Assent
February 7, 2002	Partial proclamation: creation of the Accessibility Advisory Council and Accessibility Directorate of Ontario
September 30, 2002	Proclamation of section 15 of the ODA, bringing into effect obligations of school boards
September 30, 2003	First year accessibility plans required to be completed

School Board Accessibility Planning

The ODA builds on relationships and practices that currently exist.

The ODA builds on relationships and practices that currently exist by requiring school boards to prepare annual accessibility plans and consult with people with disabilities in their preparation. The purpose is to help school boards think strategically about barrier removal and prevention and to plan for the long term.

Accessibility plans are intended to address existing barriers to people with disabilities and to prevent new barriers from being established. The specific length and format of the plans is not prescribed; flexibility remains with the school boards themselves.

Some school boards may choose to tie their plans into the annual curriculum, budget and capital planning process. In fact, accessibility planning will be most effectively implemented over the long term when it is integrated with business and capital planning cycles. The integration of accessibility planning within annual planning cycles will assist school boards in ensuring that accessibility planning is conducted in a strategic manner across the organization, and within existing financial resources. It will also assist in increasing staff understanding and awareness of ODA obligations and accessibility issues.

School boards have the flexibility to set fiscal and business priorities within the accessibility planning process. Since all are directed to implement this within existing resources, school boards would take this into consideration during long-term priority setting and planning.

At this time, school boards are not required to submit their accessibility plans to the Accessibility Directorate of Ontario, but the Directorate may request them.

School Boards may want to approach this first year as a “transition year,” and this first plan as the beginning of a longer-term process.

School Boards may want to approach this first year as a “transition year,” and this first plan as the beginning of a longer-term process. First year plans should start to bring together the diverse pieces and initiatives on accessibility that are already occurring, to gather information on existing barriers that have already been identified. Then they should start to plan for the following year and set longer-term priorities for ongoing barrier removal and prevention.

Accessibility planning is an annual obligation, which enables school boards to plan and move ahead in a strategic way by setting goals, budgeting resources and setting performance measures and monitoring. Accessibility planning is an ongoing process: next year’s plan will report on the commitments made in this year’s plan, and set new priorities and commitments for the following year, and so on. The accessibility planning cycle will also be facilitated by integrating it with the business and capital planning cycles.

Keeping in mind that all organizations have *Human Rights Code* obligations to accommodate people with disabilities, short of undue hardship, the purpose of annual accessibility planning is to set priorities and plan for prevention and removal of barriers over the long term.

Steps in Creating our Accessibility Plan

The following outline provides a series of steps our school board undertook in developing our initial accessibility plan.

- 1. Create an accessibility planning working group.**
- 2. Commit (or re-commit) to annual accessibility planning.**
- 3. Collect information on previous accessibility improvement activities**
- 4. Establish measures for preventing new barriers**
- 5. On-going review and identification of barriers**
- 6. Determine a process for addressing identified barriers in the coming year.**
- 7. Establish a review and monitoring process.**
- 8. Prepare the plan, obtain approval, and make it available to the public.**

1. Create an Accessibility Planning Initial Working Group.

The role of the Initial Working Group is to:

- Prepare the school board's accessibility plan, in consultation with people with disabilities or those representing people with disabilities and others;**
- Champion the planning process across the school board; and,**
- Ensure the plan is made available to the public.**

- Success of the working group is contingent on the following:
 - support from senior staff.
 - choice of members based on their professional skills and responsibilities.
 - input from people with disabilities.
- Broad representation on the working group is required as the ODA suggests a comprehensive definition for both "disability" and "barrier".

- Initial Group representation may include:
 - i. Administration
 - ii. Policy/Program
 - iii. Finance/Business Services
 - iv. Human Resources/Employee Services
 - v. Information Technology
 - vi. Plant Services
 - vii. Special Education and,
 - viii. Purchasing.
- Expanded Group representation may include: Trustees, Teaching Staff, Students, Community Members, and Employee Groups.

2. Commit (or re-commit) to annual accessibility planning³.

- Guided by the overall Mission, Vision and Value statement and how our school board strives for “inclusiveness”.

3. Collect information on previous accessibility improvement activities.

“The accessibility plan shall include a report on the measures that the [school board] has taken to identify, remove and prevent barriers to persons with disabilities.” (ODA; s. 15 (3) (a))

- Initial Working Group conducts a review of previous achievements.
- An opportunity to highlight the efforts made to date.
- In the first year plan, our school board would be reporting on key achievements in accessibility in previous years.
- In subsequent plans, our school board would begin to report more specifically on those commitments to barrier prevention and removal that were made in previous plans.

4. Establish measures for preventing new barriers⁴.

“The accessibility plan shall include the measures in place to ensure that the [school board] assesses its proposals for by-laws, policies, programs, practices and services to determine their effect on accessibility for people with disabilities.” (ODA; s. 15 (3) (b))

- The core intent of the accessibility plan is to provide an action plan for the elimination of present barriers and the creation of policies and practices to prevent future barriers from being created.

³ See section 3: Tool for School Board Accessibility Working Groups (page 38).

⁴ See section 4: Where To Look for Barriers (page 42).

5. Identify areas to review in the coming year and barriers to address in the coming year

“The accessibility plan shall include a list of the by-laws, policies, programs, practices and services that the [school board] will review in the coming year to identify barriers to people with disabilities.” (ODA; s. 15 (3) (c))

- The Expanded Working Group should take the following into account:
 - The broad definitions of disability and barriers and,
 - The facilities, services, etc. that are frequently used by the public or have a significant impact on people with disabilities.
- Accessibility planning on an annual basis will provide our school board with a process for strategic and continuous improvement.
- Rather than review and address all barriers in all policies, procedures, practices, programs, services and facilities in the first year, the Expanded Working group can establish priorities for reviewing and addressing barriers.
- Once priorities in barrier-removal are established, effective strategies can be created to use the school boards finite resources optimally.
- The ODA requires that people with disabilities be consulted in the development of accessibility plans by school boards. However the method of consultation is not prescribed. Organizations to be consulted include: SEAC, disability organizations, parent advisory councils.
- School boards should use their discretion but all are encouraged to consult with people who have a variety of disabilities to address diversity of barriers that exists.
- On-going collaboration between senior business officials, other school board staff, the accessibility planning Working Group and community groups is important to provide an opportunity for on-going input.

