

Northwest School Division Accessibility Plan 2025-2028



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This report is available in alternate format upon request.

To request an alternate format, please contact our Meadow Lake Office by email at office@nwsd.ca or by phone at 306-236-5614.

Message From the Director

As Director of Education, I am pleased to present our Accessibility Plan in response to the requirements of the *Accessible Saskatchewan Act*. This important legislation came into force on December 3, 2023 and marks a significant step forward in creating a more inclusive and barrier-free province.

At our school division, we believe that every person, whether student, staff member, caregiver or visitor, deserves to fully participate, engage, and thrive in our learning community. The Act's definition of accessibility—"that all people can take part in their communities through work, play and other daily activities"—guides our belief that inclusion and independence are foundational to education and community life.

This Accessibility Plan is our commitment to removing barriers (physical, digital, attitudinal, and otherwise) that may limit someone's ability to learn, work, connect, or feel welcome in our schools. The Act specifically recognizes that a barrier can be "anything that stops or makes it harder for persons with disabilities to fully participate in their communities" and sets out key areas such as Built Environment, Information & Communications, Employment, Service Delivery and more.

In crafting this plan, we have engaged with our staff, students, and community stakeholders, especially those with lived experience of disability, to ensure we follow the principle of "Nothing about us without us." Our actions will be transparent and ongoing: the Act calls for an accessibility plan, a publicly-available progress report each year, and periodic review.

We honour the fact that accessibility is not simply a one-time project, but a living, evolving commitment. As the Act explains, while the legislation outlines many areas, standards will continue to be developed, and new barriers identified over time.

In the coming years we will:

- Identify and remove obstacles in our physical environments (school buildings, playgrounds, common areas)
- Improve how information and communications are delivered (ensuring formats, technologies, signage, and supports are accessible)
- Foster a culture of respect, dignity and belonging for people of all abilities

Our expectation is that every member of our community plays a role in this work. I invite you to review this plan, share your input and engage with us as we move forward together.

Thank you for your commitment to making our division a truly accessible, welcoming, high-performing environment where every learner, every staff member, every family can participate fully.

Together, let us embrace this opportunity to lead by example and build a school division that reflects the best of our values of inclusion, fairness, opportunity and compassion.

Jennifer Williamson
Director of Education
Northwest School Division

Message From the Board Chair

On behalf of the Northwest School Division Board of Education, I am pleased to present our Accessibility Plan. As required under Saskatchewan's *Accessible Saskatchewan Act*, this plan reflects our commitment to ensuring that high-quality public education is accessible to every learner, family, staff member, and community partner in NWSD. Meeting the provincial requirements is an important responsibility, but more importantly, it aligns with our core belief that all students deserve equitable opportunities to learn, grow, and succeed.

This plan represents the first step in a long-term process. It is a living document - one that will evolve as we learn more, hear from our communities, and continue identifying and removing barriers across our schools, facilities, programs, and services. The work of accessibility is ongoing, and our board remains dedicated to continuous improvement and meaningful action.

We are grateful to the students, staff, families, and partners who contributed to the development of this plan. Together, we will continue working toward an NWSD where every person feels supported, included, and able to fully participate in their educational journey.

Travis Neufeld
Chair, Board of Education
Northwest School Division

About our School Division

Established in January of 2006, the Northwest School Division has 22 schools in 15 communities across Saskatchewan's mid-west. The student enrollment is approximately 4,100 students from Pre-Kindergarten through Grade 12.



Introduction

The Northwest School Division is committed to identifying, removing, and preventing accessibility barriers for individuals who work at or access school division facilities, programs, and services. As part of this commitment, the government of Saskatchewan introduced [The Accessible Saskatchewan Act](#), which came into force on December 3, 2023. The Act requires Northwest School Division to publicly post an accessibility plan to remove and prevent accessibility barriers for persons with disabilities. An accessibility plan is intended to help identify accessibility barriers for people who are in, or interact with, an organization and describes the actions that will be taken to remove and prevent accessibility barriers. Northwest School Division is committed to Accessibility for All guided by all people protected under the [Saskatchewan Human Rights Code](#) and recognizing that accessibility is good for everyone. Northwest School Division is also committed to the Calls to Action of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission and seeks culturally responsive solutions to all aspects of the accessibility plan.

