qathet SD

Accessibility Plan

2025-2028



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Introduction

About SD 47

qathet School District is situated on the northern tip of the Sunshine Coast in the qathet Regional District. We provide public education to approximately 3,200 students in four regular elementary schools, one dual track elementary school, one remote island elementary school, one online learning school (comprised of three campuses), an alternate school and one secondary school.

The School District's student population continues to see growth. There are currently 473 Indigenous students in the district (5.9% of overall student population) and 391 Students with diverse abilities and disabilities (about 6.9% of overall student population).

We have approximately 400 employees within the district, which includes teachers, support staff, educational assistants, principals and vice principals, and management staff. Our district leadership team is comprised of the Superintendent, directors of instruction, director of student support services, secretary treasurer, director of human resources, a district principal of Indigenous education, a district principal of technology, a district principal of early learning and childcare and 16 principals/ vice principals.

Message from the Committee

qathet School District's Accessibility Plan represents our commitment to meet the guidelines and obligations established within the Accessible BC Act . While our commitment is to meet the requirements, we endeavor to ensure that our focus is to move beyond compliance, as we work to identify, prevent, and remove barriers of engagement that people with diverse disabilities face within our school district. Our goal is to create an inclusive environment where all individuals, regardless of their abilities or disabilities, have equal access to education, employment, resources, and support.

Our district is dedicated to inclusion, accessibility, and equity for staff, students and all those interacting with the district. We are committed to improving the experiences of people with disabilities and we encourage our community to share

their feedback and experiences, via the feedback form located on our website www.sd47.bc.ca

Territorial Acknowledgement

We would like to acknowledge and thank the Coast Salish peoples, specifically the ɬaʔamɩn Nation whose traditional territory School District 47 resides on. We value the opportunity to live, learn, and share educational experiences on this traditional territory.

Definitions

The following definitions are provided in the Accessible BC Act and the Developing Your First Accessibility Plan Guide, which was created as part of the Accessible Organization Project led by Disability Alliance BC. These definitions help to guide our work in creating accessibility, inclusion, and equity within SD 47. It is important to note that some terms are not reflective of language used within public education in BC; for example, the Act uses the term "persons with disabilities", rather than persons with "disabilities and diverse abilities", as used in provincial and school district education documentation. For clarify, we have chosen to utilize the Accessible BC Act language.

Accessibility Plan	A plan to identify, remove, and prevent barriers to individuals in or interacting with the organization through the considerations of inclusion, adaptability, diversity, collaboration, self-determination, and universal design.
Adaptability	Disability and accessibility are evolving concepts that change as services, technology, and attitudes change.
Barrier	Anything that prevents a person with a disability from fully participating in all aspects of society, because of their disability. This includes physical barriers, architectural barriers, information or communication

	barriers, attitudinal barriers, technological barriers and policy or practice barrier.
Collaboration	Promoting accessible communities is a shared responsibility and everyone has a role to play. Organizations and communities work together to promote access and inclusion.
Disability	An inability to participate fully and equally in society as a result of the interaction of an impairment and a barrier.
Diversity	Every person is unique. People with disabilities and individuals with varied backgrounds, individual characteristics including race, gender, sexual orientation, religion, and lived experiences greatly inform the experiences of individuals.
Inclusion	All British Columbians, including persons with disabilities, should be able to participate fully and equally in their communities.
Impairment	includes a physical, sensory, mental, intellectual or cognitive impairment, whether permanent, temporary or episodic
Self Determination	Empowering people with disabilities to make their own choices and pursue the lives they wish to live.
Universal Design	The Centre for Excellence in Universal Design defines Universal design as the “design and composition of an environment so that it can be accessed, understood, and used to the greatest extent possible by all people regardless of their age, size, ability or disability

F**ramework Guiding our Work**

School District 47's Accessibility Plan is built upon the principles outlined within the Accessible BC Act. Our commitment to promote and support accessibility is also guided by the global context, the national and the provincial context.

Global Context – United Nations

Canadian Context – Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms, Accessible Canada Act

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

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

Provincial Context –Accessible BC Act

Accessible BC Act Principles

The Accessible BC Act outlines six principles that must be considered by the Working/ Advisory Group in the development of the accessibility plan: inclusion, adaptability, diversity, collaboration, self-determination and universal design. The legislation identifies eight types of accessibility standards that will be developed to remove or prevent barriers. These standards include:

- Employment
- Delivery of service
- The built environment
- Information and communications

- Transportation
- Health
- Education
- Procurement

About our Advisory Committee

qathet District Advisory Committee consists of seven members who represent persons with disabilities and organizations that serve persons with disabilities. One of the group members is Indigenous, three members identify as having a disability or as members of an organization that serves persons with disabilities, one member is a parent of a student with a disability and two members are part of the SD 47 Accessibility Plan Working Group. The Working Group is responsible for the creation of the draft accessibility plan and will gather feedback and seek input from the Advisory Committee.