6. Determine a process for addressing identified barriers in the coming year

“The accessibility plan shall include the measures that the York Region District School Board intends to take in the coming year to identify, remove and prevent barriers to people with disabilities.” (ODA: s. 15(3) (d))

- After collecting data, the Initial/Expanded Working Group will decide which barriers to address in the coming year (how barriers will be removed or prevented, performance criteria identified, responsibility for removal or prevention of the barrier decided, timetable decisions, and allocation of resources).

7. Establish a review and monitoring process

- Frequency that the objectives are reviewed, and ascertain whether barrier-removal and barrier-prevention strategies are being implemented effectively and on time.
- Initial/Expanded Working Group regularly meets
- Progress to be evaluated at least quarterly.

8. Prepare the plan, obtain approval, and make it available to the public.

- Those who are part of the consultative process should have input on the plan before its internal approval and public release.
- Accessibility Plans must be made available to the general public using accessible formats (suggestion: word processor files, ASCII files, CD-ROM, properly marked up Web pages, Braille, and audio cassette).

**Accessible formats
may include standard
word processor files,
ASCII files, CD-ROM,
properly marked-up
Web pages, in Braille,
or on audio cassette.**



Section 2

The York Region District School Board's

2003-04 Accessibility Plan



The York Region District School Board's

2003-04 Accessibility Plan

Submitted to

The Coordinating Council of Superintendents

Prepared by

The York Region District School Board
Initial Working Group

*This publication is available on the York Region DSB's website
(www.yrdsb.edu.on.ca)*



The York Region District School Board's 2003-04 Accessibility Plan

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Executive Summary

The purpose of the *Ontarians with Disabilities Act, 2001* (ODA) is to improve opportunities for people with disabilities and to provide for their involvement in the identification, removal and prevention of barriers to their full participation. To this end, the ODA requires each school board to prepare an annual accessibility plan; to consult with people with disabilities or representatives of people with disabilities in the preparation of this and all future plans; and to make the plan public.

This is the first annual plan (2003 - 2004) prepared by the Initial Working Group of the York Region District School Board. The plan describes: (1) the measures that the York Region District School Board has taken in the past, and (2) the measures that the York Region District School Board will take during the year (2003 - 2004) to identify, remove and prevent barriers for people with disabilities.

This year, the York Region District School Board committed to the continual improvement of access to school board facilities, policies, programs, practices and services for students, staff, parents/guardians, volunteers and members of the community with disabilities.

The Initial Working Group identified current barriers for people with disabilities. The most significant findings are within the "Attitudinal" type. In addition to undertaking a comprehensive consultation process, during the 2003/04 school year, the Initial Working Group recommends removal of some of the barriers.

1. Aim

This plan describes the measures that the York Region District School Board has taken in the past and measures that will be taken during the current year (2003 - 2004) to identify, remove and prevent barriers for people with disabilities who work in, use or attend school board facilities and services.

2. Objectives

This plan:

1. Describes the *process* by which the York Region District School Board will identify, remove and prevent barriers for people with disabilities
2. Reviews efforts at the York Region District School Board to remove and prevent barriers for people with disabilities during the *past year(s)*
3. Lists the policies, procedures, programs, practices and services that the York Region District School Board will review in the *coming year* to identify barriers for people with disabilities
4. Describes the *steps* the York Region District School Board will take in the coming year to identify, remove and prevent barriers for people with disabilities
5. Describes how the York Region District School Board will make this accessibility plan *available to the public*

3. Commitment to Accessibility Planning

In June 2003, the Coordinating Council of Superintendents committed to an Action Plan that works towards the removal of barriers for people with disabilities.

The York Region District School Board is committed to:

- Supporting the recommendations of the Initial/Expanded Accessibility Working Group(s)
- Consulting with people with disabilities in the development and review of its annual accessibility plans
- Ensuring school board policies and procedures are consistent with the principles of accessibility
- Improving access to facilities, policies, programs, practices and services for students, staff, parents/guardians, volunteers and members of the community

The Director of Education and the Coordinating Council of Superintendents authorized the Initial Working Group to prepare an accessibility plan that will enable the York Region District School Board to meet these commitments.

4. Description of the York Region District School Board

The York Region District School Board serves public school communities located in nine municipalities including: Aurora, East Gwillimbury, Georgina, King, Markham, Newmarket, Richmond Hill, Vaughan and Whitchurch-Stouffville. Geographically, York Region is bounded by north: Lake Simcoe, south: Steeles Avenue, east: Tenth Line and, west: Hwy 27. The area is geographically diverse and of the over 830,000 residents, more than two-thirds (73%) live in the three southern municipalities of Markham, Richmond Hill and Vaughan. Both urban and rural communities exist in this vast area and it is culturally diverse.

The York Region District School Board serves 100,000 students (65,000 elementary and 35,000 secondary) through 138 elementary and 26 secondary schools. Approximately 12% of these students are enrolled in special education programs. School staff and those supporting the schools are approaching 7,700 in number.

The York Region District School Board strives for equity, inclusiveness, and diversity in all our programs, practices, facilities and people. The Board is committed to a program that continuously improves access to people with disabilities. Our commitment is expressed in our Mission, Vision and Values, our Character Education Program, in our hiring, transportation and training practices, in our Special Education Plan, our accessibility strategies, and in the new construction and renovation of our schools.