A school division committee worked together to consider the feedback received and identified actions that the school division will take over the next three years to improve the accessibility of facilities, programs, and services.

When developing our accessibility plan, Northwest School Division examined existing programs and services. We want to recognize the hard work of everyone on our team to promote an inclusive workplace.

Northwest School Division consulted with persons with disabilities to inform the actions outlined in this accessibility plan. We conducted a survey of the community, staff, families and students to seek feedback on accessibility barriers people have experienced within Northwest School Division facilities and programs. We also conducted site surveys of each school within the division.

What We Heard

Through our accessibility feedback survey, three key themes emerged from students, families, staff, and community members.

1. Barriers in Physical Accessibility

Respondents identified significant challenges related to wheelchair and mobility access in some of our facilities. These barriers limit full participation in school activities and reduce independence for individuals who rely on accessible routes, entrances, washrooms, and equipment.

2. Barriers in Technology and Digital Access

Access to technology was another major theme. Participants noted inconsistent connectivity for adaptive devices, digital content that does not always meet accessibility standards, and limited availability of assistive or adaptive technologies. These barriers impact learning, communication, and equitable participation in school

life.

3. Barriers in Accessing Student Support Services

Many respondents described difficulty accessing timely assessments, adequate assistive supports, and specialized services. Concerns included long wait times, limited Educational Assistant availability, and the need for more training to provide required supports. These challenges can delay student progress and increase stress for families and staff.

Definitions:

Accessibility barriers

The Accessible Saskatchewan Act defines a barrier as anything that hinders or challenges the full and equal participation in society of persons with disabilities.

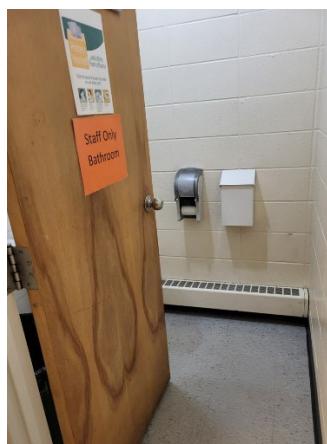
There are many types of barriers that persons with disabilities may experience, including physical barriers, information and communications barriers, and attitudinal barriers. Definitions and examples of each barrier type are outlined below to help people understand the experiences of people with disabilities.

Physical barriers

Physical barriers exist when spaces are designed in ways that prevent or limit mobility or access.

For example:

- Hosting public events at a venue that is only accessible by stairs.
- Parking lots with no curb cuts that make it difficult to access sidewalks.
- Washrooms that lack accessible stalls or automatic door openers.



Information and communications barriers

Information and communications barriers exist when information or material is shared in a way that is not accessible to all people.

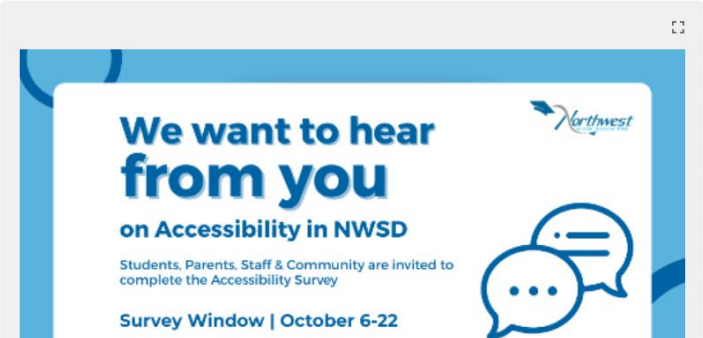
For example:

- Using small print that is hard to read.
- Websites and documents that are not accessible for screen readers or convert text to multiple languages.
- Videos that do not have closed captioning.

