BC CAISE

Guide for Developing Accessibility-Focused School District Policies and Reviewing Existing Policies Through an Accessibility Lens

Land Acknowledgement

We acknowledge with respect the territories of the First Peoples of what is now known as British Columbia. We honour the many First Nations people who have lived on and cared for these lands for thousands of years and continue to do so today. We recognize the importance of their cultural heritage, laws, and relationships with the land that continue to shape, sustain, and enrich the province of British Columbia. We are committed to learning, understanding and respecting these connections, as well as to fostering meaningful relationships based on mutual respect and reconciliation.

Partners for accessible schools

The British Columbia Council of Administrators of Inclusive Support in Education (BC CAISE), in partnership with Untapped Accessibility, Disability Alliance BC (DABC), and the Province of BC has created this resource to support British Columbia public school districts as they continue to work toward a more accessible future for students, staff, parents and caregivers, and community members with disabilities.

BC CAISE would like to thank DABC and the Province of BC for supporting this project's funding. Thanks also to Untapped Accessibility for their support in its development, and the many educators, students, and families who contributed to and inspired the creation of this resource.

Legal disclaimer

This guide provides general information only as a reference to support school districts in meeting the requirements of Accessible BC Act. Each organization is responsible for understanding and complying with its legal obligations.

Accessibility statement

This guide is accessible to PDF/UA standards.

Foreword

Committed to the principle "Nothing About Us Without Us", BC CAISE and Untapped Accessibility worked to ensure people with disabilities were highly involved in the work which led to the creation of this resource. This commitment resulted in a resource development team where at least 80% of the members were professionals with lived experience with a broad range of disabilities.

We feel this resource, particularly Part 1 – Language and Context, will be beneficial for all school district staff members as we work together to make BC's schools as inclusive and accessible as possible.

We are proud to share this guide with educational leaders across British Columbia, and we hope the voices of those people with disabilities who were involved in this work come through as you read it.

Colin Reid, adult with ADHD
President, BC CAISE

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Purpose of this guide

Who is this guide for?

This guide is intended to support Policy Review Committee members as they revise and develop district policies through an accessibility lens. It was created in alignment with the Accessible BC Act and is intended to support school districts as they identify, reduce, and remove barriers for students, staff, families, and community members with disabilities. While this resource was initially intended to support Policy Review Committees, the guidance on accessible and inclusive language is likely highly beneficial for school-based and district-based staff members in many different school district roles.

Why are accessibility-focused school district policies important?

The Accessible BC Act envisions a province where people with disabilities experience equal and full participation in all aspects of society. It sees people with disabilities driving the decisions that impact them, with organizations proactively looking for ways to identify, remove, and prevent barriers to their participation.

Inclusive schools are critical to this future. When school district policies are revised and designed with accessibility in mind, students learn in an environment that values and prioritizes all experiences, regardless of physical ability, communication, regulation, or learning style. When students experience this type of genuine inclusion in their school community, they learn to value and, more importantly, expect inclusion in the greater community. These experiences extend beyond the walls of each classroom and positively influence school district staff, families and caregivers, and all those interacting with a school district.

Accessible and inclusive school district policy directly impacts the way we, as educational leaders, prepare the next generation for life in an accepting, diverse, and interconnected world that thrives off the unique contributions of everyone.

How do I use this guide?

This guide can be used as Policy Review Committees undertake policy review and revision, or as new policies are developed to create more inclusive and accessible schools. The first few sections cover foundational information on disability language and the social model of disability. This will help ground school district teams in the current context in this area. It will also serve to provide a foundation from which Policy Review Committees can begin reviewing their existing policies to identify language to improve.

Next, we introduce three important principles for revising or developing accessibility-focused school district policies. These principles will help focus each team's work on appropriate language, participation of people with disabilities, and readability for the public.

Lastly, we introduce an example of a 10-step process which could be used by school district teams to create new accessibility policy centred on the principle "Nothing About Us Without Us".

Guide for Developing Accessible Policies

Part 1: Language and context

This section will help school district teams gain a greater understanding of acceptable and appropriate terms for accessibility-focused policy, identify terms which are not appropriate, and increase their understanding of ableism and the social model of disability.

> ✓ **What language should I use?**
>
> **Important:** How you reference disability should depend on the situation. When discussing disability with a person who has a disability, it's best practice to ask the individual how they prefer to describe or define the term. By following this preference, you are honouring their self-determination.
>
> When writing about disability in policy or other communications, this individualized approach is not possible. This is where you can borrow language and the definition from the Accessible BC Act.

What definition does the Accessible BC Act use?

The Accessible BC Act defines disability as an inability to participate fully and equally in society because of the interaction between an impairment and a barrier.