Purpose of the Committee

Under the Accessible BC Act, prescribed organizations must establish an Accessibility Committee to help identify barriers that individuals who interact within the organization may experience that prevent them from fully participating within the organization (school district). The committee is designed to work collaboratively to create a plan that identifies, removes, and prevents barriers to accessibility. Members of the committee provide feedback and advise the working group on strategies to reduce identified barriers. As per Section 9 of the Act, at least half of the members of the committee, to the extent possible, must be persons with disabilities, or represent a disability serving organization. Committee membership should also reflect the diversity of British Columbia and include Indigenous peoples.

Overview of the Plan

qathet school district is committed to working towards ensuring that all staff, students, families and those that interact with the district have equitable access

and reduced barriers. Our goal is to ensure that all members of our community are respected, have the opportunity for meaningful participation and have equitable access to learning. The priority areas highlight our commitment to ensuring alignment with the principles of the Accessible BC Act (inclusion, adaptability, diversity, collaboration, self-determination and universal design). We want to work to ensure that everyone can fully participate in and benefit from our programs, services, and facilities.

Plan Priorities

Priority 1

Assess and gather information in relation to current barriers to accessibility within our District. This information will be provided to the Advisory Group through surveys, working groups and online feedback forms. Barriers to access withing our organization may include;

a. ***Attitudinal*****:** a barrier that arises from the attitudes of staff, students, and the school community, including discriminatory behaviors and lack of disability awareness
b. ***Physical****:* a barrier resulting from a building design that impacts access to the organization.
c. ***Information or Communication***: a barrier that arises from a difficulty receiving information in person, by telephone, or online, interacting with educators, peers, or other staff.
d. ***Systemic****:* when an organization's policies, practices and procedures result in an individual being unable to fully participate withing the organization.
e. ***Technology*****:** when technology can't be accessed by people with disabilities.
f. ***Sensory****:* when sensory information such as lights, sounds, smells, etc. prevent participation in the environment.

The information gathered will be used to determine SD 47 actions within the district to try to remove barriers and improve access for all.

Priority 2

Increased visibility of those with disabilities within the education system and increased meaningful inclusion in schools. Building a universal awareness and understanding of disability, accessibility and barriers to accessibility/ inclusion across our education system.

Feedback Mechanism

a. Feedback Mechanism Development
   On online feedback form has been created and is housed on the SD 47 webpage.
   We wish to gather feedback from our community rightsholders and stakeholders and those that interact / engage with the school district to identify any barriers they have experienced and any suggestions to improve accessibility. The form also allows for feedback on the SD 47 Accessibility Plan; feedback will be considered when reviewing and updating the plan.

b. Monitoring

   The Advisory Group will meet three times per year to monitor and evaluate the current Accessibility Plan. Collectively, we will review feedback and monitor progress within each of the priority areas, adapting our actions as necessary.

c. Evaluating

   The plan will be evaluated and reviewed by the Advisory Group every three years, as per the Accessible BC Act. Information from the online feedback form will be reviewed by the Advisory Group and will help inform updates to the plan.

Appendices

Appendix A: About Disability

The Disability Continuum (contributed by Untapped Accessibility and BC CAISE)

There is no universally accepted meaning for the word "disability". However, the Ontario Human Rights Code provides definitions of disability that form our guiding principles. Definitions of disability can be placed on a continuum. At one end, disability is explained in terms of medical conditions (medical model). At the opposite end, disability is explained in terms of the social and physical contexts in which it occurs (environmental model).

The medical model focuses on deficiencies, symptoms and treatments. The World Health Organization's (WHO) 1976 definition for disability, for example, is "any restriction or lack (resulting from an impairment) of ability to perform an activity in the manner or within the range considered normal for a human being." Medical model definitions promote the idea that disability is a deviation from the norm.

Many people with disabilities are troubled by definitions that regard disability as abnormal, preferring instead to portray disability as commonplace, natural, and in fact, inevitable. As people age, they experience gradual declines in visual acuity, auditory sensitivity, range of motion, bodily strength and mental powers. Significant functional limitations affect almost half of people between the ages of 55 and 79, and over 70% of people over 80 (World Health Organization WHO report entitled "Aging and Health", 2015). Beyond middle age, disability is the norm.

The environmental model explains disability in relation to social and physical contexts. In this view, the environment, not an individual's medical condition, causes disability. For example, during an electrical blackout, a person who is completely blind can effortlessly navigate around the home, hammer nails, and, if a Braille user, read a novel. A sighted person would be unable to perform these tasks easily, if at all. In this example, the environment disables the sighted person.