Image Editor: Accessibility Survey.png

Adjust attributes such as alt text and filename. Delete or replace image and change where it is shared.

[EDITOR](#) [CROPS](#) [Click here to learn about the new Image Crops feature!](#)

A graphic for an accessibility survey. It features a blue header with the text 'We want to hear from you' in large, bold, white letters. Below this, in smaller white text, is 'on Accessibility in NWSD'. Further down, it says 'Students, Parents, Staff & Community are invited to complete the Accessibility Survey'. At the bottom, it says 'Survey Window | October 6-22'. On the right side, there is a Northwest School Division logo and a speech bubble icon.

Alt *

Accessibility Survey graphic to notify families about the survey window

Filename *

Accessibility Survey .png

Tags

Start typing or select tags from drop down

Sites

Northwest School Division (total: 1)

Attitudinal barriers

Attitudinal barriers exist when people act or think based on false assumptions.

For example:

- Not including persons with disabilities in decisions that impact them.
- Making assumptions about a person's ability to communicate or do things for themselves.
- Avoiding a person with a disability for fear of offending them.

Accessibility goals and actions

Northwest School Division has taken steps to improve the accessibility of division facilities, programs, and services. However, we recognize that progress will be ongoing as we aim to become more inclusive. This plan outlines the actions that the school division will prioritize over the next three years to remove accessibility barriers that persons with disabilities experience. Division staff will work together to complete the actions outlined in this plan and raise awareness about accessibility. Northwest School Division will work to identify and remove barriers that people with disabilities experience in the school division and facilities.

Goal 1 – Make school division buildings and properties more accessible

Northwest School Division recognizes that accessible buildings are an important part of improving the accessibility of school division services.

Achievements to date:

- As part of ongoing yearly maintenance, the school division has:
 - increased the availability of automatic door openers;
 - made washroom accessibility upgrades;
 - doorway upgrades;
 - sidewalk upgrades;
 - upgraded the Turtleford School elevator.
- Several schools have added accessible playground equipment.



Actions for 2025-2028:

The actions we have identified to improve accessibility of our facilities and grounds will include:

- Developing policies to ensure new or renovated playgrounds meet accessibility standards.
 - We will establish a minimum percentage/threshold for accessible equipment at each applicable school.
- Retrofit or add accessibility features, like lifts or elevators, to schools and offices and ensure that existing infrastructure meets the needs of the building.
 - We will provide annual training for staff on how to utilize the existing lifts and elevators within the facility.
- Create an audit schedule for bathroom accessibility with a compliance checklist.

- Working toward the goal of each school having a student accessible bathroom and a staff accessible bathroom. Other non-public facing facilities will have an accessible bathroom for staff.
- Audit the transportation needs for accessibility to ensure that our busing infrastructure and partnerships meet the needs of students.
- Determine the minimum required number of wheelchair accessible buses and use this information to develop a bus renewal process to maintain levels of accessibility.

Goal 2 – Reduce technology barriers for accessibility

As many individuals' access information through digital platforms like websites and social media, it is important to make sure that digital content is understandable and accessible on the devices that people use and that staff have the capacity to use adaptive technologies to ensure all students have equitable access to learning.

Achievements to date:

- Website ability to translate to multiple languages and have font size adjustments
- The school division has ensured that students have access to technology that supports their learning in many ways based on the individual needs of the student. These include, but are not limited to: Apps and technology to support communication, adaptive readers, voice to text and text to audio technology, etc.
- Free wifi accessibility to allow devices that support communication for all students, families, staff, and community members. Free wifi helps all people to access information. Providing access to Wi-Fi also ensures persons who are Deaf and Hard of Hearing can use internet-based sign language interpretation services and allows them to access information and forms on their mobile devices without impacting their mobile data usage.



