



ACCESSIBILITY PLAN

SEPTEMBER 2023–2026



ACKNOWLEDGMENT

We respectfully acknowledge that Surrey Schools resides on the traditional, unceded and shared territories of Coast Salish peoples: The q'ic'əy'—Katzie, the q'wɑ:n'λ'ən'—Kwantlen and the SEMYOME — Semiahmoo First Nations: the stewards of this land since time immemorial.

We highlight this history knowing that relationships and partnerships based on respect with the Indigenous peoples of this land are important for truth and reconciliation.

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INTRODUCTION

A Message from the Superintendent



Dear staff, students, parents, guardians and community members,

The Surrey School District is committed to fostering inclusivity and accessibility for all members of our school communities. We recognize the importance of accessibility in our operations, and we will work hard to ensure our communications, programs, services, schools and district sites are accessible for all students, parents, staff and community members.

This three-year Accessibility Plan is a critical component of our work and identifies system needs, priorities and action plans. It will serve as a guide for our organization, enabling us to set clear objectives, allocate resources effectively and measure our progress.

Drawing on direct feedback from our school communities, this plan also reflects the lived experiences of our school communities, as well as the work of our district's Accessibility Advisory Committee, which includes staff, parents/guardians and students with disabilities.

Together, we can build an organization that embraces accessibility as a core value, ensuring that no individual is left behind or excluded due to barriers. We are excited about the journey ahead and look forward to sharing this Accessibility Plan with you.

Thank you for your continued support.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, which appears to read "Mark Pearmain". The signature is fluid and cursive.

Mark Pearmain
Superintendent | CEO
Surrey School District



About Surrey Schools

“We prepare our learners to think creatively and critically, communicate skillfully, and demonstrate care for self and others.”

With over 77,000 students attending 130 elementary schools, secondary schools, learning centres and additional early learning programs, Surrey Schools is the largest school district in B.C. A recipient of the BC Top Employers and Canada’s Greenest Employer awards, Surrey Schools’ 13,000 employees serve the cities of Surrey, White Rock and the rural area of Barnston Island.

Surrey Schools values an inclusive school district where equity is deeply embedded and diversity welcomed. We are committed to creating and cultivating diverse, inclusive, barrier-free environments for all students and employees, their families and the community. We work to continuously grow and improve practices, celebrate our differences and empower people to promote positive change in our community. Our identity is expressed in the shared values of openness, fairness and tolerance and recognizes the importance of diversity of identity and thought.



Our Commitment to “Nothing About Us, Without Us”

When first engaging in the work that would eventually lead to the creation of this plan, Surrey Schools committed to ensuring that the voices of persons with disabilities and the sentiment behind the phrase “nothing about us, without us” was woven throughout all aspects of the creation of the Accessibility Advisory Committee, the Accessibility Working Group and the Surrey Schools Accessibility Plan. This resulted in the membership of the Accessibility Advisory Committee being almost entirely made up of

persons with disabilities or individuals who support, or are from organizations that support, persons with disabilities. It quickly advanced the relationship between the Accessibility Advisory Committee and the Accessibility Working Group from one based on consultation to that of a collaborative partnership. This commitment has supported Surrey Schools in proudly moving forward with an Accessibility Plan that incorporates all of the suggestions and advice shared by the members of the Accessibility Advisory Committee.

Definitions

Some of the terms used in this Accessibility Plan may not be reflective of the terms currently used in student-focused K–12 public education documentation in British Columbia. An example of this is the use of “persons with disabilities” as opposed to “students with disabilities and diverse abilities” which currently appears in provincial and school district documentation. The terms used in this Accessibility Plan have been selected as they align most closely with those used in the Accessible British Columbia Act and because they are inclusive of students, staff and members of the community who may be interacting with Surrey Schools.

Accessibility: The state of having programs, services and environments that allow all individuals to participate fully in society without encountering barriers.