5. The Initial Working Group Members

The initial working group was formally constituted in June 2003 and consists of the following members:

<i>Working Group member</i>	<i>Department</i>	<i>Contact information</i>
Karen Bett, Supervisor of Quality Standards	Plant Services	X3270
Elizabeth Gordon, Coordinator of Recruitment and Retention	Employee Services	X2211

Louise Moreau, Coordinating Principal of Special Education	Curriculum and Instructional Services	X2236
Wanda Muirhead, Accounting Officer	Business Administration	X2425
Kathryn Smallwood, Supervisor of Administrative Services	Business Administration	X2431

The Expanded Working Group:

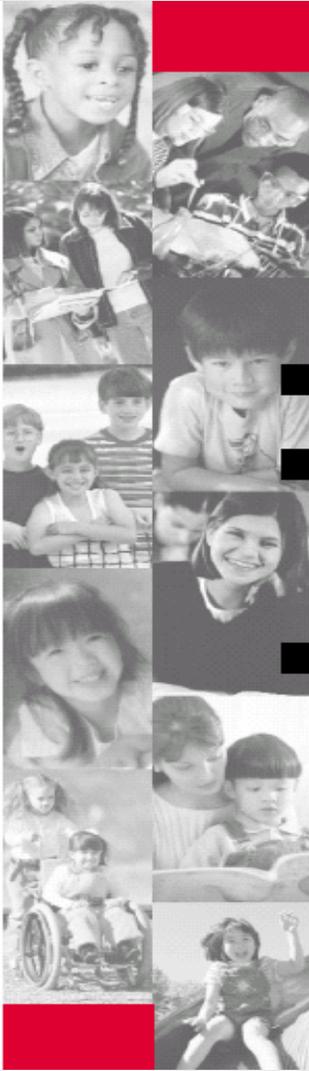
Moving towards an increasingly inclusive model of decision-making, the intent is to expand the membership of the working group in the upcoming 2003-04 school year to include any or all representatives of Information Technology, Policy/Program, Trustees, Teaching Staff, Students, Community Members, SEAC and Employee Groups. Membership would be enhanced with the inclusion of people with disabilities.

6. Recent Barrier-Removal Initiatives

During the last several years, there have been a number of initiatives at the York Region District School Board to identify, remove and prevent barriers to people with disabilities.

The York Region District School Board's Mission, Vision and Values:

The MVV guides development of learning environments which will support students in achieving expectations. The Board's values state that we "strive for equity, inclusiveness, and diversity in all our programs, practices, facilities, and people."



MISSION

We unite in our purpose to inspire and prepare learners for life in our changing world community.

VISION

We are the faces of public education. We understand our gifts and challenges. We are motivated by our dreams and act towards their fulfillment. We respect and celebrate our differences. We invite and value the spirit of community, creativity, and personal growth. We support each other. We have joy in who we are and who we are becoming.

VALUES

- We recognize and celebrate excellence, and the heart-felt efforts and contributions of our community.
- We strive for equity, inclusiveness, and diversity in all our programs, practices, facilities, and people.
- We value dedication and commitment.
- We value and will respond in an appropriate manner to the voices, ideas, and understanding of all our community members.
- We believe it is the right and responsibility of everyone to ensure a safe nurturing community.
- We embrace the spirit of innovation that acts to realize opportunities to transform our vision into reality.
- We are all responsible for our words and actions.

The York Region District School Board's Policies and Procedures:

Character Education, Policy #380.0, Revised 2003

Character education involves the preparation of learners to be responsible, caring and contributing citizens.

Provision of Barrier Free Facilities, Policy #425.0, Amended 2002

It is the policy of the Board to make provisions for the needs of students, staff and visitors with physical disabilities and to facilitate their access to all school and Board owned administrative facilities. For the purpose of this policy, the physically challenged shall include those with orthopaedic, visual or aural disabilities.

Fair and Equitable Employment and Promotion Practices, Policy #532, Revised 2003

It is the policy of the Board that the process for the hiring and promotion of staff is based on principles including a process that is open, and able to recognize and value diversity in background and experience of all qualified individuals. The selection committee and process must be bias free. The Board is committed to fair and equitable employment and promotion practices, ultimately providing a workforce which both reflects the population within its boundaries and responds to its diverse need.

Transportation to Schools, Policy 680, Revised 1998

Board policy states that provision will be made for the transportation for children with disabilities to schools with appropriate programs. Board policy allows for transportation of students from York Region to residential or other schools for the deaf/hearing impaired.

Special Education – Identification, Placement and Review, Procedure NP360.0, Revised 2000

In accordance with Ontario Regulation 181-98, the York Region District School Board has established Special education Identification, Placement and Review Committees (IPRC) to identify student needs and recommend appropriate placements.

The York Region District School Board's Special Education Plan

The York Region District School Board, through its Special Education Plan

- provides programs and services where possible in home schools;
- provides a range of placements in home school, community class, regional class;
- provides a focus on inclusive practices in our schools as an integral part of school culture and planning, and program development and delivery by:
 - providing learning communities which develop conditions that promote each member being treated with respect and dignity;
 - recognizing, valuing and validating each child regardless of ability;
 - consistently using inclusive language;
 - encouraging students to feel part of their school and to be active participants in all aspects of school activity;
 - providing appropriate accommodations and modifications as required; and,
 - creating environments for teachers, students, parents and other partners to focus on common goals to facilitate student learning.
- The Special Education Plan is available on the board website at www.yrdsb.edu.on.ca

Building New Elementary and Secondary Schools

The purpose of elementary and secondary school project prospectus' is to inform building consultants, project managers, design builders, and architects of the Board Policy as it relates to the design of schools to be built to serve students in their school community. The prospectuses include provision for accessibility including:

- The use of Barrier Free design criteria to provide a universally accessible building to all its users.
- In terms of the physically challenged, the major consideration is to make all parts of the building easily accessible and safe for the following types of disabilities:
 - Persons who use wheelchairs for mobility
 - Persons with reduced hearing or seeing ability
 - Persons with reduced stamina, strength, dexterity and speed.

All barrier free facilities should include wheelchair turning radii that account for both the wheelchair and an attendant.

In addition, the buildings are designed in compliance with the Ontario Building Code.

Accessibility Strategies:**Facility Renewal**

The York Region District School Board first implemented its accessibility program in 1985. In 2003, through the York Region District School Board's Annual Budget process, \$550,000 in funding was devoted to the renewal of facilities to improve accessibility. Projects include:

- Program renovations to support the implementation of the Special Education Plan
- Elevators and/or lifts in board facilities with multiple stories,
- Ramps for designated building access points,
- Accessible washrooms renovations,
- Installation of appropriate hardware,
- Installation of automatic door openers on designated interior and exterior school doorways,
- Audio and visual emergency alarm systems, and tactile and high-contrast signage, etc.,
- Increased lighting and,
- Special education equipment storage.

In 2000, the Board undertook a comprehensive Accessibility Survey whereby our buildings were evaluated with the Barrier Free Access requirements of the Ontario Building Code, 1997.

Classrooms

- Alterations for the creation of classrooms to provide support for students with disabilities.
- Specialized equipment funded by the Ministry of Education and Training is purchased to support students with disabilities.