Actions for 2025-28:

- Create a technology accessibility minimum standard for technology in a classroom.
- Provide professional development to staff about using the adaptive technologies and programs the division has invested in.
- Give employees more guidance for making accessible communications for students

and the public by sharing best practices.

- Develop a communication plan to share information annually about technology purchase agreements and how to access BYOD Wi-Fi.
- Conduct an annual review of school division websites for compliance with accessibility standards.
- Explore the feasibility of improving Wi-Fi in school division facilities.
- Ensure technology procurement follows the Government of Saskatchewan's Digital Public Services Policy.

Goal 3 – Improve access to student support services and programming

Northwest School Division is taking steps to remove accessibility barriers that limit access to division support services and programming.

Achievements to date:

- Redesigned service delivery model for Occupational Therapy services to better meet the needs of students within the school division.
- Host an annual accessible student event where all students are able to participate to their full potential.
- Partner with People Advocating for Children with Exceptionalities to employ an Inclusion Advocate to support families in Meadow Lake in accessing learning and supports.
- Contract services for Educational Psychology to meet the needs of underserved communities in our school division and ensure equitable access to assessments.

Actions for 2025-28:

- Expand staff training and professional development in key areas, such as:
 - Safe student transportation procedures (harnesses, securements, and wheelchair lifts)
 - Use and troubleshooting of assistive and adaptive technologies
 - Feeding tube training provided by Saskatchewan Health Authority
 - Operation of wheelchair lifts and other accessibility equipment in schools
- Explore contracted services to address a backlog or extended wait times for assessments or therapy.
- Evaluate current service delivery models and look at adapting service delivery to improve student outcomes.



- Strengthen family–school connections by building partnerships with outside agencies to support accessibility to services, both within and outside the school division.

Conclusion

Northwest School Division's Accessibility Plan represents our commitment to creating schools where every person can participate fully, safely, and with dignity. This plan is a living document. As our students, staff, families, and communities evolve, so too will the actions and priorities outlined here.

We will revisit this plan annually, reflecting on what we have achieved, where barriers remain, and what new opportunities exist to strengthen accessibility across our division. Ongoing feedback is essential to this work. We will continue to engage students, staff, families, persons with disabilities, and community partners to ensure our actions are meaningful, responsive, and informed by lived experience.

Each year, we will report publicly on our progress and the steps we are taking to identify, remove, and prevent barriers. Through transparency, collaboration, and continuous improvement, we remain committed to building an inclusive and accessible school division for everyone.

Contact us:

We value your feedback and welcome members of the public to submit comments about our accessibility plan using the form and contact information below.

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Appendix A: Glossary of Common Definitions

Ableism and Disability Oppression: Ableism or disability oppression is the discrimination of and social prejudice against people with disabilities based on the belief that typical abilities are superior. At its heart, ableism is rooted in the assumption that disabled people require 'fixing' and defines people by their disability. Ableism views typical abilities as the norm and devalues people who have physical, intellectual, psychiatric, sensory, or other disabilities.

Accommodation: Any technical aid or device, personal support or disability-related support that a person may require. This can include, but is not limited to, accessible document formats, mobility supports to attend a meeting, interpretation or captioning services, or ensuring space has sensory sensitive features.

Adaptability: The ability to be modified for a new use or purpose. Disability and accessibility are evolving concepts that change as services, technology and attitudes change.

Alternate formats: Alternate ways of providing information beyond traditional printed material. Examples include large print, text-only documents and Braille.

Alternative text: Also referred to as alt tags or alt attributes. Alternative text provides a verbal description of a visual or graph for individuals with visual impairments who use screen readers.

Assistive technology: Technology and/or specialized equipment that enables a student with an intensive need to access curriculum or to function in their environment.

Barrier: Anything that hinders or challenges the full and equal participation in society of persons with disabilities.

Captioning: Text at the bottom of the screen (television/video) allows people to follow spoken dialogue and distinct noises. Closed captioning is similar, but the text must be decoded to appear on the screen.