Accessibility Advisory Committee: A committee established by the school district to assist the district with the identification, removal and prevention of barriers to individuals in or interacting with the district. The Accessibility Advisory Committee consults with the Accessibility Working Group while the Working Group develops, updates, and creates an implementation strategy for the district’s Accessibility Plan. The intent of the Accessibility Advisory Committee is to ensure that the voices of persons with disabilities are heard and that they are considered during Surrey Schools’ ongoing work to become more accessible.

Accessibility Plan: A plan developed by the Accessibility Working Group, in consultation with the Accessibility Advisory Committee, to guide Surrey Schools’ work to identify, remove and prevent barriers to individuals in or interacting with the district. The plan will be reviewed and updated at least once every three years.

Accessibility Working Group: A group formed by the district to develop, update, and create the implementation strategy for the Surrey Schools Accessibility Plan. The Accessibility Working Group is made up of school district employees and includes representation from district departments and schools. The Accessibility Working Group consults with the Accessibility Advisory Committee.

Barrier: Anything that prevents a person with a disability from fully and equally participating in all aspects of society because of their disability. This can include physical, attitudinal, communication or information, policy or practice and technology barriers.

- **Physical Barrier:** A barrier resulting from architectural design or outdoor spaces which can include, certain smells or sounds, internal lighting, configuration of classrooms and meeting rooms and the size and width of halls and doorways.
- **Attitudinal Barrier:** A barrier that arises from the attitudes of people, including discriminatory behaviours, false assumptions and a lack of disability awareness.
- **Communication or Information Barrier:** A barrier that arises when communicating, locating or accessing information, including in-person, by telephone or online. This could include the use of signage, fonts, brochures, forms, manuals and equipment labels.
- **Policy or Practice Barrier:** A barrier resulting from rules, regulations or protocols which could include processes, policies and standard operating practices.
- **Technology Barrier:** Barriers that result from the use of inaccessible devices, platforms, software, programs, photocopiers, fax machines, telephones and switches, including the lack of assistive technologies.

Disability: The state of being unable to participate fully and equally in society as a result of the interaction between an impairment and a barrier.

Impairment: Includes, but not limited to, a physical, sensory, mental, intellectual, or cognitive limitation, whether permanent, temporary or episodic.

Public Feedback Tool: A mechanism for the school district to receive information from the public about the Surrey Schools Accessibility Plan and/or barriers to individuals in or interacting with the organization.



Guiding Framework

Surrey Schools' ongoing work to identify, remove and prevent barriers for persons with disabilities builds upon the actions already taken globally, nationally and provincially. Further information about each of these contexts and the associated legislative actions is provided in Appendix A.

The Accessible British Columbia Act, enacted in June 2021, and the Accessible British Columbia Regulation, which was brought into force in September 2022, were the catalyst for the creation of the Surrey Schools Accessibility Plan. The Regulation requires all school districts in B.C., along with many other prescribed organizations in the province, to ensure they have the following in place by September 1, 2023:

1. An accessibility committee;
2. An accessibility plan; and
3. A tool to receive public feedback on accessibility.

Further information about how Surrey Schools met these three requirements is provided in the next section.

OUR APPROACH

The Accessibility Advisory Committee



The Accessibility Advisory Committee will assist the district by ensuring the spirit of “nothing about us, without us” is at the heart of our work to improve the experiences of persons with disabilities.

The Accessibility Advisory Committee functions alongside the Accessibility Working Group to identify, remove and prevent barriers and improve accessibility for persons with disabilities. The Committee reviews feedback received through the district’s public feedback tool and

consults and advises the Accessibility Working Group as it develops, updates and creates an implementation strategy for the Accessibility Plan. The draft Terms of Reference of the Surrey Schools Accessibility Advisory Committee have been included in Appendix B.

Selection of Committee Members

Under the Accessible British Columbia Act, an accessibility committee must, to the extent possible, have members selected in accordance with the following goals:

1. At least half of the members are
 - Persons with disabilities, or
 - Individuals who support, or are from organizations that support, persons with disabilities
2. The members described above reflect the diversity of persons with disabilities in B.C.
3. At least one member is an Indigenous person
4. The committee reflects the diversity of persons in B.C.

