



POSITION PAPER

**ANNUAL ACCESSIBILITY PLAN:
YEAR THREE REPORT**

YORK REGION DISTRICT SCHOOL BOARD

SEPTEMBER 2005

**Bill Hogarth
Director of Education**

**Bill Crothers
Chair of the Board**

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Background

The Year Three Report is a follow-up to the York Region District School Board's previous report, *Annual Accessibility Planning: Year Two Report*, dated September 30, 2005.

ODA ACCESSIBILITY PLAN

The Year One Report can be accessed on the Board's website at: www.yrdsb.edu.on.ca. This initial Accessibility Plan (2003) was intended as a transitional plan which would begin a longer-term planning process to set priorities for the ongoing "identification, removal and prevention of barriers to persons with disabilities in the [school board's] by-laws, if any, and in its policies, programs, practices and services" (*Ontarians with Disabilities Act, 2001 (ODA) s.15 (2)*).

In accordance with the requirements of the *ODA*, the Year Two Report referenced the measures that the York Region District School Board (the Board) had taken in the past and the measures the Board would take in the 2004-2005 school year "to improve opportunities for persons with disabilities and to provide for their involvement in the identification, removal and prevention of barriers to their full participation in the life of the province" (*ODA, s.1*).

Initiatives to improve opportunities for persons with disabilities which had already been undertaken by the Board were identified in the Report including:

- Physical and Communication Barriers
- Architectural
- Technological
- Attitudinal
- Policy/Practice

The Report acknowledged the critical role that the local elementary and secondary schools perform in the life of the community. Universal accessibility to education facilitates equity of opportunity for students, employees, and members of the community.

In identifying current barriers, the Year Two Report noted that many persons with disabilities identified attitude as the major barrier that they encounter.

ODA ACCESSIBILITY PLAN – YEAR THREE

Commitment

Guided by its Mission, Vision, and Values statement, the York Region District School Board is committed to annual accessibility planning and to the continual improvement of accessibility and opportunity for persons with disabilities. This commitment will include a planned review of Board facilities, policies, programs, practices, and services to improve accessibility for students, staff, parents/guardians, volunteers, and members of the community with disabilities.

An Accessibility Plan Team will undertake the responsibility for drafting the annual plan and for highlighting specific areas of focus each year. The annual draft plan will be presented to Coordinating Council of Superintendents (CCS) for its review, revision, and approval. The annual accessibility plan is published yearly as a Report and is made available on the Board's website and through other communication channels.

Objective

The Year Three Report reviews the Board's progress in 2004-2005 with respect to identifying, removing, and preventing barriers for people with disabilities and identifies an area of focus for continuous improvement in 2005-2006.

Progress to Date:

In **2004-2005** attention was focused on the following areas: attitudinal and barriers faced by York Region District School Board employees and students.

(a) Physical/Architectural/Informational

A New School Survey was provided to both the principal and to a representative of the Special Education Team in order to ensure comments from administration, teachers, and support staff as applicable. Survey results will be considered as input for possible changes to the Board's prospectus for new schools.

(b) Architectural

Provision for interior signage in Braille and located at an accessible height will be included in the elementary and secondary school prospectus for the 2006 elementary school and 2007 secondary school projects.

(c) Technological

Provision of a larger-print alternative to the standard visual format on the Board website allows the end user to access a larger print font.

(d) **Attitudinal**

Plans for raising awareness of attitudinal barriers and for developing strategies for the removal of such barriers are underway. Professional development for all staff is a key element in the plan for 2004-2005.

(e) **Policy/Practice**

The review of Board policies and procedures and the drafting of a supporting procedure to the Barrier Free Policy will be undertaken as Board staff become aware of expectations regarding identification, removal, and prevention of barriers.

(f) **Consultations conducted**

Stephanie Swenson, teacher of students with Autism at Markham Gateway P.S.