This definition recognizes that impairment alone does not cause disability. Disability only occurs when the environment poses a barrier to a person with an impairment. For example, when a student who uses a wheelchair needs to get to the upper floor of the school for a class, but no ramp or elevator exists, this lack of infrastructure causes inaccessibility. It is not the student's use of a wheelchair that leads to their experience of disability, it is the environment they are operating in. This is an important distinction that changes the way many people view disability.

With this understanding, accessibility is created when organizations, communities, and individuals identify and remove barriers that prevent people with disabilities from fully and equally participating in their environments.

The definition of disability in the Accessible BC Act recognizes a wide variety of impairments, including non-apparent, temporary, and episodic conditions.

What are barriers?

The Accessible BC Act defines a barrier as anything that hinders the full and equal participation of a person with an impairment. By this definition, barriers can be caused by:

- ⊙ **Environments**
  For example, if a school has narrow doorways that do not accommodate a wheelchair.

- ⊙ **Attitudes**
  For example, if someone in power holds a discriminatory attitude or belief about people with disabilities and uses that belief to drive a decision that impacts them.

- ⊙ **Practices**
  For example, if a school utilizes software in the classroom that does not include accessibility features.

- ⊙ **Policies**
  For example, if a school has a rigid policy or rule in place related to behaviour and a student with Attention Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) is removed from class for being seen to cause too many disruptions.

- ⊙ **Information**
  For example, if a student uses American Sign Language (ASL) as their first language and a guest presenter's speech at an assembly is not interpreted into ASL.

- ⊙ **Communications or technologies**
  For example, if a student who is Deaf participates in a classroom where a video is shown with no captioning.

All barriers that fall into these categories can be removed, prevented, or mitigated with proper planning, engagement, and resource allocation.

Understanding and using the terms "Disability" and "Diverse Abilities"

At the time of the creation of this document, there may be school district and Ministry of Education and Child Care documents that use the term "students with disabilities or diverse abilities" when referencing the provision of supports for students. This term is likely used in alignment with each school district's focus on supporting all students. This is an important focus for BC's public school districts.

When discussing or referencing students with disabilities through an accessibility or human rights lens, it is important to recognize this group as distinct and specifically identified and protected from discrimination under the **Charter of Rights and Freedoms**. In these cases it would be appropriate to use the term "students with disabilites". This ensures the terms "disability" and "diverse ability" are not interpreted as synonymous with one another.

When used by itself, "diverse ability" does not reflect the meaning of disability in the Accessible BC Act. It's meaning expands beyond the people with disabilities that make up the recognized minority group that the Accessible BC Act and **Charter of Rights and Freedoms** intend to support.

Using terms like "differently abled", "special needs", and "diverse ability" as replacements for the word "disability" can also suggest an inherent shame and stigma associated with disability. Disability is not a bad word that necessitates the use of euphemisms.

"Handicapped" is another outdated term to avoid. It is derogatory and disrespectful to people with disabilities. This term can contribute to stereotypes and perpetuate discrimination.

Should I use "person with a disability" or "disabled person"?

Both "person with a disability" and "disabled person" are examples of person-centric language. They recognize the personhood of the individual. Dehumanizing terms, which remove the person, like "the disabled" have the opposite effect.

Historically, the BC Government and other government bodies in Canada have defaulted to using person-first language, for example, "person with a disability" or "people with Autism". This type of language puts the individual before the disability.

Increasingly, many in the disability community prefer identity-first language. For example, "disabled person" or "autistic person". Identity-first language recognizes that for some people, disability is an intrinsic part of who they are. It is often used to confront or resist stigma.

In a policy development or revision context, those involved will need to decide what approach to use when referencing disability. Many organizations choose to alternate between "person-first" language and "disability-first" language.

In policy communications, it may be beneficial to consider adding a note about your team's language choices. For example, in BC Housing's Accessibility Plan, the organization included the following:

✚   A Note about Language

"As with many aspects of our society, language used to describe disability and disability communities is evolving. Within this Accessibility Plan, we recognize that language preferences can vary from community to community and by individual. As a small gesture recognizing this diversity, we are alternating between using "person-first" and "identity-first" language. You will see both "people with disabilities" and "disabled people" in this plan. Alternating between these two options is considered a good practice, but of course when speaking to an individual, it's always best to ask them for their own preference."

What about accessibility?

Before moving forward, let's quickly review the term *accessibility*. This is one of those terms that can have a different meaning depending on who you ask.

In this guide, and in any work related to the Accessible BC Act, accessibility refers to improving access to services and environments for people with disabilities. It is the work we do to ensure disabled people can fully and equally participate in all aspects of society. When we use the term, we are describing a systemic and proactive effort to design processes, policies, and environments that are free of barriers.