Disability: Any impairment that, in interaction with a barrier, hinders an individual's full and equal participation in society. Disabilities can be permanent, temporary or episodic in nature, and may or may not be evident. There are many types of disabilities that people experience, including physical, mental, intellectual, cognitive, learning, communication and sensory impairments.

Diversity: Recognizing that each person is unique and has different backgrounds. Diversity means including or involving people from a range of different social or ethnic backgrounds and of different genders, sexual orientations, disabilities, etc.

Inclusion: Providing equal access to opportunities and resources for people who might otherwise be excluded or marginalized, such as individuals with physical or intellectual disabilities.

Large print: Printed information provided in a large font size (18 pt or larger) for people who have low vision. For easier reading, select "sans serif" fonts.

Neurodiversity: Neurodiversity acknowledges that differences in how brains function are normal variations, not deficits, and embraces the diverse ways people think, learn, and interact with the world.

Plain language: Clear, conversational communication that makes sense to the intended audience. The goal of plain language is to communicate so clearly that the intended audience can easily find what they need, understand what they find, and use the information.

Self-determination: People are empowered to make their own choices and control their own lives.

Universal design: Universal design means making things safer, easier and more convenient for everyone. It involves a range of design concepts, including design of products, or spaces and environments, to provide access in a way that respects all abilities.

Appendix B: Accessibility Barriers

There are many types of accessibility barriers that persons with disabilities may experience. Examples of different types of barriers are outlined below.

Physical and architectural

Structural and design-based obstacles that prevent or limit mobility or access.

Examples of physical barriers include:

- doorknobs that cannot be turned by a person with limited dexterity or strength instead of easier to use lever-style handles;
- public events hosted at venues that can only be accessed by steps; and walkways with obstacles, such as snow-covered paths into buildings.

Information and communications

Obstacles experienced by persons with disabilities related to hearing, speaking, reading, writing or understanding, and those who communicate in different ways.

Examples of information and communication barriers include:

- using small print and poor color contrast;
- creating websites and documents without considering how some people with vision impairments use screen readers; writing documents with complex language instead of simple and easy to understand words; and
- only providing customers with one option to contact your organization such as by phone instead of multiple options like email, text message, and in-person.

Attitudinal

When people act or think based on false assumptions.

Examples of attitudinal barriers include:

- assuming that someone with an intellectual disability cannot make decisions, instead of asking them if they would need any support;
- speaking to an aid or interpreter instead of directly to a person with a disability;
- assuming that all persons with disabilities require the same accommodations instead of asking how you can support them; and
- not considering the needs of people with different types of disabilities when planning events.

Appendix C: Accessible engagement

Consulting persons with disabilities is a key requirement in developing an accessibility plan. As your organization develops an engagement approach, there are steps you can take to make resources and events more accessible so that persons with disabilities can more easily participate.

The following information is provided to help your organization plan accessible engagement.

Begin the conversation

Everyone communicates differently and accessibility is not one size fits all. When planning your engagement, consider how people will engage with your organization and whether everyone will be able to access the same information.

Accessible communication

When you communicate with people during your engagement there are a couple of things to consider to ensure that the information is accessible to persons with disabilities. Ensuring that your staff know how to communicate with people with different types of disabilities is important to facilitate respectful conversations.

Writing in plain language, by using simple, common terms is easier for all people to understand. If complex terms are needed, providing a definition or using examples can be beneficial. Offering to provide documents in alternate formats upon request can also ensure that people are able to access information.

Accessible engagement

You may want to consider offering different ways to engage persons with disabilities. Online engagement is a popular strategy, but it might not work for everyone as technology barriers can prevent persons with disabilities from accessing information.

The following are some considerations to help ensure online and in-person engagement opportunities are accessible to persons with disabilities.

Online engagement

If you are hosting engagement sessions online, you may want to consider how you format your information. Including alternative text for images like pictures and charts helps people who use screen readers access information that is presented visually. To make content easier to read use a minimum of 14pt text and use easy to read fonts like Aptos, Arial, or Calibri. If you are using a website to host your information and engagement tools, ensure that when users zoom in on the page that things are resized so that they do not have to scroll the page left or right to find information and are able to navigate the page without using a mouse.