Stephanie and her team have successfully integrated students with autism into classes. Some key barriers and details brought forward by Stephanie are:

- Students need appropriate models of communication, both peer and teacher
- Students need daily opportunities to try to communicate with peers – not just with adults
- Students are integrated into their classrooms to begin their day
- Peers are taught how to respond to initiations and how to listen
- Students need opportunities to see models of appropriate social behaviour
- Students need models of appropriate behaviour
- The role of an Educational Assistant can often be a physical barrier for the student – they are seen in the other student's eyes as needing 'special' help.
- The students start each day in the integrated classroom and are removed as needed by Stephanie and her team instead of being in a segregated classroom. This way the students are given support without there being a visible barrier.
- This integration process was built up over one year and had the support of the Administration at Markham Gateway.
- These students do not have to be at the same level academically for this system to work.

Pamela Munoz, Communications Officer for Voiceprint

Voiceprint Canada is an organization that reads newspapers and magazine articles, government notices and other published information so people with disabilities can access the material. Examples of conditions that can result in becoming print-restricted include, dyslexia, physical paralysis, multiple sclerosis, Parkinson's disease, arthritis and neurological impairments resulting from accidents or illness. Volunteers come in each morning and read the newspapers and documents. There is no charge to access this program. Government notices can be provided in a bilingual format.

Dr. Kevin Stewart, Representing teachers of blind and visually impaired.

Kevin shared with the team the work that the teachers and Braille transcribers are doing in our system. We have a Braille production centre at YRDSB. Technology has done a lot to assist students with visual impairments. Attitudes from their peers is still a challenge. Children with special needs want to be like other kids. Independence is extremely important and linked to self-esteem. These students need to be socially accepted.

Lynn Lockhart-Menzies, Regional Special Education Services

Lynn Lockhart-Menzies shared some experiences that she has had regarding barriers. Lynn lost all her hearing 2 years ago. Eight months ago she had a cochlear implant and since then has been learning to hear all over again. Some barriers that students with hearing impairments are:

- FM Equipment - students are equipped with personal FM systems for classroom use. Some schools have sound systems in their assembly areas which are not usually compatible with the personal FM system
- Morning announcements - Students with hearing needs are not able to comprehend announcements. Lynn provided some simple strategies that could be used to make the announcements visible. Some suggestions were: posting all new announcements on school's main bulletin board, secretary to type announcements and send to classroom computer monitors or display on a LED announcement board in a central location, have a copy of announcements available in advance, etc. A couple of school boards use monitors in their schools to broadcast the announcements auditorially and visually.
- Videos - most Board videos are uncaptioned and are used as teaching materials in the classroom. Deaf/Hard of Hearing students are not able to follow videotape showings without any preteaching or captioning. Some schools still have older televisions that do not have captioning options in the TV menu. Some newer televisions require the use of a remote control to access the menu to activate the captioning. Remote controls are usually missing or difficult to locate. Captioning improves literacy for **all** students and provides equal access for Deaf/Hard of hearing students.
- Fire alarms and Code Reds – schools need flashing lights to let students know when there is a fire alarm sounding.
- Attitudes - Students miss a lot of auditory information and requires proper use of FM system, communication strategies, and accommodations. Some people may not repeat information or comments because "it isn't important". As a result, students feel unimportant and isolated.

Elizabeth Hubley, Educational Audiologist

- Works for our board 6 days/month
- She consults to teachers, students and parents on issues related to hearing loss including personalized equipment
- Liaise with outside clinicians (other audiologists)
- Liaise with technicians and companies of hearing instruments

Teresa Estriga - Disability Management Program, Case Manager

The main goal of the program is to assist employees that are returning to work after an injury or an illness. Special accommodations may be necessary or assistance may be needed in applying for Long Term Disability. A challenge that occurs is keeping the employee's disability confidential.

Tom Pawloski - Health and Safety Advisor

Health and Safety work very closely with the Plant Department dealing with issues that may arise (i.e. widening doorways, building ramps). They provide Health & Safety training, in-house, on-line, and self directed. Tom spoke of Bill C45 – a new law that allows charges to be laid against organizations and individuals for Health and Safety violations. It is hoped that this new law will help raise the awareness of Health & Safety in our workplace.

