

OUR VSB

Accessibility Plan

2023-2024



*With deep gratitude and respect, we are
honoured to be learning and unlearning on
the ancestral and unceded lands of the
x^wməθk^wəyəm (Musqueam),
Skwxwú7mesh Úxwumixw (Squamish
Nation) & səlilwətaʔ (Tsleil-Waututh Nation).*

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About Our School District

The Vancouver School Board (VSB) is proud to provide exceptional learning experiences for students. As a large, urban school district, VSB is one of Canada's most diverse school systems.

Equity and inclusivity are at the forefront of our approach to education. VSB creates learning environments where every student can thrive by prioritizing students' needs, applying evidence informed practices and building relationships.

VSB's culture reflects the diversity of our city. Students enrolled in VSB come from varied backgrounds and lived experiences and are encouraged to explore and share their unique selves and gifts. Our commitment to students goes beyond academics. Students' overall well-being and sense of belonging are equally important. We strive to build a school system where every student can be their authentic self and succeed throughout their learning journey.

In addition to the approximately 52,000 students the VSB serves, the District employs more than 7,700 staff who work across 124 sites and facilities. This includes employees from 14 different union groups as well as exempt staff. Accessibility is about everyone in our community, including our employees, students and their families and the broader community.

As a learning organization, we seek to continually improve outcomes in service. For more information about our school district, visit <https://www.vsb.bc.ca>

Executive Summary

Vancouver School Board's Journey to Accessibility

We're on a mission to make our schools and worksites places where everyone feels at home. We're talking about a world where diversity is celebrated, and accessibility is the norm.

Our Commitment:

- **Inclusivity:** We're dedicated to creating spaces that welcome all students, families, staff and community members.

- **Equity:** Our actions are meant to ensure that everyone has the opportunity to thrive.

Our Strategy:

- **Equity Statement:** This is our pledge to challenge and eliminate any form of inequity or oppression.
- **Accessibility Committee:** This group brings together individuals with various experiences, including of those with disabilities, to guide us in removing barriers and setting up best practices for a barrier-free future.

Our Actions:

- **Audit and Improvement:** A 2021 accessibility audit sparked enhancements across our facilities, from new buildings to playgrounds, ensuring they're equipped with features that welcome everyone.
- **Operational Changes:** We've made significant strides within our operations to support our vision of accessibility.

Looking Ahead:

- **Three-Year Plan:** We're crafting a living plan for 2024-2027, shaped by the Accessibility Committee and enriched by community feedback through surveys and focus groups.
- Together, we're building a future where every member of the VSB community can participate fully and meaningfully.

Framework Guiding our Work

In June 2021, the provincial government passed the *Accessible B.C. Act*. Its purpose is to establish a legal framework for identifying, removing and preventing barriers to full and equal participation of people with disabilities in British Columbia.

The goal of the Act is to support identification, prevention and removal of barriers that people with disabilities face in their day-to-day lives. The Act requires public sector organizations – including school districts – to establish an Accessibility Committee, create an Accessibility Plan, and have a mechanism to

both receive feedback about the plan and about how accessible the institution is, generally.

Central to our [Education Plan](#) (the District’s strategic plan) is an Equity Statement which also guides the work of the Accessibility Committee.

“The Vancouver School Board – a large, urban school district located on the unceded, traditional lands of the xʷməθkʷəy̓əm (Musqueam), Sḵwxwú7mesh Úxwumixw (Squamish Nation) and səlilwətał (Tsleil-Waututh) Nations – respects and supports Indigenous ways of knowing and learning. VSB will create an equitable learning environment where every child can experience a deep sense of belonging and is free to pursue pathways of learning in ways that are authentic to themselves. VSB will achieve this by:

- having students see themselves and their communities in the curriculum and in the staff throughout the District;
- prioritizing student needs by making informed decisions and engaging in open communication with rightsholders and stakeholders; and
- actively fighting systems of oppression through relationship building, ongoing communication and transparency. The VSB commitment to equity will be informed by humility and accountability.”

- *VSB Equity Statement*

Our Approach

VSB is committed to providing an environment that is accessible to students, families, staff and broader school communities. When we say “an environment that is accessible” we include the removal of: attitudinal barriers, information and communication barriers, physical barriers and constructed spaces, systemic barriers and technology barriers.