A two-phased approach is being used to determine the membership of the Surrey Schools Accessibility Advisory Committee. By using a two-phased approach, we are able to not only ensure that the Committee meets the requirements of the Accessible British Columbia Act, but we are also able to act on our commitment to listening to the voices of persons with disabilities in all aspects of the school district's work to identify, remove and prevent barriers to accessibility. This includes the foundational work of determining the membership of the first Surrey Schools Accessibility Advisory Committee.

During the first phase, seven individuals were invited to join the Accessibility Advisory Committee. These individuals were selected to ensure that the initial committee membership included student, staff, community and Indigenous representation, while also ensuring that the membership of the committee met the requirements of the Accessible British Columbia Act. Whenever possible, invitations were sent to people who identified as persons with disabilities or individuals who support, or are from organizations that support, persons with disabilities.

With a shared understanding of the importance of collaboration with other community stakeholders, an invitation for membership on the Surrey Schools Accessibility Advisory Committee was extended to one member of the City of Surrey's Surrey Accessibility Leadership Team (SALT)

(previously the Measuring Up Working Group). The SALT promotes accessibility and inclusion, and provides engagement and insight to City of Surrey strategic plans and projects. Similarly, the City of Surrey provided an invitation for one member of the Surrey Schools Accessibility Advisory Committee to sit on the SALT. With both organizations taking part in each other's work to identify, remove and prevent barriers to accessibility for persons with disabilities, we believe we can increase the awareness of our shared goals, while also aligning and expediting our efforts.

The second phase of the determination of membership to the Accessibility Advisory Committee will take place during the first year of this three-year Accessibility Plan. During this second phase, the first seven members will determine the selection criteria for the individuals who will fill the remaining four seats on the committee. By utilizing this two-phased approach, the voices of persons with disabilities and individuals who support, or are from organizations that support persons with disabilities, will have a direct impact on the membership of the committee. Not only does the Accessibility Advisory Committee provide an avenue for the voices of persons with disabilities to advise Surrey Schools' work to identify, remove and prevent barriers for persons with disabilities, but the membership of the Committee itself is also determined by those same voices.



Membership

The Surrey Schools Accessibility Advisory Committee will have a maximum of eleven members including but not limited to:

- Indigenous community representative (1)
- Surrey Schools Accessibility Working Group representative (1)
- CUPE Local 728 representative (1)
- Surrey Teachers Association representative (1)
- Surrey Schools student representative (1)
- Parent/guardian/caregiver of a student representative (1)

Surrey Schools would like to thank the following first seven members of the Surrey Schools Accessibility Advisory Committee for their participation, guidance and collaboration as we work toward creating a more accessible school district. Your voices were invaluable during the creation of this plan.

Kim Egger, Allan Hendricks, Nancy Johnson, Stephanie Kluch, Dana Neidig, Leena Sansoa and Colin Reid.



The Accessibility Working Group

The Accessibility Working Group is made up of representatives from various school district departments and will include elementary and secondary school administration representation. This group is advised by and consults with the Accessibility Advisory Committee to consider feedback, to identify, remove and prevent barriers, and to improve accessibility for persons with disabilities. The Accessibility Working Group develops, updates and coordinates the implementation strategy for the Accessibility Plan priorities and actions. The Accessibility Working Group's membership is intended to remain flexible, which will allow the group to change and adapt to

best meet the needs of the work being undertaken at the time.

During the creation of this plan, members of the Accessibility Working Group included representation from the Indigenous Learning Department, Inclusive Learning/Student Support Department, Human Resources Department, Communication Services Department, Information Management Services Department, Facilities Department, Community Schools Partnerships Department, and the Internal Audit and Risk Management Department.

The Public Feedback Tool

Surrey Schools is deeply committed to listening to students, staff members, families and community members when it comes to accessibility.

In particular, we want to better understand the experiences of persons with disabilities when they are interacting with our schools and district sites, as well as accessing our services. With that in mind, we have created two online feedback surveys which meet the Accessible British Columbia Act's requirement for a school district to establish a process for receiving comments from the public. The surveys include an opportunity to respond to open and closed questions, as well as upload photo, video and audio files when providing feedback on this Accessibility Plan and barriers to individuals in or interacting with Surrey Schools.