Jose Fernandes - Race Relations, Coordinator

Several issues discussed included:

Attitudes – we can't control attitudes, there is a need to put the behaviour in place. There is no "special treatment" when it comes to public institutions, we (the Board) will meet needs. Jose discussed a survey that was provided by the Board that measures self-awareness.

Elaine Vollett and Michelle Del Carmen - The Centre for D.R.E.A.M.S. (Developing Relationships for Exceptional Adults in Markham)

The main goals at D.R.E.A.M.S. are to help individuals with intellectual challenges become productive, independent, dignified, and respected members of society.

ODA – Accessibility Plan Team

The ODA - Accessibility Plan Team (the Team) is a working committee comprised of staff, teachers, trustees, Special Education Advisory Committee (SEAC) members, and administrators.

The members of the team are noted below:

Linda Bernofsky	Special Education Advisory Committee
Christina Doyle, Vice-Chair	Elementary Teacher
Janet Hicks	Employee Services
Rhonda Jacobsen-Cherry	Special Education Advisory Committee
Brian Jolicoeur	EA, Huron Heights Secondary School
Sue Kaufman	OSSTF, District 11
Andrew Keuken	Planning Department
Stan Korolnek	Trustee
Fred Mayor	ETFO-YR, OT
Louise Moreau	Curriculum and Instructional Services
Mary Cromwell	President, CUPE 1196
Susan Plamondon	Trustee
Jaimini Randev, Chair	Superintendent of Employee Services
Deborah Rose	Special Education Advisory Committee
Pierre Schipper	Manager of Facilities Services

Ross Virgo
Sandra Ware
Kathy Wosnick
Beth Dolson

Public Relations Officer
Secondary Teacher
Elementary Vice-Principal
Recorder

**Working to Improve Accessibility for Persons with Disabilities in York Region -
Identification of Barriers Addressed in 2004-2005**

The Accessibility Plan Team identified the removal of attitudinal barriers as the Board's main focus for the 2004-2005 school year. The Team believed that raising awareness of attitudinal barriers which may limit full participation in education and community is the first significant step to reducing and eliminating such barriers.

According to Statistics Canada, there are approximately 1.5 million people with disabilities in Ontario, representing approximately 13.5% of all citizens. By 2025, it's expected that this number will increase to three million people, or 20 % of the population.

In 2001, the number of people in York Region who identified themselves as having a disability was about 90,330 or 12% of the total population. According to projections for the region, it is estimated that the number of people with disabilities in 2026 will be approximately 18% of residents.

York Region District School Board serves over 106,000 students and their families. It employs approximately 10,000 full-time and part-time workers. Students, staff, and visitors interact with the systems approximately 180 schools and administrative buildings. The YRDSB has opened over 43 new schools in the last five years and is scheduled to open another 25 new schools in the next five years. With a high rate of

growth and steady rates of retirement, the Board hires/replaces approximately 800 people on an annual basis.

Over the 2004-2005 school year, our Accessibility Plan has been to continue to identify and remove barriers. In order to do so effectively, we have focused our attention on increasing our own awareness of accessibility issues. We have learned that disabilities come in varying forms and can be physical, mental, or emotional. Disabilities may be temporary or permanent. Disabilities may be visible or invisible. We have also learned that whatever disability a person may have, he, or she is an individual first.

Accessibility is a shared responsibility. Each division, department, site, and individual has a responsibility to help in meeting the organization's goal of ensuring quality workplaces that are accessible and invite the full participation of all stakeholders.

Update for Community Education Centres, York Region District School Board

Renovations That Were Addressed Last School Year to Enhance Accessibility

- Aurora Heights modification to handicap washroom
- Charles Howitt changes to portapack to accompany special education programme
- Eva L. Dennis installation of door openers to front door
- H.G. Bernard modification to handicap washroom to accommodate needs of physically disabled students
- Highview renovations to classroom to accommodate space needs of physically disabled students
- Ross Doan installation of ramp for special needs student and installation of telephone in DD class for safety issues
- Ross Doan installation of washroom facility in DD classroom
- Bayview High School on the list for elevator installation in 2006/2007
- Thornhill High School renovations to handicap washroom/DD classroom that will accommodate a change table in the washroom and make the DD room accessible to students in wheelchairs
- Alexander Mackenzie push button at front door for wheelchair accessibility
- additional parking spaces for handicapped
- additional signage for same parking spaces
- installation of elevators
- wheel chair ramps
- Hoyer lifts
- removal of carpeting
- "hush-up" on chairs
- white boards to replace black boards