Playgrounds

- All-abilities playgrounds are supported by the school board.

Awareness Training

Attitudinal barriers for people with disabilities are being addressed through staff and student service training.

Employee Services coordinates staff awareness training on removing the barriers for people Deaf or hard of hearing, and can do so upon direction for other types of disabilities.

Special education regional staff facilitate sessions in the schools on understanding the abilities that people with disabilities have. This is an interactive approach where staff and students participate in disability simulations.

7. Preventing New Barriers

In keeping with our current philosophy, all school board programs, policies, practices and services will be subject to the guiding principles of inclusionary practice. We will strive to create an environment that is accessible to all people, regardless of age or ability. Through the annual accessibility planning process, The York Region District School Board's programming, policies and practices will be assessed to ensure continuous improvement in accessibility.

8. Barrier-Identification Methodologies

The Initial Working Group used the following barrier-identification methodologies:

<i>Action</i>	<i>Description</i>	<i>Timeline</i>
Presentation to Senior Administration	Opportunity for input and feedback	Year I and Ongoing
Solicit staff contributions through interviews, discussions and meetings	Staff with professional portfolios that have an impact on the removal of barriers to people with disabilities were included. Their input has been included in the Working Template.	Year I
Presentation to Special Education Advisory Committee	Describe the working group composition and initiatives for the coming year. Opportunity for input and feedback.	Year II
Initial/Expanded Working Group to identify additional barriers and develop barrier-removal strategies	Using the Toolkit in Sections 3 and 4, the Initial/Expanded working group will continue to work towards the identification and removal of barriers.	Year II
Communicate Plan with School Council Chairs, Principals, Trustees	Describe the working group composition and initiatives for the coming year. Opportunity for input and feedback.	Year II
Communicate and consult with key stakeholders and partners	The board solicits input with community groups representing persons with disabilities and other relevant stakeholder groups, e.g. March of Dimes	Year II

9. Barriers Identified

In its review, the Initial Working Group identified many barriers. A cursory list identified by staff will serve to set the stage for discussion and clarification during the consultation process in upcoming year.

Type of Barrier	Description of Barrier	Strategy for its removal/prevention
A. PHYSICAL		
Physical	<p><i>Are the YRDSB buildings accessible by people with disabilities?</i></p> <p><i>Once inside our buildings, are all administrative and teaching areas accessible to people with disabilities?</i></p> <p><i>Are ergonomic principles employed in the selection and provision of furniture and equipment to accommodate people with disabilities?</i></p>	<p><i>Continue to review regional needs and take a planned approach to improving physical access and the removal of barriers to and throughout our buildings.</i></p> <p><i>Specific considerations include: interior and exterior doors and ramps, impact of poor weather conditions, parking, washrooms, transportation, circulation, furniture and equipment, lifts and elevators, etc.</i></p> <p><i>Compile requirements and implement in new schools.</i></p>
B. ARCHITECTURAL		
Architectural	<p><i>Do newly constructed or renovated administrative and teaching spaces support people with disabilities and satisfy the program requirements and the needs of the students?</i></p>	<p><i>Continue to review regional needs and take a planned approach to the removal of architectural barriers.</i></p> <p><i>Specific areas to consider include: furniture and equipment, lifts and elevators, stairs, reception, classrooms, circulation, signage, lighting, etc.</i></p>
C. COMMUNICATION		
Communication	<p><i>Are students and/or parents with disabilities being communicated in effective ways?</i></p>	<p><i>Continue to review regional needs and take a planned approach to the removal of communication barriers.</i></p> <p><i>Specific areas to consider include: post secondary learning paths, departmental networking, external agencies, interpretation services, emergency alert and preparedness, teaching aids, etc.</i></p>

D. INFORMATION		
Information	<i>Are students and parents with disabilities receiving information that the supports their needs?</i>	<i>Continue to review regional needs and take a planned approach to the removal of information barriers. Specific areas to consider include: alternative formats, resources, content, etc.</i>
E. ATTITUDINAL		
Attitudinal	<i>What can the YRDSB be doing to increase awareness of the types of disabilities and their needs?</i>	<i>Continue to review regional needs and take a planned approach to the removal of attitudinal barriers. Specific areas to consider include: staff and student education and professional development, etc.</i>
F. TECHNOLOGICAL		
Technological	<i>How effectively does technology support the needs of people with disabilities at the YRDSB?</i>	<i>Continue to review regional needs and take a planned approach to the removal of technological barriers. Specific areas to consider include: alternative technology, website design, furniture and equipment, etc.</i>
G. POLICY/PRACTICE		
Policy/Practice	<i>Do Board Policies and Procedures consider the removal of barriers for people with disabilities?</i>	<i>During the normal review and revision of Board Policy and Procedures, more specific references to the removal of barriers can be adopted. This would improve awareness and promote the board's long term commitment. The drafting of a more comprehensive Policy and an accompanying Procedure to support the Barrier Free Policy.</i>

10. Barriers To Be Addressed in 2003 - 2004

The Initial/Expanded Working Group will spend Year II in consultation with many different groups with the following three goals:

- Gain feedback on the Annual Accessibility Plan
- Continue to identify barriers
- Continue to develop barrier removal strategies

The Initial/Expanded Working Group will focus on the following barriers for discussion, input and refinement during Stage II.