From the Accessibility page of the [SurreySchools.ca](https://www.surreyschools.ca) website, individuals have the opportunity to complete two different feedback surveys. The first survey gives the public an opportunity to provide feedback on barriers they may have identified within the school district. The second survey provides an opportunity for the public to provide feedback on the Surrey Schools Accessibility Plan and accessibility in general within the district. Both of these public feedback surveys allow the user to upload files if it helps them provide their feedback.

These two feedback surveys will remain open and available from the SurreySchools.ca website.

Prior to future reviews and revisions of this plan, information received through these two surveys will be carefully considered by the Accessibility Advisory Committee and the Accessibility Working Group.



THREE-YEAR PLAN

Collaboration

The Accessibility Advisory Committee was the primary means of public consultation during the creation of this Accessibility Plan. Although the Accessible British Columbia Act stipulated that this committee was to be consulted and the Accessibility Working Group created the Accessibility Plan, Surrey Schools sought to move beyond that and endeavoured to ensure the members of the Advisory Committee were seen as partners in this work. The interaction between the Accessibility Advisory Committee and the Accessibility Working Group quickly moved toward a collaborative partnership as opposed to a consultative relationship.

Through discussion with the Accessibility Advisory Committee, several points of focus stood out as key priorities and corresponding barrier types. These priorities and barrier areas are listed below:

	PRIORITY	BARRIER TYPE
1	Accessible Recruitment/Hiring Practices	Policy/Practice
2	Accessible Schools and District Facilities	Physical
3	A Common Understanding of Accessibility	Attitudinal
4	Accessible Employment with Surrey Schools	Multiple

As the discussion with the Accessibility Advisory Committee continued, several objectives were proposed by the committee to the Accessibility Working Group. All of the objectives were adopted by the Accessibility Working Group and all are included in this three-year plan. Surrey Schools is proud to have an Accessibility Plan that includes priorities, objectives and actions that originated from the Accessibility Advisory Committee.

As Surrey Schools begins to move forward with the actions listed below, continued collaboration with, and the involvement of, the Accessibility Advisory Committee will be prioritized. Surrey Schools is committed to ensuring the voices of persons with disabilities are at the centre of our work toward identifying, removing and preventing barriers to accessibility.

During the creation of this Accessibility Plan, the Accessibility Working Group carefully considered the principles of inclusion, adaptability, diversity, collaboration, self-determination and universal design.

Priorities, Objectives and Actions



PRIORITY 1: Accessible Recruitment/Hiring Practices

Timeline: 2023 – 2025

Barrier Type: Policy/Practice

Objective:

Review and update recruiting/hiring practices to ensure they are equitable and accessible, and consistently practiced across the school district.

Actions:

- Surrey Schools, in consultation with the Accessibility Advisory Committee, will review current job posting templates, application processes, interview processes and onboarding processes in an effort to identify barriers to accessibility.
- When barriers are identified, new or updated processes will be created to remove or, to the greatest extent possible, reduce those barriers.
- The updated recruiting/hiring practices will be formally communicated across all schools and district departments to create consistent district-wide accessible recruitment/hiring practices.

PRIORITY 2: Accessible Schools and District Facilities

Timeline: 2024 – 25 School Year

Barrier Type:

Physical

Objective:

Assess the accessibility of all schools and district facilities in order to obtain baseline information and inform future upgrades and renovations.

Actions:

- Surrey Schools, in consultation with the Accessibility Advisory Committee, will explore options for, and select, an appropriate physical site accessibility assessment. This may include the creation of a new accessibility assessment or the selection of an existing accessibility assessment.
- Instruction will be provided to specific staff at each site on the correct use of the accessibility assessment.
- Physical site accessibility assessments will be conducted at all elementary schools, secondary schools, learning centres and district facilities.
- The results of the assessments will be collated and reviewed by the Accessibility Advisory Committee and the Accessibility Working Group. The results of the assessments, pre-existing information regarding physical site accessibility barriers, planned accessibility renovations and the advice of the Accessibility Advisory Committee will be considered during future renovations and when future revisions of the Accessibility Plan are undertaken.