We are dedicated to continually improve accessibility and remove barriers to provide greater equity for everyone. Our understanding of how to remove barriers to accessibility is evolving and we value the input and feedback from students, their families, staff and the broader community.

VSB has established an Accessibility Committee that represents students’ families, staff and partner organizations that support individuals with

disabilities. This group was created to ensure that engagement with a broader group was thoughtful and ensured that the group included a mix of skills, backgrounds, viewpoints as well as lived-experiences, and that those most impacted by issues of accessibility were centered in our work.

In addition to the Accessibility Committee, we have an internal Accessibility Working Group that brings together District staff to discuss, review and prioritize accessibility projects across the District.

About our Committees

Accessibility Committee

The *Accessible B.C. Act* states that the Accessibility Advisory Committee:

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

The Accessibility Committee, must, to the extent possible, have members who are selected in accordance with the following goals:

- a) At least half of the members are
 - i. Persons with disabilities, or
 - ii. Individual who support, or are from organizations that support, persons with disabilities;
- b) The members describes in paragraph (a) reflect the diversity of persons with disabilities in British Columbia;
- c) At least one of the members is an Indigenous person
- d) The committee reflects the diversity of persons in British Columbia

Our Accessibility Committee:

Will Chan	Project Coordinator
David Delorme	District Principal of Indigenous Education
Ingrid Kusnierczyk	Vancouver Pediatric Team, Vancouver Coastal Health

Meghan McLeod	District Parents Advisory Council (DPAC)
Alison Ogden	Associate Superintendent
Rosie Poetschke	Director of Instruction
Em Rogness	Professional and Administrative Staff Association (PASA)

This group has provided input and guidance in establishing a process to gather input to build a larger Accessibility Committee in the 2024-2025 school year, as well as how to gather input to inform a three-year Accessibility Plan. The *Accessible BC Act* is clear: accessibility work must center those most impacted by accessibility issues. The Accessibility Committee is committed to ensuring that people with lived experiences are those that are guiding the work.

Internal Accessibility Working Group

An Internal Accessibility Working Group was established in August 2021. The group meets monthly to discuss, review and prioritize accessibility projects across the District. Requests come to this working group through schools, the Director of Instruction for Learning Services, the accessibility@vsb.bc.ca email, students’ families, as well as planning for incoming students with accessibility needs. The group is comprised of the following staff:

Will Chan	Project Coordinator
John Duong	Manager – Maintenance
Ron Macdonald	Director of Facilities
Alison Ogden	Associate Superintendent
Geoff Pearmain	Supervisor – Grounds Maintenance
Rosie Poetschke	Director of Instruction, Learning Services
Owen Spooner	Supervisor – Maintenance

Your Voice Matters – Sharing your accessibility feedback

VSB welcomes and seeks ongoing feedback about accessibility. Input will help ensure our schools, offices, programs and services are accessible to students, families, staff and the broader Vancouver community. We are dedicated to

continually improving accessibility and removing barriers to provide greater equity for our community.

To help us identify specific barriers members of the community may face when accessing VSB services, please email accessibility@vsb.bc.ca with the following information:

- What you were trying to access
- Where the barrier happened/exists and what the barrier is
- Any recommendations you might have

Thank you in advance for sharing your feedback. It will be reviewed and considered by the Accessibility Committee.

Next Steps

Early work to date has been informed by the Accessibility Committee (informed by the *Accessible BC Act*), with the intention to center the perspectives of people with lived experiences. To develop a three-year plan, the Accessibility Committee will gather feedback. During National AccessAbility Week 2024, a survey will be available to gather input and experiences from students, their families, staff and the broader Vancouver community.

Survey results gathered will help inform our ongoing work, in addition to information that has been collected through internal facilities surveys, reported accessibility needs through the accessibility@vsb.bc.ca email, and needs highlighted through internal processes by staff. Based on information collected, additional focus groups will provide further input to help refine a three-year Accessibility Plan to be established (2024 through 2027).

The Accessibility Committee will continue to meet to inform direction for the development, monitoring and evaluation of the Accessibility Plan. The Committee will also work to ensure there is appropriate and diverse representation on the Committee.