Barrier	Objective	Means to remove/prevent	Performance criteria	Resources	Timing	Responsibility
<p>Physical/ Architectural/ Information</p> <p><i>Classroom spaces newly constructed or renovated to support students with disabilities do not always satisfy the program requirements and the needs of the students.</i></p>	<p>To facilitate the feedback from special education staff on the extent the physical building accommodates the special education program.</p>	<p>The New School User Survey that is currently distributed to school principals will also be provided to a representative of the Special Education team to solicit comments from teaching staff. Survey results are a vehicle to changes in the board's prospectus.</p>	<p>For schools that opened in September 2003, the surveys will be circulated for completion in February 2004.</p>	<p>Printing for additional surveys.</p>	<p>February 2004 and On-going</p>	<p>Quality Standards Team in Plant Services</p>
<p>Architectural</p> <p>Interior Signage in new elementary and secondary schools is in a visual format only.</p>	<p>To provide signage that complies with barrier free requirements expanding the access to non-seeing individuals.</p>	<p>Provision for interior signage to be designed in Braille and located at an accessible height.</p>	<p>To be included in the elementary and secondary school prospectus for the 2006 elementary and 2007 secondary school projects.</p>	<p>Funding for these projects will be generated by the capital funding model.</p>	<p>Over 2003/04 school year</p>	<p>New Construction Team in Plant Services</p>
<p>Technological</p> <p>Board website is not accessible to people who are blind and visually impaired or who use screen-reading software.</p>	<p>To provide an alternative to the standard visual format that the Board Website consists of. Larger print font as manipulated by the end user serves people with visual disabilities.</p>	<p>Allow for font manipulation that could be managed by the end user.</p>	<p>People with visual disabilities can access school board website</p>	<p>Staff time spent in investigating and development.</p>	<p>Over 2003/04 school year</p>	<p>Information Technology Team</p>
<p>Attitudinal</p> <p><i>Lack of opportunities for system-wide awareness training.</i></p>	<p>To raise awareness of the barriers and removal strategies.</p>	<p>Leadership from Staff Development, Special Education, Employee Services and Learning Resources to partner with other departments as necessary to develop and offer a module to be delivered in staff orientations and any other forums. i.e. caretaker workshops, leadership conference, etc.</p>	<p>Positive changes towards inclusionary attitudes.</p>	<p>Staff time spent in coordinating and developing training materials.</p>	<p>Development of training module over 2003/04 school year</p>	<p>Staff Development Team</p>

Barrier	Objective	Means to remove/prevent	Performance criteria	Resources	Timing	Responsibility
Policy/Practice Board Policy and Procedures having regard for the removal of barriers for people with disabilities.	Ensure all board policies and procedures are inclusive and address accessibility issues	<i>During the normal review and revision of Policies and Procedures, more specific references to the removal of barriers can be adopted. This would improve awareness and promote the board's long term commitment.</i> <i>The review, and revision where appropriate, of the Board's Barrier Free Policy.</i> <i>The drafting of a supporting Board Procedure.</i>	Inclusionary policies and procedures that give board-wide direction.	Staff time	Begin in September 2003 and complete by June 2004	All applicable departments

11. Review and Monitoring Process

The Initial/Expanded Working Group meets regularly during the planning year to review progress. Throughout the year, evaluation of the effectiveness in implementing the barrier-removal and prevention strategies will be ongoing in preparation for the second year of accessibility planning.

The Initial/Expanded Working Group reminds staff about roles in implementing the plan. Minutes of meetings will be available.

12. Communication of the Plan

The York Region District School Board's accessibility plan will be posted on the board website at www.yrdsb.edu.on.ca and hard copies will be available.



Section 3

Tool for School Board Accessibility Working Groups

Tool for School Board Accessibility Working Groups

The following questions are designed for members of school board accessibility working groups involved in accessibility planning under the *Ontarians with Disabilities Act, 2001* (ODA). The various questions may be used to help identify barriers and develop barrier removal strategies and to assist with the annual accessibility planning exercise.

SOME ISSUES TO CONSIDER IN SCHOOL BOARD ACCESSIBILITY PLANNING

1.	<p>Does your board have a main contact person/department identified to handle inquiries related to accessibility?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Can this person provide quick and easy information to students, staff and visitors about your board's accessibility planning? • If this information is available via a telephone, is it also available through TTY/TDD for people who are deaf and hard of hearing as well? • If this information is available on the board's website, is the information available in a text-based format to make it accessible to people who are blind and visually impaired and use reading software?
2.	How does your board currently deal with accessibility issues?
3.	Does your board monitor the availability, usage and condition of barrier-free features (i.e. accessible parking spaces, drinking fountains, counters, doorways, ramps, signage etc.)?
4.	Does your board get complaints about cluttered hallways and paths, or about providing accessible services/facilities? Consider keeping an inventory of complaints and following up with them.
5.	<p>Does your board have policies on:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Accommodating employees and students with disabilities? • Ensuring facilities, publications, websites, and services are accessible to people with disabilities?
6.	Do your board's site planning, facilities and capital planning have policies promoting a barrier-free facility through the use of universal design features?
7.	Does your board ensure barrier-free designs are incorporated into new construction projects and re-development in outdoor spaces (i.e., parking lots, pathways, etc.)?
8.	Is accessibility considered in the approval of expansions or the construction of new buildings and facilities?

9.	Does your board provide information in accessible formats to people with disabilities (i.e. large print, audio tapes, computer diskettes, Braille)?
10.	Do your board's schools and facilities have both audible and visual emergency alarm systems?
11.	Are all board buildings, parking lots and other facilities barrier-free?
12.	Does your board's maintenance and snow removal plans consider people with disabilities (i.e. access for wheelchairs, canes, strollers, etc.)?
13.	Does your board use International and Universal Symbols and tactile signage in schools and facilities? Consider font size, colour, lighting and contrast.
14.	Are trash receptacles, drinking fountains, benches, public telephones and other accessories easily accessible for people using wheelchairs, crutches and other assistive devices?
15.	Has board staff received training in providing accommodation for people with disabilities? (For example, communication using TTY, sign language interpreters, real-time captioning for people who are deaf and hard of hearing.) Does staff know how to respond to requests for communications in accessible formats?
16.	Have teaching and non-teaching staff had training with respect to interaction with people with disabilities and understanding issues concerning people with different types of disabilities?
17.	Does your board have an emergency evacuation protocol, which includes assisting the safe evacuation of people with disabilities?
18.	Does your board deal with or maintain an arrangement with a taxi service or other means to provide accessible vehicles to transport students with disabilities to and from schools and events?



Section 4

Where to Look for Barriers

Where to Look for Barriers⁵

Definition of disability

The ODA adopts the broad definition for disability that is set out in the *Ontario Human Rights Code*. “Disability” is:

- (a) any degree of physical disability, infirmity, malformation or disfigurement that is caused by bodily injury, birth defect or illness and, without limiting the generality of the foregoing, includes diabetes mellitus, epilepsy, a brain injury, any degree of paralysis, amputation, lack of physical co-ordination, blindness or visual impediment, deafness or hearing impediment, muteness or speech impediment, or physical reliance on a guide dog or other animal or on a wheelchair or other remedial appliance or device.
- (b) a condition of mental impairment or a developmental disability;
- (c) a learning disability, or a dysfunction in one or more of the processes involved in understanding or using symbols or spoken language;
- (d) a mental disorder, or
- (e) an injury or disability for which benefits were claimed or received under the insurance plan established under the *Workplace Safety and Insurance Act*, 1997.