What are other language considerations?

While reviewing the language we use through an accessibility lens, there are many other considerations that can help us focus on inclusion. For example, using gender neutral language. This language avoids specifying the gender of a person when it's unnecessary or when the gender is unknown. Here are some common examples:

- **Pronouns**
  Use "they" or "them" instead of gender-specific pronouns like "he" or "she".
- **Family and relationship terms**
  Use "parent", "guardian", or "caregiver" instead of "mother" or "father".
- **Generic terms**
  Use terms like "chairperson" to designate roles instead of "chairman".

The medical model vs. the social model of disability

Historically, disability has been understood and acknowledged through the medical model. Under that model, people with disabilities are viewed as needing to be fixed or changed by treatment or medical intervention. The assumption is that something is "wrong" with a disabled person because they do not have a "typical" body or mind. This view reduces the person to being a problem. It also creates low expectations and leads to a loss of independence, choice, and control.

Over the past 30 years, we have seen a necessary shift from this way of thinking. Thanks to the Disability Justice movement and fierce advocates within the disability community, disabled people are driving change around how society understands and talks about disability. This has brought us to the current era of the social model.

The social model is a proactive and systemic approach to disability that invites individuals, organizations and communities to take ownership in solving accessibility barriers. Whereas the medical model sees disability as a problem with the person, the social model recognizes that the problem lies with an inaccessible society. It aims to solve access barriers by changing the way we design environments, policies, and cultures.

When applied to school districts, the social model suggests that we pursue accessibility by addressing environmental barriers, inaccessible and exclusive policies, and attitudes that prevent inclusion of disabled learners, staff, and community members.

What is ableism?

Ableism refers to discrimination and social prejudice against people with disabilities. These behaviours are rooted in a false belief that disabled people are inferior to people without disabilities. Like other forms of oppression, ableism occurs on a personal, institutional, and societal level, often resulting in unequal treatment, exclusion, and marginalization of people with disabilities. It can manifest in various ways, such as environmental barriers, negative attitudes or assumptions, offensive language, lack of opportunity, segregation, and more.

In an educational context, ableism can often show up in overt and subtle ways. For example, an overt form of ableism is assuming accommodations or supports equate to preferential treatment and using that logic to prevent students from accessing the educational supports they are entitled to. An example of a more subtle form of ableism could be an attendance or grading policy or practice that does not accommodate the support needs of students with mental health conditions or students with self-regulation difficulties. Another subtle example is designing and planning school activities, fieldtrips, and events without considering the needs of disabled students.