PRIORITY 3: A Common Understanding of Accessibility

Timeline: 2023 – 24 School Year*

Barrier Type: **Attitudinal**

Objective 1:

Implement a communication plan to foster a common understanding of “disability”, “accessibility”, “barriers” and “inclusion”.

Actions 1:

- Surrey Schools, in consultation with the Accessibility Advisory Committee, will select and/or create a series of videos that defines and communicates a common understanding of the terms “disability”, “accessibility”, “barriers”, and “inclusion”.
- The videos will be provided to all schools and district departments to be shared with staff and school communities.

Objective 2:

Promote National AccessAbility Week throughout the school district.

Actions 2:

- Posters will be selected or created to promote National AccessAbility Week (the week starting on the last Sunday in May). The posters will be provided to all schools and district departments to be posted in visible locations.
- Background information about National AccessAbility Week, as well as recommended ways to celebrate it, will be provided to all schools and district departments.

**The promotion of National AccessAbility Week will be an ongoing annual practice*

PRIORITY 4: Accessible Employment with Surrey Schools

Timeline: 2025 – 26 School Year

Barrier Type:

Multiple

Objective 1:

Identify and analyze existing data or implement a new strategy to measure the number of persons with disabilities employed by Surrey Schools. This data will create a baseline which will be referenced as efforts are made to employ more staff members with disabilities.

Actions 1:

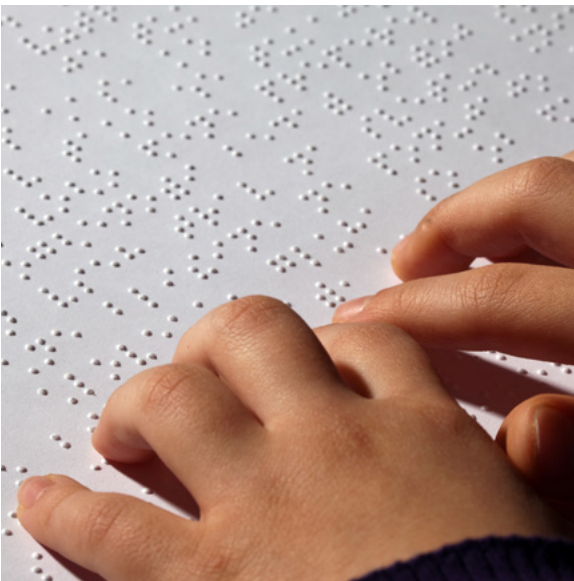
- Surrey Schools, in consultation with the Accessibility Advisory Committee, will explore pre-existing data and/or explore the utilization of a new data collection method to measure the number of persons with disabilities employed by Surrey Schools (all data reviewed or collected will ensure staff member anonymity).
- Collected data will be shared with the Accessibility Advisory Committee and the Accessibility Working Group and will be considered during future reviews and revisions of the Accessibility Plan.
- Collected data will also be shared with managers/supervisors of schools and district departments.

Objective 2:

Investigate opportunities to learn more about increasing the accessibility and inclusivity of employment with Surrey Schools for persons with disabilities.

Action 2:

- Surrey Schools will explore and consider joining provincial organizations that work to improve employment practices to be more inclusive for persons with disabilities. (ex. Presidents Group)



Monitoring and Evaluation

The four priorities, as well as their actions and objectives included in the Surrey Schools Accessibility Plan will be continuously monitored and formally evaluated by the Accessibility Working Group on an annual basis. An Accessibility Plan Progress Update Report will be prepared by the Accessibility Working Group and presented to the Accessibility Advisory Committee and district leaders each school year. The Accessibility Progress Update Report will also be shared publicly on the Accessibility page of the SurreySchools.ca website.

The Surrey Schools Accessibility Plan will be reviewed and updated at least once every three years. The review and update process will include collaboration with the Accessibility Advisory Committee as well as consideration of all feedback provided through the public feedback surveys.

APPENDIX A: BACKGROUND

The Surrey Schools Accessibility Plan builds on significant prior work at the global, national and provincial levels to promote and support accessibility. A few notable legislative changes and advancements are included below to provide context for the work currently undertaken by Surrey Schools.