What is a barrier?

A “barrier” is anything that prevents a person with a disability from fully participating in all aspects of society because of his or her disability, including a physical barrier, an architectural barrier, an informational or communications barrier, an attitudinal barrier, a technological barrier, a policy or a practice.

An example of each of the different kinds of barriers is shown below:

⁵ The material set out in this section has been largely drawn from Appendix B found in the *Guide to Annual Accessibility Planning under the Ontarians with Disabilities Act, 2001* published by the Ministry of Citizenship. The original document may be found on the Ministry’s website at www.gov.on.ca/citizenship.accessibility/english/accessibleplanningguide.htm.

Barrier Type	Example
Physical	<p>Heavy doors at entrances and in building interiors.</p> <p>Door knobs that must be twisted</p> <p>Narrow library or cafeteria aisles</p> <p>Benches and tables that are too high in science laboratories</p>
Architectural	<p>A hallway or door that is too narrow for a wheelchair or scooter</p> <p>A portable/modular classroom that does not have an accessible washroom</p>
Information	<p>Typefaces that are too small to be read by a person with low vision</p> <p>Decor which may be confusing or disorienting for disabled pupils with visual impairments</p> <p>Signage which is confusing or inadequate</p>
Communication	<p>An employee who talks loudly when addressing a person who is deaf</p> <p>School communications to parents are not provided in accessible formats</p>
Attitudinal	<p>Staff who ignore students/visitor who have disabilities or speak only to the people accompanying them.</p> <p>Students with disabilities who are socially isolated and bullied</p>

Barrier Type	Example
Technological	<p>Electrical wiring that is inadequate to support the various versions of assistive instructional technology.</p> <p>Science laboratory materials placed too high (e.g., microscopes) or requiring the use of two hands</p>
Policy/Practice	<p>A practice of announcing important messages over an intercom that people with hearing impairments cannot hear clearly, or at all.</p> <p>School teaching and non-teaching staff and students are not encouraged to share a philosophy of inclusion</p> <p>School board workplace policies do not accommodate the needs of persons with mental illness.</p>

Where to Look for Barriers

1. Physical Barriers:

- Furniture
- Work stations
- Chairs
- Doors
- Door knobs
- Handrails
- Classroom design
- Windows
- Planters
- Bathroom hardware
- Locks
- Security systems
- Drinking fountains
- Seats, tables, counters
- Telephones

2. Architectural Barriers:

- Exterior to a building
- Interior of a building
- Parking areas
- Drop-off zones
- Hallways
- Floors
- Carpets
- Lobbies
- Reception areas
- Offices
- Classrooms
- Athletic facilities
- Cubicles
- Washrooms
- Cafeterias
- Elevators
- Escalators
- Stairs
- Stairwells
- Closets
- Storage areas
- Lighting
- Entrances
- Assembly halls

3. Information/communication Barriers:

- Books
- Printed information
- Web-based resources
- Signage
- Bulletin boards
- Brochures
- Training
- Receptionists
- Forms
- Manuals
- Fax transmissions
- Equipment labels
- Computer screens
- Public announcements

4. Attitudinal Barriers:

- Biases and beliefs
- Lack of information/knowledge
- Lack of understanding
- Lack of sensitivity/intolerance
- Stigmatization
- *See also "Policy/practice" below

5. Technological Barriers:

- Computers
- Operating systems
- Standard software
- Proprietary software
- Websites
- Keyboards
- Mice
- Printers
- Fax machines
- Telephones
- TTYs
- Photocopiers
- Appliances
- Control panels
- Switches

6. Policy/practice Barriers:

- Procurement and purchasing
- Job postings
- Hiring
- Interviewing
- Testing
- Meetings
- Promotion
- By-laws
- Regulations
- Rules
- Protocols
- Safety and evacuation
- Community use of facilities



Section 5

Frequently Asked Questions

Frequently Asked Questions

Contents:

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11. How should school boards make their plans public?
12. Are school boards required to consult with people with disabilities in preparing their annual accessibility plans?
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15. Do school board accessibility plans have to look like the sample annual accessibility plan provided?
16. Can a school board prepare a plan jointly with another public organization or school board in the area?
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19. Is there a penalty for *not* completing the annual accessibility plan?
20. What is the cost for retrofitting old buildings? Who pays?
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22. Where can I get more information on the ODA?

1. What is the *Ontarians with Disabilities Act, 2001*?

- The *Ontarians with Disabilities Act, 2001* (ODA) was passed on December 14, 2001.
- The purpose of the ODA is to improve opportunities for people with disabilities and to provide for their involvement in the identification, removal and prevention of barriers to their full participation in the life of the province (*section 1*).
- Several key sections were proclaimed on February 7, 2002, including the establishment of the Minister's Accessibility Advisory Council and the Accessibility Directorate.
- The majority of ODA obligations were proclaimed on September 30, 2002 and December 31, 2002.
- A document entitled *Independence and Opportunity: Ontario's Framework for Change for Persons with Disabilities* was released in November 2001 and describes the government's plan to make Ontario fully accessible for people with disabilities.

2. What is the definition of disability under the *Ontarians with Disabilities Act, 2001*?

- The ODA covers the same broad range of disabilities as the Ontario *Human Rights Code*. These include physical, sensory, cognitive, developmental and mental disabilities, and brain injury.
- Section 2 of the ODA defines "disability" as:
 - (a) any degree of physical disability, infirmity, malformation or disfigurement that is caused by bodily injury, birth defect or illness and, without limiting the generality of the foregoing, includes diabetes mellitus, epilepsy, a brain injury, any degree of paralysis, amputation, lack of physical co-ordination, blindness or visual impediment, deafness or hearing impediment, muteness or speech impediment, or physical reliance on a guide dog or other animal or on a wheelchair or other remedial appliance or device,
 - (b) a condition of mental impairment or a developmental disability,
 - (c) a learning disability, or a dysfunction in one or more of the processes involved in understanding or using symbols or spoken language,
 - (d) a mental disorder, or

- (e) an injury or disability for which benefits were claimed or received under the insurance plan established under the Workplace Safety and Insurance Act, 1997; ("handicap").