Reviewing policies through an accessibility-focused and inclusion lens can be a great tool for examining and addressing the overt and subtle forms of ableism that may be present in school districts. It is important to pay attention to ableism throughout the policy review and development process so that district teams can identify and address ableist views as they surface.
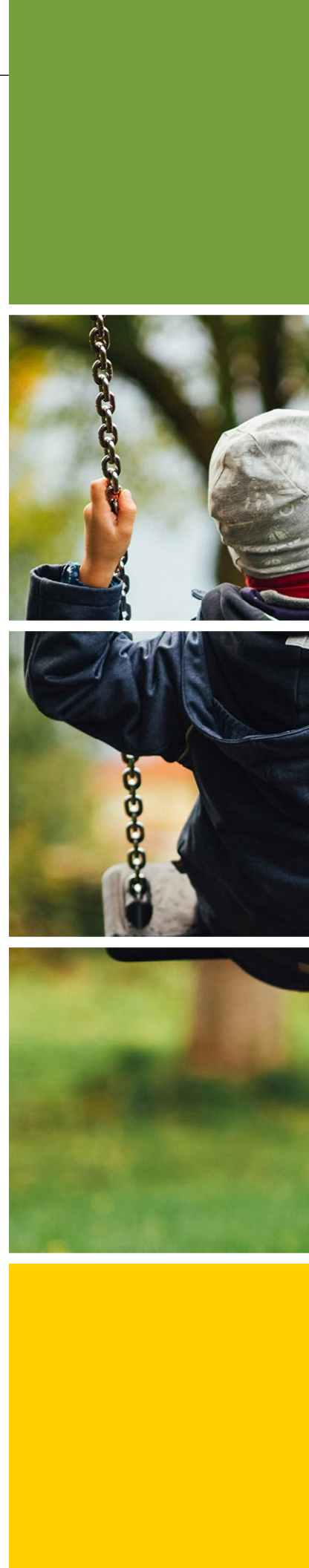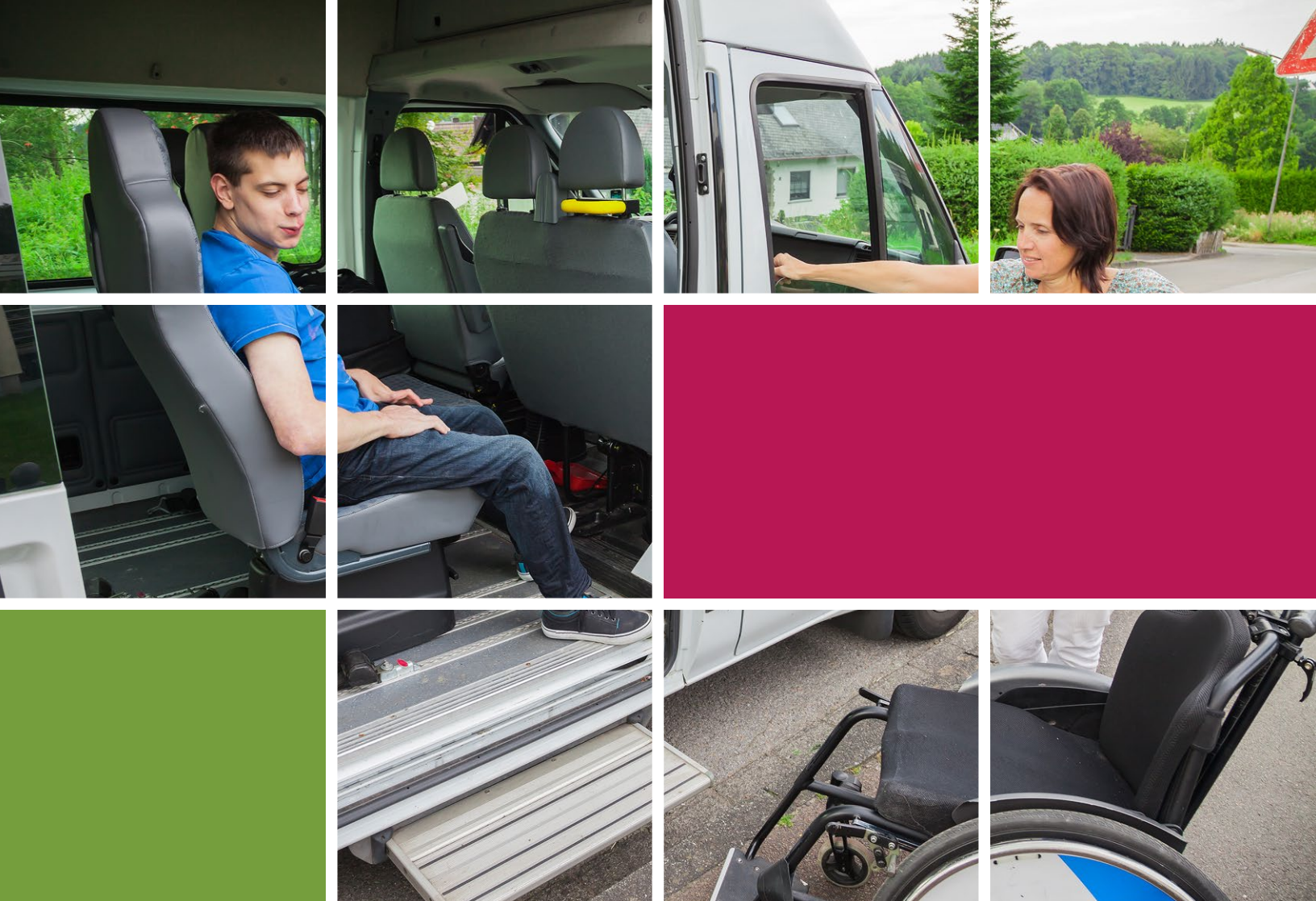
Part 2: Principles for ensuring that an accessibility and inclusion focus are present in policies

Now that we've considered appropriate and modern disability language and discussed the social model of disability and other contextual pieces, let's review key principles for ensuring school district policies are accessibility-focused and inclusive. Use these principles to guide your work when:

1 Reviewing and revising existing school district policies to be more inclusive and accessible, and

2 Developing new inclusive and accessible school district policies

Principle 1: Use inclusive and current language

Language is an important part of inclusive and accessible school district policy. It shapes how we see and understand one another, the value we place on different identities, and our behaviour towards people.

In many aspects of society, disabled people have endured negative language that reflects the medical model of disability. This is no longer acceptable. It is important to keep this in mind when looking to revise or develop school district policies. Use person-centric language and align disability definitions with the Accessible BC Act. See Appendix B for further guidance on disability terminology.

