

ANNUAL ACCESSIBILITY PLAN
FOR THE
YORK REGION DISTRICT SCHOOL BOARD



YEAR FOUR REPORT

OCTOBER 2006

Bill Hogarth
Director of Education

Bill Crothers
Chair of the Board

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.

“It is our hope that all parents, students and employee groups become familiar with accessibility issues and work together to fulfill our mission of providing a community that is safe, inviting and fully accessible to all.” (Bill Hogarth, Director of Education)



On behalf of the staff and administration of the York Region District School Board, welcome.

Learning in York Region's public schools is a sacred trust. As publicly-supported and accountable employees, we believe that York Region District School Board students have a right to feel safe, academically challenged, nurtured, and respected. Each one is a capable learner and, as a system, we are responsible for preparing them to become contributing citizens within our global economy.

A supportive learning community, however, is incomplete without the assistance of parents and regional partners. With your support, we can improve the quality of educational programs and services for all students. With your involvement, we can ensure that York Region public school students develop their skills, interests, and talents to the fullest potential.

If after reviewing this report, you can think of ways to make our school board more informative and accessible, please drop us a line. We are particularly interested in identifying, removing and preventing all barriers that limit the full participation of our students, their families and our staff members.

With warmest regards,

Bill Hogarth

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1. INTRODUCTION

The purpose of the Ontarians with Disabilities Act, 2001 (ODA) is to improved 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. To this end the ODA requires YRDSB and all school boards to prepare an annual accessibility plan; to consult with people with disabilities in the preparation of this plan; and to make the plan public.

People with disabilities represent a portion of the YRDSB population. To that end, enhancing the ability of these members of our community whether they are students, teachers, support staff, parents, volunteers or other community members will have only positive effects for our Board and the quality of their life. This annual plan is prepared by the YRDSB “O.D.A. Team”. The plan describes:

- The measures the YRDSB has taken over the past year; and
- The measures the YRDSB intends to take over the next year.

The plan will be accomplished with the financial resources of the Board and its ability to fund the projects.

2. DEFINITIONS

A number of terms used throughout the Plan are clarified by the following definitions.

BARRIER:

-anything that prevents a person with a disability from full participating in all aspects of society because of his or her disability, including:

- Physical barrier: - Objects added to the environment: doors, windows, elevators, furniture, workstations, recreational facilities, playgrounds, bathroom hardware, etc.
- Architectural barrier: -building design, area adjacent to the building, shape of room, size of doorways, etc.
- Information barrier: -inadequate or incomprehensible signage, difficulties reading brochures, forms, manuals, web sites, fax transmissions, equipment labels, computer screens, etc.
- Communication barrier: -difficulties receiving information in person or by telephone; difficulties interacting with receptionists or other staff; difficulties receiving training.
- Attitudinal barrier: -staff who do not know how to communicate with people with disabilities; staff who refuse to provide service; discriminatory behaviours.
- Technological barrier: -computers, photocopiers, fax machines, telephones and switches, inadequate or inappropriate assistive technologies.
- Policy or a practice: -rules, regulations and protocols that prevent on from performing their job satisfactorily; or from serving the public; or that restrict public participation.

- **Disability:**

- 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
- f. Established under the Workplace Safety and Insurance Act, 1997; (“handicap”).

ACCESSIBILITY:

Ability to be reached; easy to approach, enter, speak with or use.

3. GOAL OF THE PLAN

Our goal is to make YRDSB accessible to all stakeholders including students, their families, staff members and visitors. We aim to ensure conditions that invite the full participation of the community.

4. OBJECTIVES OF THE PLAN

In order to ensure optimum accessibility for all, this plan:

- a. Describes the process for identifying, removing and preventing barriers that limit the participation of people with disabilities.
- b. Outlines the process for reviewing our progress in addressing barriers.
- c. Lists the accomplishments in the area of “barrier removal”.
- d. Describes goals for next year’s accessibility improvement initiatives.

5. COMMITMENT TO ACCESSIBILITY PLANNING

The YRDSB is committed to working with members of the O.D.A. Accessibility team in taking a pro-active approach to barrier identification/removal/prevention. This will be done by:

- Ensuring a regular review of policies and procedures to ensure compliance the goals of the Accessibility Plan
- Improving access to programs, facilities and services for all stakeholders
- Establishing an O.D.A. Accessibility team that includes representation from all employee unions/federations, trustees, staff
- Conducting regular consultations with people with disabilities.