3. Does the ODA have priority over the Ontario *Human Rights Code*?

No. The Ontario Human Rights Code retains primacy over the *Ontarians with Disabilities Act, 2001*.

4. What is the role of the Accessibility Advisory Council? (Section 19)

The Accessibility Advisory Council of Ontario reports directly to the Minister of Citizenship and advises the Minister on a range of accessibility issues, including:

- Implementation of the ODA and preparation of the regulations;
- Programs of public information that have a connection to the ODA;
- Accessibility for people with disabilities to services provided or paid for by the Government of Ontario;
- Accessibility for people with disabilities to employment opportunities in Ontario; and
- Any other matters related to the ODA where the Minister requests advice.

5. What is the role of the Accessibility Directorate? (Section 20)

The Directorate consults with organizations that must prepare accessibility plans and policies, and may request and review those documents. It provides information, tools and resources to assist organizations in meeting their obligations under the ODA.

The Directorate provides specialized knowledge, research and support to the implementation of the ODA.

It supports public and private organizations through partnerships. For example, the Ministry of Citizenship partnered with the Canadian Standards Association to develop voluntary standards for customer service to increase the knowledge and skills of businesses when serving customers with disabilities.

The Directorate provides public education and information as well as develops educational resources, standards, and features best practices.

It supports and consults with the Accessibility Advisory Council of Ontario.

The Directorate also makes recommendations to the minister on draft regulations, after studying comments it receives from the public.

6. What are the requirements for school boards under the ODA?

School boards are required to prepare annual accessibility plans and to make them public. The plans will address the identification, removal and prevention of barriers to people with disabilities in the organization's by-laws (if any), and its policies, programs, practices and services (*section 15 and Schedule*).

In preparing plans, two or more municipalities, school boards, hospitals, colleges and universities may prepare joint plans (*section 17*).

7. By what date must accessibility plans be prepared?

Plans should be prepared on an annual basis, enabling organizations to tie accessibility planning into their regular planning cycles. The initial plan must be completed by September 30, 2003.

8. What are the requirements of the ODA with respect to school boards?

School boards, as defined in section 1 and established under section 68 of the *Education Act*, are required to prepare an accessibility plan each year and to consult with people with disabilities and others, when preparing this plan. Accessibility plans must be made available to the public.

9. What must school boards include in their accessibility plans?

Plans must identify barriers to people with disabilities, ways in which to remove and prevent them in a school board's, by-laws, policies, programs, practices and services. Section 15 of the ODA provides additional information about the contents of a plan.

10. Are school boards required to submit the accessibility plans to the government?

No, the Ministry of Citizenship's Accessibility Directorate of Ontario may, upon request, review those documents. However, these plans must be made public.

11. How should school boards make their plans public?

School boards may use a variety of methods for letting members of the public know about their plan, for example: posting the information on their website, putting a notice in their newsletter, posting information on bulletin boards, etc.

Also, the accessibility plan needs to be available in formats that are accessible to people with disabilities.

12. Are school boards required to consult with people with disabilities in preparing their annual accessibility plans?

Yes. Section 15 of the ODA requires that school boards consult with people with disabilities and others when preparing their plans.

13. How can school boards identify people with disabilities within the board and within the community to assist with implementing their obligations?

Many people with disabilities are actively involved with disability organizations in their community. Some examples of these organizations include: the Canadian National Institute for the Blind; Easter Seals Association; the Ontario March of Dimes; Canadian Mental Health Association; Le Phénix; Canadian Hearing Society and Community Living Ontario, as well as consumer organizations such as independent living centres, injured workers associations and self-help groups such as the DisAbled Women's Network (DAWN).

Special Education Advisory Committee (SEAC), representing local associations, is a crucial member source of information about people with disabilities and accessibility needs.

We encourage school boards to contact these and other organizations in their community to locate individuals who have expertise and credibility in disability issues.

Employees and other individuals with disabilities who can assist with the development of the accessibility plan could be identified through advertising in newsletters, via e-mail requests or through managers or immediate supervisors.

14. Who will pay the costs of developing and implementing the plans?

- School boards, hospitals, provincial ministries, municipalities, colleges, universities, and public transportation providers have been asked to develop accessibility plans using their existing resources. The Accessibility Directorate of Ontario is available

for consultation. Working tools, such as the sample annual accessibility plan, are also available.

15. Do school board accessibility plans have to look like the sample annual accessibility plan provided?

No. The sample plan is simply a tool to assist school boards in the planning process. The plans can take any form that a board would like to develop, as long as the requirements of the ODA are addressed.

16. Can a school board prepare a plan jointly with another public organization or school board in the area?

Yes. Section 17 of the ODA states that two or more organizations are allowed to prepare an accessibility plan together and make it available to the public.

If an organization prepares an accessibility plan with another organization, it does not need to prepare its own accessibility plan if the joint plan meets the ODA's individual requirements for each party.

17. Should plans be prepared as part of the operating plan process?

It may be useful to coordinate the development of an accessibility plan with the operating planning process. However, this may not be possible with the first plan, as the initial plan must be completed and made public by September 30, 2003.

18. Municipalities are required to establish an Accessibility Advisory Committee. Are school boards required to set up a committee as well?

No, Section 15 does not require school boards to establish an accessibility advisory committee. However, in order to carry out the accessibility planning exercise, school boards may wish to set up a working group to assist in the preparation of the annual accessibility plan. The composition of an accessibility working group, how often it meets, etc., is left to the discretion of each board. Further, as accessibility plans are required annually, a working group could provide some consistency even if the position of the Chair is rotated from board to board on an annual or biannual basis.

In addition, it might be useful to draw upon the ideas and experience of the membership of the local municipal accessibility advisory group. (The ODA requires municipalities of 10,000 or more to establish such committees, with a majority of the membership being people with disabilities.)

19. Is there a penalty for *not* completing the annual accessibility plan?

If the accessibility plan is not completed and made available to the public, as required under the ODA, then the school board is in contravention of the Act. The Accessibility Directorate is monitoring implementation of the ODA by all organizations that have obligations.