When thinking about policy language, it's important to pay attention to the specific words being used, and to examine why specific groups of people are being identified.

When to highlight disability in school district policy

Another important consideration for policy review and creation is when to directly identify students, staff members, or community members with disabilities. Policies that focus on removing barriers and increasing accessibility can identify this group in a way that brings awareness and acceptance to their needs and rights. For example, a policy that prohibits animal presence on school property may name guide dogs or service dogs for students with disabilities as an exception. This is an appropriate time to directly identify "students with disabilities" because it recognizes the specific rights of a group of students which are protected from discrimination. However, policies that identify students with disabilities in a way that lowers expectations, suggests a lower service level, or hinders opportunities are not appropriate. An example would be a field trip policy that indicates students with mobility aids are required to arrange their own travel. This suggests that students with mobility challenges can receive a lower level of service and support than their peers. This is not an appropriate reason to directly identify "students with disabilities" and it should be identified as a policy that needs to be revised.

When reviewing existing policies, an important first step can be to ensure students or staff with disabilities are being appropriately identified as a separate group. When this group is specifically identified in policy, the policy should increase inclusion and accessibility for people with disabilities. The reference should not, in any way, lower expectations, decrease inclusion or accessibility, or put the responsibility for support or accommodation on the person with the disability. For the development of new policies, it is critical to ensure the language is used correctly the first time.

Principle 2: Include people with disabilities in the process

According to the principle "Nothing About Us Without Us", school district policies that impact people with disabilities should be created with direct engagement and consultation with the school district's disability community (for example, an Accessibility Advisory Committee or utilizing the voices of students, staff members, or community members with disabilities). By engaging people with disabilities in the policy review and development process, school district teams can invite lived experience into the process. This allows people with disabilities to influence the decisions that ultimately impact them.

Who should you engage?

When developing or reviewing policies that will impact students with disabilities, engaging students with disabilities and their families is important. This engagement will help school district teams understand the needs and experiences of these children, and their hopes for the educational community. Additionally, this engagement can support students to develop skills in expressing their thoughts and ideas. They are encouraged and empowered to be active creators and contributes to their school environment.

Involving parents, guardians, and caregivers in the consultation process can be another important practice. They know their children through a different lens and may be strong advocates for what their children need. Keep in mind that depending on the age of the students, it can be equally important to create space for students to share their thoughts with you directly.

Parents, guardians, and caregivers may also be people with disabilities. Capturing these perspectives invites more lived experience into the process and is an acknowledgement that many family members interact with school districts daily. This will support the creation of impactful policies.

When policies impact staff members with disabilities, it's also important to engage school district staff members with disabilities in the development or review process. They can provide critical input on how to make a school or district department accessible for everyone. This engagement will also help to create a workplace culture where all staff feel represented, prioritized, and valued. This can set the precedent for more staff and students with disabilities to disclose and communicate their needs.

Principle 3: Ensure consistency across policies and language

Consistency in policy is an important consideration for simplicity, comprehension, transparency, and accessibility. It also supports accountability by communicating clear and consistent expectations. For general consistency, please consider:

- ❯ Using the same structure and format for all policies,
- ❯ Using the same language throughout your policies,
- ❯ Using the same file naming conventions, and
- ❯ Following the same general requirements regardless of who created the policy.

✔ What are other types of consistency?

Beyond having general consistency across items such as structure, format, language, and organization, there are three more types of consistency to consider. Policies should have an internal consistency, vertical consistency, and horizonal consistency.

Internal Consistency

Internal consistency describes consistency across all definitions, goals, and general content in your policies. There should be conscious effort to review content to ensure there is nothing contradictory. When you have policies that contradict other messaging in your documentation, people may get confused and lose trust in your values and priorities. This is particularly important for people with disabilities as policies and legislation have previously been used to infringe on their rights.

Vertical Consistency

Vertical consistency describes policies that highlight a clear, logical, and relevant implementation process. Programs and activities need to complement an inclusive policy and support genuine progress towards an intended outcome.

Horizontal Consistency

Horizontal consistency is when your policies are consistent across all policy domains. This could mean ensuring an overarching vision unites all the different policy areas. For example, your policy on inclusion and accessibility reinforces other policies regarding transportation or access to services and vice versa.

Stages of policy review and development

- 01 Plan for engagement
- 02 Identify clear goals
- 03 Develop a statement of commitment
- 04 Break down all tasks
- 05 Conduct research/environmental scan
- 06 Conduct accessibility gap analysis
- 07 Draft policy
- 08 Review your consistencies
- 09 Communicate and implement
- 10 Evaluate

Part 3: Example of a policy development process for a policy focused on accessibility

When creating a policy that specifically focuses on accessibility, ableism, or students or staff members with disabilities, ensuring "Nothing About Us Without Us" is at the center of the process will be important. The following 10-stage cycle provides an example of how a focus on accessibility and inclusion could be incorporated throughout a policy development process.