In-person engagement

If you are conducting in person engagement there are a few things that you may want to consider to ensure an accessible event. To ensure that the entrance to the venue is accessible consider the availability of drop-off and pick-up areas close to the entrance, as well as the availability of accessible parking spaces near the entrance. Also consider the paths to all venue entrances and meeting rooms to ensure they are safe and free from obstacles. Ensuring that all doorways have automatic door openers or can be propped open makes navigating spaces easier for people who use wheelchairs and other assistive devices. Within meeting rooms consider having multiple seating options available, like chairs with and without armrests and empty spaces at adjustable height tables for people who use wheelchairs.

Appendix D:

Summary and Overview of Objectives for the Plan

Goals and Objectives	Actions	Outcomes and Measurements to be Considered
Make school division buildings and properties more accessible.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Wheelchair accessible playgrounds - Lifts/elevators or spaces to support accommodations - Wheelchair accessible interior spaces (bathrooms, gyms, classrooms, staff rooms) - Paved parking lots, maintaining sidewalks - Review policies and update to reflect new accessibility guidelines - Ensure accessible transportation is available to any student that requires it - Improve employee knowledge and awareness of accessibility and inclusion - 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - All new or renovated playgrounds meet accessibility standards <ul style="list-style-type: none"> o Measure: percentage of playgrounds with accessible surface and/or equipment o Feedback from students, family and staff using mobility aids - Lifts and elevators – building are fully accessible for students and staff with mobility needs. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> o Staff annually review use and operation of lifts/elevators in facility - Accessible bathrooms – each school will have a student accessible bathroom and a staff accessible bathroom. Other facilities will have staff accessible bathrooms. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> o Create an audit schedule for bathroom accessibility (compliance checklist) - Measure participation of students with accessibility issues in school activities and extra-curricular

		<p>programs</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Routes in and around the school are safe and accessible <ul style="list-style-type: none"> o Inventory of paved sidewalks and sidewalk conditions o Number of accessible spaces designated in each lot. o Log of snow removal and/or debris - Transportation will monitor the percentage of the fleet that is wheelchair accessible, with a minimum standard to maintain. Bus purchasing will reflect the accessibility standard. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> o Transportation and student services will track the number of students that require accessible transportation - All policies align with provincial and federal accessibility standards
Make technology more accessible.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Continue to review and improve the accessibility of the school division website and web-based services. - Utilize translation features to support students and families that don't read/speak English. - Review process for accessing accessible technology/devices 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Utilize platform with responsive design for division website - Annual review of school division website for compliance with accessibility standards <ul style="list-style-type: none"> o Educate web publishers about best practices for web content accessibility - Develop a communication plan to

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Educate school community about technology availability - Create a technology accessibility standard for technology in a classroom 	<p>share information annually about technology purchase agreements and how to access BYOD wifi</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Education and professional development around best practices for using the adaptive technologies and programs the division has invested in - Minimum standard checklist for classroom technology, new purchases should comply with checklist
Improve Access to Student Support Services	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Expand staff training and professional development • Increase access to assessments • Adapt service delivery models • Strengthen family–school connections 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • PD for staff such as: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Safe student transportation procedures (harnesses, securements, and wheelchair lifts) ○ Use and troubleshooting of assistive and adaptive technologies ○ Feeding tube training provided by registered nurses ○ Operation of wheelchair lifts and other accessibility equipment in schools • Contract additional professionals—such as Educational Psychologists—to reduce the backlog and ensure students receive timely evaluations • Look at adapting

		<p>service delivery of other support services, similar to how OT has made changes to manage case loads and prioritize.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Explore other partnerships, such as the one with PACE, for opportunities like the Inclusion Advocate position for communities outside Meadow Lake. Continue to promote this position with families in Meadow Lake.
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