- electronic door openers
- old cork board covered
- grab bars installed
- asbestos removed
- platforms (pee step!) installed in washroom
- change tables
- office moved to front of school
- buzzers indicating need for assistance
- YRDSB Abilities Awareness Programme at Ross Doan P.S.
- PT/OT staff meeting presentation at Oak Ridges P.S. to address playground and safety needs
- Pre-school visits by Coordinators and Consultant of EIS students in preparation of entry to school programme and sharing of information with PT/OTs so that accommodation and modification of school facilities may be undertaken e.g. acquisition of slant board, installation of change table, acquisition of small tables and chairs
- Ongoing consultation with Regional PT/OT to address individual needs of students
- Attendance at Regional Hospital transition meetings, such as, Bloorview MacMillan, by coordinator and regional support staff
- Ongoing discussions with Plant Services re: renovation needs in school sites

Activities Conducted to Increase Awareness of Accessibility Issues

- YRDSB Abilities Awareness Programme at Ross Doan P.S.
- PT/OT staff meeting presentation at Oak Ridges P.S. to address playground and safety needs
- Pre-school visits by Coordinators and Consultant of EIS students in preparation of entry to school programme and sharing of information with PT/OTs so that accommodation and modification of school facilities may be undertaken e.g. acquisition of slant board, installation of change table, acquisition of small tables and chairs
- Ongoing consultation with Regional PT/OT to address individual needs of students
- Attendance at Regional Hospital transition meetings, such as, Bloorview MacMillan, by coordinator and regional support staff
- Ongoing discussions with Plant Services re: renovation needs in school sites
- abilities awareness workshops for students
- awareness meetings (e.g. anaphylaxis)
- staff presentations re. specific disabilities
- newsletters that inform the community
- well water alert
- postings on windows
- signage re. asphalt indicators
- school council presentations by groups concerned
- training for school assistants
- no snacks outside (wasp attraction danger for students with allergies)

What you would you like to see happen that will improve accessibility for students, staff, and visitors in YRDSB?

- improve air circulation
- allow air exchanges to run past 5 pm and turn back on prior to 7 am
- ensure that portables are accessible to students in wheelchairs
- establish a system-wide protocol for messages regarding disabilities e.g. signs, newsletter inserts, etc. thus giving the same message to all
- increase understanding what we mean by “disabilities” (e.g. medical, not just physical)
- Install lifts at all stairs thus increasing accessibility for all (staff, students, seniors, etc.)
- provide adequate storage for equipment required by students with severe disabilities
- pave additional areas to ease access for all
- Remove contaminated carpeting from older sites to address respiratory Problems and environmental sensitivities experience by students and staff
(Note: this statement was repeated time and time again, and is seen as urgent)

Update for Curriculum and Instructional Services Report

Staff in Curriculum and Instructional Services actively plan all in-service, training and PD activity to ensure full accessibility for all potential participants. The sites used for all Curriculum-sponsored activities are screened for accessibility prior to any booking arrangements. In keeping with this screening process, the following criteria must be met before a location will be used for any activity:

- handicap parking must be available;
- walkways and main entrances to the venue must provide easy access for those with physical disabilities;
- washrooms and breakout rooms must be easily accessible;
- seating arrangements for participants are easily adapted for those requiring additional space, or wheelchair access; and
- Session leaders ensure that appropriate accommodations are made for participants with ambulatory, visual, or auditory requirements.

Centre for Leadership and Learning

Recently, the York Region District School Board carried out renovations to the building now referred to as The Centre for Leadership and Learning which is located at 300 Harry Walker Parkway South in Newmarket, Ontario. This building has been specifically designed to support the in-service, training, and professional development needs of all

staff employed by the York Region District School Board. To ensure that the needs of staff using this training facility are met, the following access issues have been addressed.