1. Plan for engagement

"Nothing About Us Without Us". Engagement is the first consideration when revising or developing policy that will impact people with disabilities. To engage the right people, identify who in your school district community you need to hear from. Think about incorporating diverse representation from these priority groups:

- Students with disabilities
- Parents, guardians, and caregivers of students with disabilities
- Parents, guardians, and caregivers with disabilities
- Staff with disabilities
- Disabled community members

It may be helpful to build a small planning group with as many of the above perspectives as possible. This group can help you create an engagement opportunity that effectively invites in those you wish to hear from. For example, the group may support you to:

⊙ Anticipate and address certain barriers to participation of the group members you're hoping to engage,

⊙ Ensure proper use of language in your recruitment and other communications, and

⊙ Plan a realistic engagement that meets the timing and scheduling needs of all priority groups.

2. Identify clear goals

When you have a good idea of how you will engage your disability community, consider the specifics of what you're hoping to achieve with this policy development project. Think about what inclusive and accessible policy will mean for your school district – and how it will change the way the disability community interacts with and experiences the school community. Translate this into specific goals that speak to what you're hoping to accomplish from an inclusion and accessibility lens. For example, you may wish to consider goals related to:

⊙ Increasing the involvement of students, parents, and staff with disabilities in the policy review/development process,

⊙ Raising awareness of inclusion and accessibility throughout the school community,

⊙ Developing policies that meet the needs and priorities of all students, parents, and staff with disabilities, and

⊙ Creating buy-in and support for inclusion and accessibility from the school community.

Goals related to these areas can help you maintain a clear focus on inclusion and accessibility throughout your policy development process.
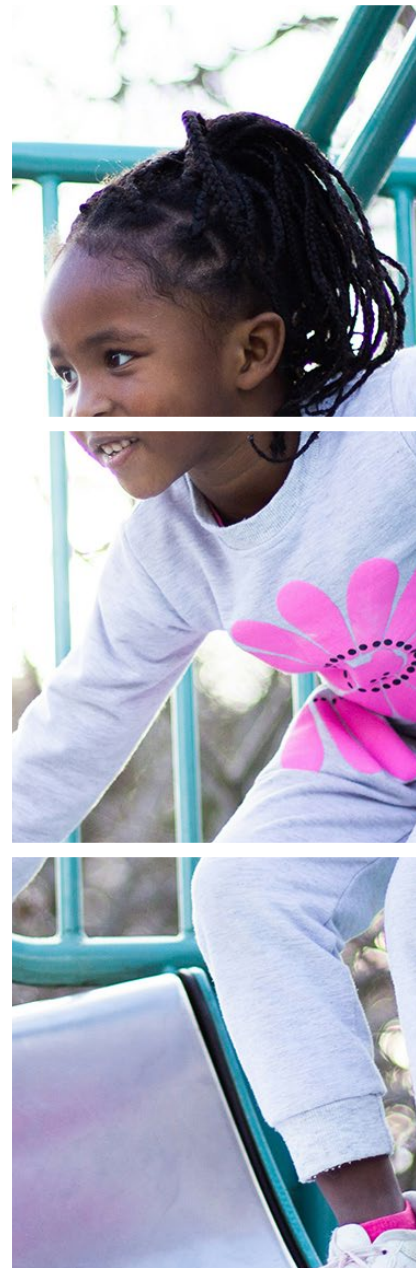
3. Develop a statement of commitment

At this point, you may wish to formulate a clear statement that identifies why the new policy is needed and what exactly you are committing to. This statement may be related to the goals you outlined previously, but it should ultimately address what is motivating the work. For example, you may wish to speak to compliance with the Accessible BC Act and how the work reflects deeper values of inclusion and accessibility.

The following guiding questions may be helpful as you contemplate your specific motivations:

- What does accessibility and inclusion mean to your school district?
- How does accessibility and inclusion relate to your school district's mission and values?
- Why is accessibility and inclusion important to your school district, now and in the future?
- How does your school district approach accessibility and inclusion currently? How would your school district like to approach accessibility and inclusion in the future?
- What specific accessibility or inclusion initiatives/actions has your school district implemented? What initiatives are planned?

Commitment statements that reflect values-based motivations can help you build trust with your community and increase feelings of inclusion and belonging.