Global Context

The United Nations General Assembly adopted the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities in 2006. The Government of Canada describes the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities in the following way:

“The Convention of the Rights of Persons with Disabilities is an international human right treaty aimed at protecting the rights and dignity of persons with disabilities without discrimination and on an equal basis with others. Parties to the Convention of the Rights of Persons with Disabilities are required to promote and ensure the full enjoyment of human rights of persons with disabilities including full equity under the law.”

Canada ratified the Convention of the Rights of Persons with Disabilities in 2010.



National Context

National milestones in Canada include the inclusion of disability in the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms, which occurred in 1985, and in 1986, when persons with disabilities were included in the Employment Equity Act.

In 2019, the Accessible Canada Act received Royal Assent and came into force. The intent of the Accessible Canada Act is to create a barrier-free Canada by 2040.

“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

The Accessible British Columbia Act received Royal Assent in 2021 and the accompanying Accessible British Columbia Regulation came into effect on September 1, 2022. The regulation requires prescribed organizations in B.C., including public school districts, to have an Accessibility Committee, an Accessibility Plan and a tool to receive public feedback on accessibility in place by September 1, 2023.

The regulation, and its requirements, highlight the importance of involving persons with disabilities and those with lived experience in the process of identifying, removing and preventing barriers to accessibility.

The Accessible British Columbia Act identifies six principles (inclusion, adaptability, diversity, collaboration, self-determination and universal design) which must be considered as organizations develop and update their accessibility plans. The Act also stipulates that an organization must consult with its accessibility committee during this process.



APPENDIX B: ACCESSIBILITY ADVISORY COMMITTEE TERMS OF REFERENCE (DRAFT)

Vision

Surrey Schools (the District) is dedicated to inclusion, accessibility and equity for staff, students and all those who interact with the District. The Accessibility Advisory Committee (the Committee) will assist the District by ensuring the spirit of *“nothing about us, without us”* is at the heart of its work to improve the experiences of persons with disabilities.

Mandate

The Committee shall function alongside the Accessibility Working Group (the Working Group) to identify, remove and prevent barriers and improve accessibility for persons with disabilities. The Committee shall review feedback received through the District’s public feedback tools and shall be consulted in the Working Group’s development and updating of the District’s Accessibility Plan.

Membership

The Committee has a maximum of 11 members including but not limited to:

- Indigenous community representative (1)
- Surrey Schools Accessibility Working Group representative (1)
- CUPE Local 728 representative (1)
- Surrey Teachers Association representative (1)
- Surrey Schools student representative (1)
- Parent/guardian/caregiver of a student representative (1)

To the extent possible, the members of the Committee should be selected in accordance with the following goals as detailed in Section 9 of the Accessible British Columbia Act:

At least half of the members are:

- Persons with disabilities, or
 - Individuals who support, or are from organizations that support, persons with disabilities;
 - The members described in paragraph (a) reflect the diversity of persons with disabilities in British Columbia
- At least one of the members is an Indigenous person;
- The Committee reflects the diversity of persons in British Columbia

The Surrey Schools Accessibility Working Group representative shall be designated the Chair.

Members are appointed to the Committee by the Chair. With the exception of the Chair, members can be appointed to the Committee for up to three-year terms and may not be appointed for more than two consecutive terms.

Members are expected to attend the Committee meetings, act with integrity and honesty, be tolerant of others' opinions, and interact with others in a respectful and inclusive manner. Members are expected to excuse themselves from any Committee discussions or activities which may be viewed as a conflict of interest.





Scope of Work

As detailed in Section 9 of the Accessible British Columbia Act, the Committee shall:

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

Meetings

The Committee shall meet three times during each school year (September – June).

Additional meetings may be scheduled as needed.

Reporting

The Committee reports to and provides advice to the Accessibility Working Group. Minutes from each of the Committee's meetings shall be presented to the Accessibility Working Group through the Chair.

The Terms of Reference will be reviewed annually by the Committee and advice will be provided to the Working Group.