The environmental model emphasizes that people with disabilities are capable individuals, and it is the barriers in the built and human environments, not their medical conditions, that create disability. Disability occurs when the world is designed only for a certain way of living, without considering the natural variation

among human beings. Barriers are created by humans, and modifying how we live, the tools we use, and our understanding of the proper way to do things can eliminate or minimize design problems that cause barriers. Systematic barriers can be eliminated by modifying policies, plans, and processes. Attitudes that cause barriers can be addressed through disability awareness, respect, and positive interactions with people with disabilities.

Types of Disability and Functional Limitations

A person's disability may make it physically or cognitively challenging to perform everyday tasks such as operating a keyboard, reading a sign, differentiating colours, distinguishing sounds, climbing stairs, grasping small items, remembering words, or doing arithmetic.

There are many kinds of disabilities, including physical, sensory, hearing, mental health, developmental and learning. Disabilities can be visible or invisible.

Visual Disabilities

Visual disabilities reduce one’s ability to see clearly. Very few people are totally blind. Some have limited vision such as tunnel vision, where a person has a loss of peripheral or side vision, or a lack of central vision, which means they cannot see straight ahead. Some can see the outline of objects while others can see the direction of light. Impaired vision can restrict a person’s ability to read signs, locate landmarks or see hazards. In some cases, it may be difficult to tell if a person has a visual disability. Others may use a guide dog or white cane.

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

- Identify yourself when you approach the person and speak directly to them.
- Speak normally and clearly.
- Avoid referring to the disability or using phrases like “handicapped”.
- Unless it is an emergency, only touch the person if you have been given permission.
- If you offer assistance, wait until you receive permission.
- Offer your arm (the elbow) to guide the person and walk slowly.
- Service animals are working and have to pay attention at all times. Refrain

from engaging with the animal.

- If you're giving directions or verbal information, be precise and clear. For example, if you're approaching a door or an obstacle, say so.
- When entering a room, show the individual to a chair, or guide them to a comfortable location.
- Identify landmarks or other details to orient the person to the environment around them.
- Ensure you say good-bye prior to leaving the individual.
- Be patient. Things may take a little longer.

Hard of Hearing and Deafness

People who have hearing loss may be deaf or hard of hearing. Like other disabilities, hearing loss has a wide variety of degrees. People who are hard of hearing may require assistive devices when communicating. While some people may use sign language, notes or hearing aids when communicating, others may also use email, pagers, TTY telephone service or Bell Canada Relay Service.

Here are some suggestions to help you interact with people who are deaf or hard of hearing:

- Always ask how you can help. Don't shout.
- Avoid referring to the disability or using phrases like "handicapped".
- Attract the person's attention before speaking. The best way is a gentle touch on the shoulder or gently waving your hand.
- Make sure you are in a well-lit area where the person can see your face.
- Look at and speak directly to the person. Address the person, not their interpreter.
- If necessary, ask if another method of communicating would be easier, for example a pen and paper.
- Keep your face clearly visible when speaking.
- Be clear and precise when giving directions and repeat or rephrase if necessary. Make sure you have been understood.
- Service animals are working and have to pay attention at all times. Refrain from engaging with the animal.
- Any personal (e.g., financial) matters should be discussed in a private room to avoid other people overhearing.

- Be patient. Communication for people who are deaf is different because their first language may not be English. It may be American Sign Language (ASL).
- If the person uses a hearing aid, try to speak in an area with few competing sounds.

Physical Disabilities

There are many types and degrees of physical disabilities and not all require a wheelchair. For example, people who have arthritis, heart or lung conditions, or amputations may also have difficulty moving, standing or sitting. It may be difficult to identify a person with a physical disability.

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

- Speak normally and directly to the person rather than someone who is with them.
- People with physical disabilities often have their own ways of doing things. Ask before you help.
- Avoid referring to the disability or using phrases like “handicapped”.
- Be patient and be sure you understand their needs.
- Unless it is an emergency, refrain from touching any assistive devices, including wheelchairs.
- Provide the person with information about accessible features of the immediate environment (automatic doors, accessible washrooms, etc.).

Intellectual Disabilities

People with intellectual or developmental disabilities may have difficulty doing many things most of us take for granted. These disabilities can mildly or profoundly limit one’s ability to learn. You may not be able to know that someone has one of these disabilities unless you are told.

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

- As much as possible, treat the person with an intellectual disability like anyone else. They may understand more than you think, and they will appreciate you treating them with respect.
- Don’t assume what a person can or cannot do.
- Avoid referring to the disability or using phrases like “handicapped”.
- Use simple words and short sentences.
- Make sure the person understands what you’ve said.
- If you can’t understand what’s being said, ask again.
- Give one piece of information at a time.
- Be polite and patient.
- Speak directly to the person, not to someone who is with the person.