> ### ✓ Here is an example of a values-based commitment statement
>
> We strive to ensure all students feel included, accepted and valued in all aspects of their educational community. Our district provides a variety of supports for students so that all students have equitable access to all educational experinces and a meaningful connection to their peers and school staff. We value inclusion, diversity, equity and accessibility (IDEA) and we hold these values as foundational to our district-level stratigic planning as well as local school-based planning. We recognize the amazing diversity within both our student and staff population and highlight it as a strength within our district. We honour the many First Nations people who have lived on and cared for these lands for thousands of years and continue to do so today.

4. Break down all your tasks and ensure there's a focus on inclusion and accessibility throughout

At this stage, you can break down all your main tasks to ensure the work reflects your engagement, goals, and commitments around inclusion and accessibility. To support this process, carefully examine all larger tasks using a task hierarchy system. This allows you to break down each main task into sub-tasks that relate specifically to your engagement and other inclusion and accessibility goals/commitments.

To use a task hierarchy, record the main task and then list all sub-tasks in sequence points below. For example, the task of revising a policy to be more inclusive and accessible could be broken down as follows:

1 **Policy is revised:**

    a. Share the policy that needs to be revised with the disability community via survey and/or focus group to collect feedback on key questions relating to inclusion and accessibility.

    b. The Policy Committee collects and consolidates all feedback from the disability community and drafts a revised version of the policy.

    c. The Policy Committee sends the revised version out to the disability community for another round of review/feedback.

    d. The Policy Committee finalizes the revised policy with feedback from the review.

    e. The Policy Committee shares a final version with the disability community, along with an engagement report that describes how the community's feedback was applied.

Task hierarchies are helpful because they show you all the steps involved in the breakdown of a larger task. This is a good exercise for ensuring your inclusion and accessibility priorities are addressed throughout the process.

5. Conduct research/prepare an environmental scan

Now it's time to do some research. You may wish to conduct an environmental scan, which allows you to find, gather, interpret, and use relevant information from the internal and external environment to inform your policy work. You can review past and present school district policy documents, conduct a thorough review of the Accessible BC Act and any published regulations related to the K-12 education system, and collect and examine other helpful publications. The goal is to become familiar with the context surrounding the topic, area, or issue you're addressing with your policy so you can approach planning and decision making from a well-informed state.

As you work through all the information, take note of any themes or key messaging. This can help guide you as you plan and prepare for your policy development.

6. Conduct an accessibility gap analysis

After the research stage, you should have a good sense of what the policy needs to cover to address the accessibility gaps that are present in your district. You're ready to identify specific areas to focus your policy work.

Ideally, this identification process will occur via discussion-based engagement with a working group or focus group with participants who have disabilities. These formats create a great opportunity to pose well-crafted questions to the people who best know how to answer them. The groups can help you to identify what is missing from existing policy and how a new policy can fill gaps.

You could consider the following questions:

- ⊙ How can our new policy be crafted in a way that considered the experience of those impacted by the policy?
- ⊙ How can we ensure this new policy doesn't result in the same ways of doing things?
- ⊙ What are the barriers to more equitable outcomes around this policy?
- ⊙ How will people with different disabilities be impacted by this policy? For example, a policy might address the needs of people with mobility disabilities but not consider the needs of people with visual disabilities.
- ⊙ How can accessibility policy contribute to a school and district environment and culture that fosters reconciliation?

If you're unable to engage a working group or focus group, consider using a pre-existing Accessibility Committee to explore these questions and identify the focus of your new policy. A survey to your school district's disability community may also be possible. Just be prepared to analyze a large amount of data so you can apply the results.

7. Draft policy

Now you're ready to apply all that you've learned to draft your policy. Consider using a working group or Accessibility Committee to support the development of your draft. You can have group members work on a draft together, or you can ask members to work on it independently. If members do the work by themselves, ensure you host a group session where everyone comes together to discuss their ideas and make decisions together.

You may want to consider drafting several options for how a new policy is phrased. If you are presenting your draft to another audience for feedback, providing several versions can make it much easier for reviewers to see options and pick out what they like and don't like.

8. Review your consistencies

When you get to this stage, it can be helpful to review the principle from part 2 that speaks to policy consistencies.

As part of your consistency review, identify if your revised/new policy is linked to other school district policies. You'll want to ensure all linked policies are updated to reflect the newly written inclusive and accessible policy. For example, risk assessment policies, health and safety policies, and accessibility policies are often linked. A newly revised or developed accessibility policy may impact the language, content, and phrasing of risk assessment policies or health and safety policies.

9. Communicate and implement the policy

Now it's time to implement the new policy and communicate its release. To embed accessibility into your communications, consider who will receive your communications and what their needs are.

Who is receiving the communications?