Our Accessibility Work to Date

Accessibility Audit

A physical accessibility audit of schools was undertaken and completed in February 2022. The audit examined vehicular access, exterior entrances, washroom facilities, interior level access and emergency accessibility features. This information has been used to inform the work and project prioritization of the Internal Accessibility Working Group.

Internal Accessibility Project Tracking System

As part of the work of the Internal Accessibility Working Group, all projects related to accessibility are now tracked over time. This allows staff from facilities, maintenance, grounds and learning services departments to have a view of the needs of the entire school district and prioritize ongoing accessibility improvements.

Secondary Inclusion Working Group

A group of secondary administrators has been working with other District staff since July 2023 to bring together educators to discuss how to best support inclusion in secondary school settings. Discussions have included how to best use staffing to support the diversity of students' needs within a school as well as hearing from schools who are using more inclusive models of support. Vancouver has a history of establishing sheltered programs to provide support to students and the discussions have centered how to provide support for students in their community school.

Emphasis on Equity, Diversity and Inclusion

Board [Policy 21](#) states that “The District believes in equitable treatment for all individuals regardless of race, colour, ancestry, ethnic origin, religion, socioeconomic status, gender, sexual orientation physical or mental ability or political beliefs. The letter and the spirit of the *Canadian Human Rights Act* and the BC Human Rights Code shall be carefully observed, enforced, and supported so that all members of the school community may work together in an atmosphere of respect and tolerance for individual differences.” The school

district’s focus on diversity, equity and inclusion is foundational in building a sense of belonging for our accessibility efforts.

Accessibility in New Buildings, Seismic Upgrades and Playgrounds

During building construction, upgrades or renovations, accessible features are incorporated in accordance with building codes. Examples include: universal washrooms, elevators, lifts, ramps and automatic door openers. When designing new playgrounds or refurbishing existing ones, accessibility and play elements that address both sensory and physical needs are intentionally included. This includes play structures that students with physical and sensory needs can use with their friends.

Vancouver District Student Council (VDSC)

In the 2023-2024 school year, VDSC worked to develop a set of guidelines titled, “Inclusion and Accessibility: 5 Questions to Ask as a Student Leader When Planning an Event” to guide their work in making student-organized school events more accessible and inclusive.

Glossary

Glossary (these definitions are adapted from the foundational document BC Framework for Accessibility Legislation)

Accessibility Advisory Committee (AAC): an official group established with people with disabilities to develop an accessibility plan and feedback mechanism.

Accessibility Plan: a plan, developed by an AAC, that identify accessibility challenges and solutions for addressing those challenges.

Barriers: Anything that hinders the full and equal participation in society of a person with a disability (a) caused by environments, attitudes, practices, policies, information, communications or technologies, and (b) affected by intersecting forms of discrimination.

Disability: an inability to participate fully and equally in society as a result of the interaction of an impairment and a barrier.

Inclusion: All British Columbians, including persons with disabilities, should be able to participate fully and equally in their communities.

Adaptability: Accessibility plans should reflect that disability and accessibility are evolving concepts that change as services, technology, and attitudes change.

Diversity: Every person is unique. People with disabilities are individuals with varied backgrounds. Individual characteristics including race, gender, sexual orientation, religion and lived experience greatly inform the experiences of individuals. Accessibility plans should acknowledge the principle of intersectionality and the diversity within the disability community.

Collaboration: Promoting accessible communities is a shared responsibility and everyone has a role to play. Accessibility plans should create opportunities for organizations and communities to work together to promote access and inclusion.

Self-determination: Accessibility plans should seek to empower people with disabilities to make their own choices and pursue the lives they wish to live.

Universal Design: The Centre for Excellence in Universal Design defines Universal Design as “the design and composition of an environment so that it

can be accessed, understood, and used to the greatest extent possible by all people regardless of their age, size, ability or disability.” An accessibility plan should be designed to meet the needs of all people who wish to interact with the organization.

Resources

[Accessible BC Act](#)

[UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities](#)

[Canadian Human Rights Act](#)

[Accessible Canada Act](#)

[BC Human Rights Code](#)

[Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms](#)