Learning or Cognitive Disabilities

Learning or cognitive disabilities can result in a host of different communications difficulties for people. They can be subtle, as in having difficulty reading, or more pronounced, but they can interfere with the person’s ability to receive, express or process information. You may not be able to know that someone has one of these disabilities unless you are told, or you notice the way people act, ask questions or body language.

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

- Patience and a willingness to find a way to communicate are your best tools.
- Recognize that some people with communication difficulties use augmentative communication systems such as Signed English and Picture Exchange System.
- When you know that someone with a learning disability needs help, ask how you can best help.
- Speak normally and clearly, and directly to the person
- Take some time — people with some kinds of disabilities may take a little longer to understand and respond.
- Try to find ways to provide information in a way that works best for them. For example, have a paper and pen handy.
- If you’re dealing with a child, be patient, encouraging and supportive.
- Avoid referring to the disability or using phrases like “handicapped”.

- Be courteous and patient and the person will let you know how to best provide service in a way that works for them.

Mental Health Disabilities

People with mental health disabilities look like everyone else. You won't know that the person has a mental health disability unless you're informed of it. But if someone is experiencing difficulty in controlling their symptoms or is in a crisis, you may need to help out. Be calm and professional and let the person tell you how you can best help.
Here are some suggestions to help you interact with people with mental health disabilities:

- Treat people with a mental health disability with the same respect and consideration you have for everyone else.
- Be confident and reassuring and listen to persons with a mental health disability and their needs.
- If someone appears to be in a crisis, ask him or her to tell you the best way to help.
- Take the person with a mental health disability seriously, and work with them to meet their needs.

Speech and Language Disabilities

Some people have communication challenges. It could be the result of cerebral palsy, hearing loss, or another condition that makes it difficult to pronounce words, causes slurring or stuttering, or not being able to express oneself or understand written or spoken language. Some people who have severe difficulties may use communication boards, sign language or other assistive devices.

Here are some suggestions to help you interact with people with speech and language disabilities:

- Just because a person has one disability doesn't mean they have another. For example, if a person has difficulty speaking; make no assumption they have an intellectual disability as well.
- If you don't understand, ask the person to repeat the information.

- Avoid referring to the disability or using phrases like "handicapped".

- If you are able, ask questions that can be answered 'yes' or 'no'.
- Take some time. Be patient and polite and give the person whatever time they need to get their point across.
- Allow the individual to finish their sentences themselves without interruption.
- Patience, respect and a willingness to find a way to communicate are your best tools.

Deaf-Blind Disabilities

A person who is deafblind cannot see or hear to some extent. This results in greater difficulties in accessing information and managing daily activities. Most people who are deafblind will be accompanied by an intervener, a professional who helps with communicating. Interveners are trained in special sign language that involves touching the hands of the client in a two-hand, manual alphabet or finger spelling, and may guide and interpret for their client.

Here are some suggestions to help you interact with people who are deafblind:

- Make no assumptions about what a person can or cannot do. Some deaf-blind people have some sight or hearing, while others have neither.
- Avoid referring to the disability or using phrases like “handicapped”.
  A deaf-blind person is likely to explain to you how to communicate with them or give you an assistance card or a note explaining how to communicate with them.
- Speak directly to the person, as you normally would, not to the intervener. Identify yourself to the intervener when you approach the person who is deaf- blind.
- Don’t touch service animals – they are working and have to pay attention at all times.
- Unless it’s an emergency, refrain from touching a deaf-blind person without permission.

Appendix B: Suggested References/Resources

Global, Canadian and Local Accessibility Context and Legislation

- United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities
  Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms
- BC Framework for Accessibility Legislation
- Accessible British Columbia Act
- BC Accessibility Legislation Plan Language Summary

Accessibility Planning Resources for Schools and School Boards

- Accessibility Hub
- Universal Design
- Special Education Technology BC (SET BC)
- Accessible Resource Centre - BC
- Standards Council of Canada
- B6521-95 Barrier-Free Design
- A Guide to Creating Accessible Play Spaces (Rick Hansen Foundation)
- Canadian National Institute for the Blind (CNIB)
- Canadian Hard of Hearing Association
- Canadian Hearing Services
- Accessibility | Canadian Hearing Services
- Auditory Outreach Provincial Resource Program
- Provincial Inclusion Outreach Program (Complex Needs)
- Multiple Sclerosis Society of Canada
- Learning Disabilities Association of Canada
- Brain Injury Canada
- Spinal Cord Injury Canada
- Tourette Canada
- Kelty Mental Health (BC Children's Hospital)
- Gifted Children's Association of BC