Ensure the new policy is communicated to all staff groups, especially those whose work will be impacted by the policy change. Students and their parents, guardians, and caregivers may also need to be informed of new policies crafted for inclusion and accessibility.

Needs and preferred formats

Now consider the communication needs of these different groups. Think about how they receive and engage with school district information. For example, staff may usually receive important information via staff meetings or memos. Parents may best be reached through email or newsletters. Students may need a school assembly, classroom announcement, or engaging poster. You'll also want to adjust the content of your communications so you can focus on the most relevant information for each audience.

For accessibility, consider communicating your messaging to each group in various formats. This will help you meet different communication needs.

Another accessibility practice is to use plain language. The International Plain Language Federation describes this as communication where the wording, structure, and design is clear, allowing the reader to:

- ➲ Easily find what they need,
- ➲ Understand what they find, and
- ➲ Use the information.

✓ **Here are some tips for writing in plain language**

→ Ensure the most important information comes first in your messaging.

→ Break up your content into manageable pieces, with one paragraph speaking to a single idea/topic.

→ Use concise headings to break up your content in a logical order.

→ Choose plain words (for example, use "must" instead of "require", or "if" instead of "in the event of").

→ Define or spell out unfamiliar terms like abbreviations and acronyms.

→ Speak directly to your audience, expressing one idea per sentence.

→ Express ideas in the affirmative (for example, instead of saying, "students must not use illicit or non-medical drugs", say "we prohibit use of illicit or non-medical drugs").

→ Translate noun forms of words (nominalizations) into verbs (for example, instead of saying, "students will be expected to…", use the more active form, "we expect students to…").

→ Consider alternatives to paragraphs (for example, bullet points).

→ Ensure there is a strong contrast between your text and background.

→ Avoid all caps (for example, use "policy" instead of "POLICY").

For more information, see the plain language guide on the government of British Columbia website.

10. Evaluate your policy for accessibility

As a final and on-going commitment to accessibility, you may wish to design an evaluation to monitor and measure the accessibility of your newly crafted policy. This can take many forms, depending on what you'd like to measure. One example is to evaluate your engagement with the disability community. Did this engagement help you to develop an accessibility policy that accurately reflect the needs and priorities of everyone?

When you have an evaluation question, you can determine what the success indicators are. For the above example, an indicator may be a policy document that everyone in your working group collaborated on. Or perhaps it's a themes document from the survey you released to your disability community that shows key learnings – and how they are written into your policy. Being able to monitor and measure what you accomplished with your engagement will be a valuable metric to learn from, celebrate, and communicate with your community.

Appendix A

Guidance on disability terminology

The Accessible BC Act includes definitions for some key terms related to disability. Beyond this, there is no guidance on what terms are acceptable and what terms are out of date. The table below may help to provide this guidance at the time this resource was created. Use it to search for outdated terms in your policy so you can replace them with something appropriate.

+ "Student with special needs", "special education"

Guidance
The needs of people with disabilities are not special. They are recognized as part of the wide variation of the human experience.

Instead Use
"Student with a disability", "inclusive education".

Note: when a policy focuses on educational supports and not just accessibility, "students with disabilities or diverse abilities" may be appropriate.

+ "Handicapped", "wheelchair bound", "confined to a wheelchair"

Guidance
These terms reinforce a negative view of disabled people/people with disabilities. They often depict people with disabilities as powerless "victims" or "objects".

Instead Use
"Wheelchair user", "person who uses a mobility device".

➕ "Differently abled", "handi-capable"

Guidance

Euphemisms attempt to avoid historical stigma associated with disability. But in some ways, they reinforce it. These terms are not included in human rights or accessibility legislation, and therefore are less powerful.

Instead Use

"Disabled", "disability".

➕ "The disabled", "an autistic"

Guidance

This language can be dehumanizing as it doesn't recognize the personhood of whoever is being talked about.

Instead Use

"Disabled student", "student with a disability", "Autistic person", or "person with autism/ASD".

➕ "Suffers from/victim of a condition", "afflicted by a condition"

Guidance

Such expressions infer a disabled person has a reduced quality of life or is reduced to their health condition. Avoid descriptions that imply pity.

Instead Use

"Person with a condition", "person living with a condition".

Appendix B

Accessibility resources

⊕ **Legislation**

- ⊙ [UN Declaration on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities](#)
- ⊙ [Accessible Canada Act](#)
- ⊙ [BC Human Rights Code](#)
- ⊙ [Accessible BC Act](#)

⊕ **Accessibility planning resources**

- ⊙ [BC CAISE Accessibility Resources](#)
- ⊙ [BC Accessibility Hub](#)
- ⊙ [Updates from BC's Accessibility Directorate](#)

BC CAISE