6. The YRDSB O.D.A. ACCESSIBILITY TEAM

The team members include representation from the following groups:

- Superintendent
- Trustees (including a Student Trustee)
- ETFO
- OSSTF
- CUPE 1734
- CUPE 1196
- ETFO-OT
- Public Affairs (Communications)
- SEAC (Special Education Advisory Committee)
- YRAC (York Region District School Board)
- Regional Special Education Team
- Disability Management (Employee Services)
- Curriculum and Instructional Services
- Plant Services
- Planning Services

7. BARRIER REMOVAL INITIATIVES

PLANT SERVICES

Accessibility Projects Completed during 2005 – 2006 School Year

Bayview SS	Design for Disabled Lift	\$50,000
Bayview SS	Installation of Lift (to be finished in 2006-7)	\$350,000
Ashton Meadows PS	Library Door Opener	\$3658
Blue Willow PS	Ramps at entrance and Parking Lot	\$ 3530
Bogart PS	Ramp to Portable	\$5500
Brownridge PS	Door Openers	\$14282
Fairwood PS	HC Washroom Door Opener	\$5490
Huron Heights SS	Door Openers	\$4,000
Newmarket HS	HC Washroom Door Openers and Communication System	\$6715
R.L. Graham PS	Door openers	\$9,084
Thornlea SS	HC Washroom door opener	\$3,379

PLANNING SERVICES

The York Region District School Board continues to be one of the fastest growing school boards in Canada, and has grown by 9,000 elementary and 3,825 secondary school students since 2001.

The York Region District School Board has constructed a total of 50 new elementary schools and 8 secondary schools since 1998, as well as 28 additions to schools. At the present time an additional 17 new elementary schools, 3 secondary schools and 9 additions are under design or have started construction. The Board has also recently committed to a replacement school strategy which will replace 10 existing schools with new facilities.

All of the 125 school projects have been designed to improve accessibility by providing buildings which are physically accessible and have barrier free washrooms.

The Planning department includes within the prospectus document which governs school design sections related to accessibility, and examines with plant staff and each school architect ways to improve accessibility for staff, students and the community within school buildings.

With respect to the renovation of existing schools to improve accessibility, the Board has through the capital plan submission to the Ministry of Education identified several schools for improvements to accessibility, and has committed to making all buildings accessible over a ten year timeframe subject to funding being made available.

SPECIAL EDUCATION PROGRAMS

Our staff members at **Regional Special Education Services** have experienced first hand the impact that education has on reducing attitudinal barriers which may prevent some individuals from fully participating in society.

The work of the ODA committee serves as a catalyst to many of our existing programs to further educate individuals and groups towards more inclusive learning environments and workplaces.

The Abilities Awareness Program is one example of how a group of motivated individuals in the York Region District School Board have come together to make a significant difference for students, staff, and community members. The program has been in place for ten years in YRDSB.

The Abilities Awareness Program is an experiential, school-based initiative designed to increase awareness of people with differing abilities and demonstrate how you can treat all people with respect and empathy

The program strives to promote the key themes of respect, empathy, and responsibility

Abilities Awareness is a dynamic, experiential workshop in which participants rotate through stations that provide activities simulating a variety of disabilities

Stations that are frequently presented include: People with Physical Disabilities; People who are Deaf or Hard of Hearing; People who have Developmental Disabilities; People who are Blind or Visually Impaired; People who have Speech or Language Disabilities; People with Learning Disabilities and People with Autism or Pervasive Developmental Disorders.

At each station, students and staff participate in a variety of activities that stimulates discussion and encourages thinking about issues of equity - for example, students may have to negotiate through narrow doorways in a wheelchair, or they may be asked to take notes from a lesson while experiencing a simulated hearing impairment. Discussions about

appropriate strategies to assist in each situation are facilitated following the simulation exercises.

The program travels to schools and presents the stations in the regular school environment.

The Abilities Awareness Program has been enthusiastically received by elementary and secondary schools within York Region over the past decade - thousands of students and staff have participated.

This program was originally designed to educate children and it has evolved into an educational program for people of all ages.