Section 21 of the ODA does contain a specific enforcement provision. However, Section 21 has not yet been proclaimed. The government is committed to proclaiming and implementing the Act in a reasonable manner that permits every affected organization to meet its obligations, and to be sure that systems and training are in place to support this.

20. What is the cost for retrofitting old buildings? Who pays?

The requirements of the ODA are not retroactive. However, organizations that are required by law to prepare accessibility plans may identify access to older buildings as a barrier.

The ODA does not prescribe measures school boards must take each year to remove barriers. It allows school boards to identify their own priorities and establish reasonable timelines and relevant approaches to barrier removal. Accessible or universal design should be embedded in the front-end of new construction, and renovations of existing spaces; accessibility should be taken into account when ordering new equipment or modifying existing equipment. Planning for accessibility at the beginning of a project will reduce costly renovations to remove barriers later.⁶

The cost of retrofitting would depend on what barriers and actions are identified in organizations' accessibility plans. Advance planning for accessibility at the design stage is usually much cheaper than modifying a building later to make it accessible.

The ODA allows organizations the flexibility to determine their own priorities. It is expected that organizations will develop and implement accessibility plans within existing planning processes and using existing resources.

21. What buildings currently must be wheelchair accessible? How will the ODA change this?

The ODA requires a number of organizations to plan for the removal of barriers through the process of accessibility planning. However, the ODA does not change the current requirements that school boards comply with the Ontario Building Code or the Ontario Human Rights Code.

⁶ See also the "Business Case for Accessibility: How Accessibility Awareness Strengthens Your Company's Bottom Line." (page 18) By the Global Business and Economic Roundtable on Addiction and Mental Health. November 2001. Available at *Paths to Equal Opportunity*: www.equalopportunity.on.ca

New buildings and those undergoing renovation must meet the requirements of the current Ontario Building Code (OBC). The OBC provides a set of minimum requirements for public safety inside buildings.

The Human Rights Code (HRC) prevails over the Building Code and over the ODA. The HRC creates a right to accessible workplaces, housing, public transit, hospitals, schools, libraries, restaurants, etc. and places a positive obligation on businesses and public sector organizations to make their facilities accessible. If an organization or business complies only with the requirements of the OBC, they may be vulnerable to a human rights complaint to the extent that their premises continue to fall short of the requirements of the HRC.

The Ontario Human Rights Commission's Policy and Guidelines on Disability and the Duty to Accommodate and relevant case law make it clear that facilities should be made accessible through inclusive design choices at the outset. Where barriers already exist, steps should be taken to remove them, unless to do so would cause undue hardship.

For more information about barrier-free design, contact the Canadian Standards Association (416-747-4044) and request the CSA Standard B651-95 Barrier Free Design booklet. It is available in both English and French.

22. Where can I get more information on the ODA?

Additional information, including Backgrounders and Frequently Asked Questions, is available from:

The Accessibility Directorate of Ontario
Ministry of Citizenship
3rd Floor,
400 University Ave.
Toronto, ON M7A 2R9
Tel: (voice) 416-314-7541; Toll-free 1-888-520-5828
TTY/TDD 416-326-0148; Toll-free: 1-888-335-6611
Fax: 416-314-7307
E-mail: ODA@mczcr.gov.on.ca
or the Accessibility Directorate of Ontario web portal at:
<http://www.gov.on.ca/citizenship/accessibility/index.html>

A general guide to annual accessibility planning is available at the following link on the Accessibility Directorate of Ontario website:

<http://www.gov.on.ca/citizenship/accessibility/english/accessibleplanningguide.htm>

The Paths to Equal Opportunity website also provides extensive information on accessibility and disability issues at: <http://www.equalopportunity.on.ca>



Section 6

Suggested Reference Materials/Resources

Suggested Reference Material/Resources

Note:

In addition to the following resources, consult the links provided on the Ministry of Citizenship's website (<http://www.gov.on.ca/citizenship/accessibility/index.html>) and on the Paths to Equal Opportunity website (www.equalopportunity.on.ca/eng_g/links)

Accessibility Planning Resources for School Boards:

Accessibility Ontario – Guide to Annual Accessibility Planning

<http://www.gov.on.ca/citizenship/accessibility/english/accessibleplanningguide.htm>

The *Ontarians with Disabilities Act, 2001*

<http://www.gov.on.ca/citizenship/accessibility/english/act2001.htm>

Government of Ontario – Paths to Equal Opportunity

A-Z index – Accessibility in Educational environments

http://www.equalopportunity.on.ca/eng_g/subject/index.asp?action=search_4&dir_id=1071

Ontario Human Rights Commission - *Policy and Guidelines on Disability and the Duty to Accommodate* <http://www.ohrc.on.ca/english/publications/disability-policy.shtml>

Enablelink (Canadian Abilities Foundation) Directory of Canadian Disability Links

http://www.enablelink.org/resources/links_to.html

Directory for Accessibility

<http://www.accessibilitydirectory.ca>

Adaptive Technology Resource Centre

<http://www.utoronto.ca/atrc>

Ontario Interpreter Services (OIS)

<http://www.chs.ca/services/ois.html>

Canadian Standards Association:

B651-95 Barrier-Free Design

B480-02 – Customer Service Standard for People with Disabilities

<http://www.csa.ca>

Playability Tool Kit: Building Accessible Playspaces

<http://www.opassoc.on.ca/toolkit.asp>

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A Few Key Ontario Disability Organizations:

Canadian National Institute for the Blind (CNIB)
<http://www.cnib.ca>

Canadian Hearing Society
<http://www.chs.ca>

Canadian Mental Health Association – Ontario
<http://www.ontario.cmha.ca>

Community Living Ontario
<http://www.oacl.on.ca>

Multiple Sclerosis Society of Canada – Ontario Division
<http://www.mssociety.ca/ontario>

Learning Disabilities Association of Ontario
<http://www.ldao.on.ca>

Little People of Ontario
<http://www.lpo.on.ca>

Ontario Brain Injury Association
<http://www.obia.on.ca>

Canadian Paraplegic Association – Ontario
<http://www.canparaplegic.org/on>

Le Phénix
<http://www.lephenix.on.ca>

Ontario March of Dimes
<http://www.dimes.on.ca>

The Easter Seal Society – Ontario
<http://www.easterseals.org>

AboutFace International
<http://www.aboutfaceinternational.org>