Tables allow us to present content in a logical and organized way. Accessible tables must be formatted properly and include a table summary. Here are some best practices to ensure tables are more accessible to everyone, including people with disabilities.

Use tables the right way

Right way: Tables should only be used to show data or information that is easier to understand in as linear and sequential grid.

Schools by Area	Elementary	Secondary
North	45	8
Central	45	8
West	39	8
East	58	11

Wrong way: Tables should never be used as a way to format the layout of a document or webpage. Removing table borders to visually format a page will make your content inaccessible to for screen readers.

There are specific column tools for formatting information side-by-side (which was used to format this section of text).

Simple Structure

The information in a table should be easy to follow across and down. Tables presented this way will also be accessible for screen reader software, which reads each cell from left to right and top to bottom.

The structure of tables should be kept simple by not using the merge or split cells tools. Combining, merging or splitting cells can make information harder to understand for both visual and non-visual users. This also means any table titles should go above the table and not in the top row of the table as merged cells.

Row and Column Header

The first row and column of all tables need to be identified as headers. In Microsoft Word, the "Header Row" and "First Column" are identified by default when you add a table. The "Repeat Header Rows" needs to be enabled in Microsoft Word (refer to image below) so that the header row is repeated on each page if the table continues onto multiple pages.
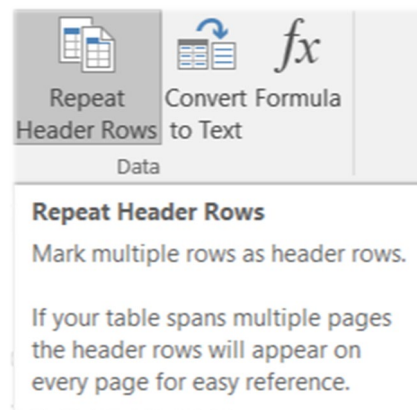
Proper table headers are important because screen reader software reads the header row before reading each cell.

For example, the accessible table below would be read by screen reader software like this: "First Name Riley, Last Name Smith, Age 9, Grade 4, First Name Ryan, Last Name Lee, Age 8, Grade 3".

First Name	Last Name	Age	Grade
Riley	Smith	9	4
Ryan	Lee	8	3

If a table is not formatted correctly using a row header, people who use screen reader may not understand the contents of certain cells in relation to other cells. For example, if the table above did not have a header row identified, it would be read by screen reader software like this: "First Name, Last Name, Age Grade, Riley, Smith, 9, 4, Ryan, Lee, 8, 3".

Table Summary

Tables are considered [complex images](#) that need alt text. All tables should include a summary of the information within the table as alt text and/or in the text around the table.

Do...

- Use a table to show or compare data/information using rows and columns.
- Ensure row and/or column headers are identified, including the "Repeat Header Rows" in Microsoft Word.
- Create multiple tables separated by headings above each table if the information requires multiple headings.

Don't...

- **Don't** use tables just to format the layout of information in a document or webpage.
- **Don't** merge or split cells in a table.
- **Don't** leave any empty cells in a table.
- **Don't** add a table within another table.