In addition, the program has been presented annually to Teacher candidates at York University, other school boards and through teacher workshops.

Many of the themes presented and reinforced by Abilities Awareness provide a natural connection to Board initiatives; for example, Character Matters offers many overlapping concepts.

Themes presented include respect and empathy for others; and the concepts that we are “More Alike Than Different” and we understand others when we are able to “Walk A Mile In their Shoes”.

Other important concepts the program communicates are that:

- Everyone has unique abilities and talents
- Our attitudes are important in determining how all people experience community
- It is important that we see the person first and the disability second and
- "Its what's inside that counts"

Schools request presentations through the Organizing Committee of The Abilities Awareness Program. The committee is a multidisciplinary team consisting of Physical and Occupational Therapists, Specialized Teachers, Work Experience Coordinators, Speech Language Pathologists, Hearing and Vision Teachers and Educational Assistants within Special Education.

This program is extremely popular and in high demand, which is a true indication of how our school communities continually strive to create accessible and equitable learning environments.

DISABILITY MANAGEMENT (EMPLOYEE SERVICES)

Our Disability Management team consists of professionals who work to support employees who are having difficulties attending work due to a disability. Each year we assist hundreds of employees to either return to work, stay at work, or apply for suitable disability benefits. Our program is based on human rights legislation and is a joint effort between management and the union/federation, aimed at supporting employees. All cases are dealt with in a consistent manner; however, each accommodation is unique to the individual's particular abilities and working environment. Specific accommodations are put in place in order to ensure that employees are able to participate and contribute, with dignity, to the best of their ability. All medical information gathered throughout the process is confidential.

8. PREVENTING NEW BARRIERS

Through the use of the newly created brochure (Access for All), all system leaders will consult with staff members in raising awareness and inviting input and advice in helping to identify/remove and prevent barriers. The brochure will be used to encourage the appropriate use of language in reference to disabilities and people with disabilities. The brochure is available as an attachment to the AODA report on the York Region District School Board website (www.yrdsb.edu.on.ca) and clicking on the “Access for All” icon.

BARRIER IDENTIFICATION METHODOLOGIES

The O.D.A. Accessibility Team will employ the following strategies in dealing with barrier identification/removal/prevention:

- Presentation to the Board of Trustees
- Presentations to Managers, Principals and Vice-Principals
- Distribution of the “Access for All” brochure
- Use of the “Barrier Buster” on the YRDSB web-site
- Inviting individuals and/or groups of people with disabilities to the scheduled O.D.A. Accessibility Team meeting.
- Reviewing Policies on a regular basis in order to ensure compliance with the goals of the Accessibility Plan.
- Development and distribution of “Access for All – Barrier Buster Tips” flyers that detail specific steps schools/departments can take in ensuring appropriate accommodations for students/staff/parents/visitors with disabilities.

9. REVIEW AND MONITORING PROCESS

Monthly O.D.A. Accessibility Team meetings will be held in order to review and monitor our progress to attaining our stated goals. An annual report is made by the Superintendent of Employee Services to the Coordinating Council of Superintendents. This report is also presented to the Board each fall. The annual report is posted on the York Region District School Board website (www.yrdsb.edu.on.ca) along with any additional material that will be useful in the identification, removal and/or prevention of barriers to people with disabilities.

10. COMMUNICATION OF THE PLAN

The posting of the Annual O.D.A. Accessibility Plan is to be communicated to all York Region District School Board locations through an e-mail memo to the system from the Superintendent of Employee Services. This will occur each fall immediately following the posting of the Plan.

11. O.D.A. ACCESSIBILITY TEAM MEMBERS

Loralea Carruthers, Trustee

Mary Cromwell, President (CUPE 1196)

Lesley Crossley, Vice-Principal

Beth Dolson, Administrative Assistant

Christina Doyle, Teacher (ETFO)

Janet Hicks, Manager, Employee Services

Sarah Kahan, President (CUPE 1734)

Lynn Lockhart-Menzies, Teacher (Regional Sp. Ed.)

Flora MacDonald, Member of SEAC

Rose McCarthy, Employee Relations Officer

Lewis Morgulis, Manager

Jaimini Randev, Superintendent of Employee Services

Ross Virgo, Public Affairs Officer

Sandra Ware, Teacher (OSSTF)

Kathy Wosnick, Principal