- handicap parking spaces have designated near the main entrance to the training facilities;
- the entrance doors leading to the reception area and training/meeting rooms provide wheelchair/handicap access;
- all training/meeting rooms can be easily accessed from the first floor entrance, or the elevator entrance on the second floor (no training/meeting rooms require access via stairs); and
- All washroom facilities provide wheelchair access and adapted amenities to support use by those with ambulatory disabilities.

Suggested Reference Material/Resources

Note:

In addition to the following resources, school boards are encouraged to consult the links provided on the Ministry of Citizenship's website (<http://www.gov.on.ca/citizenship/accessibility/index.html>) and on the Paths to Equal Opportunity website (www.equalopportunity.on.ca/eng_g/links)

Accessibility Planning Resources for School Boards:

Accessibility Ontario – Guide to Annual Accessibility Planning

<http://www.gov.on.ca/citizenship/accessibility/english/accessibleplanningguide.htm>

The *Ontarians with Disabilities Act*,

2001 <http://www.gov.on.ca/citizenship/accessibility/english/act2001.htm>

Human Resources Development Canada, *A Way With Words*

http://www.hrdc-drhc.gc.ca/hrib/sdd-dds/odi/documents/waywithwords_tmp/purpose.shtml

Community Resources for Independence, *Using Words With Dignity*

<http://www.crinet.org/dignity.php>

Government of Ontario – Paths to Equal Opportunity

A-Z index – Accessibility in Educational environments

http://www.equalopportunity.on.ca/eng_g/subject/index.asp?action=search_4&dir_id=1071

Ontario Human Rights Commission - *Policy and Guidelines on Disability and the Duty to Accommodate* <http://www.ohrc.on.ca/english/publications/disability-policy.shtml>

Enablelink (Canadian Abilities Foundation) Directory of Canadian Disability Links

http://www.enablelink.org/resources/links_to.html

Directory for Accessibility

<http://www.accessibilitydirectory.ca>

Adaptive Technology Resource Centre

<http://www.utoronto.ca/atrc>

Ontario Interpreter Services (OIS)

<http://www.chs.ca/services/ois.html>

Canadian Standards Association:

B6521-95 Barrier-Free Design

B480-02 – Customer Service Standard for People with Disabilities
<http://www.csa.ca>

Playability Tool Kit: Building Accessible Playspaces
<http://www.opassoc.on.ca/toolkit.asp>

A Few Key Ontario Disability Organizations:

Canadian National Institute for the Blind (CNIB)
<http://www.cnib.ca>

Canadian Hearing Society
<http://www.chs.ca>

Canadian Mental Health Association – Ontario
<http://www.ontario.cmha.ca>

Community Living Ontario
<http://www.oacl.on.ca>

Multiple Sclerosis Society of Canada – Ontario Division
<http://www.mssociety.ca/ontario>

Learning Disabilities Association of Ontario
<http://www.ldao.on.ca>

Little People of Ontario
<http://www.lpo.on.ca>

Ontario Brain Injury Association
<http://www.obia.on.ca>

Canadian Paraplegic Association – Ontario
<http://www.canparaplegic.org/on>

Le Phénix
<http://www.lephenix.on.ca>

Ontario March of Dimes
<http://www.dimes.on.ca>

The Easter Seal Society – Ontario
<http://www.easterseals.org>

AboutFace International
<http://www.aboutfaceinternational.org>

Annual ODA Accessibility Planning

An ODA Accessibility Plan Team, under the leadership of the Superintendent of Employee Services, will undertake responsibility for monitoring progress and achievement with respect to meeting the objectives of the annual plan.

The Team will be pleased to consider recommendations and proposed direction from key stakeholders and partners on an ongoing basis. It is imperative that the dialogue continue with the persons most affected by this plan.

Questions and comments should be directed to the Superintendent of Employee Services, Jaimini Randev, at jaimini.randev@yrdsb.edu.on.ca or by phone at (905) 727-0022, ext. 2220.