

# **Accessibility Handbook**

Halton District School Board



**2004**

The *Accessibility Handbook* has been prepared by the Halton District School Board Accessibility Working Group. It is available on the board website at [www.hdsb.ca](http://www.hdsb.ca) and in accessible formats, upon request.

Electronic copies are available from [oxleyj@hdsb.ca](mailto:oxleyj@hdsb.ca).

## Table of Contents

	page
Overview of the Ontarians with Disabilities Act, 2001	4
Purpose and Use of the Handbook	5
Terminology Guide Concerning People with Disabilities	5
Communicating with People with Disabilities	7
Overall Attitudes and Approach	8
Creating Accessible Meetings	10
Communication Suggestions	10
Guiding Principles for Reviewing Policies/Practices	10
Accessibility Accommodations for Employees	11
The Accessible Classroom for Teaching & Support Staff	11
Glossary of Terms	12
▪ Disability	
▪ Barrier	
▪ HDSB Diversity Foundation Statement	
Resources	13
A Few Ontario Disability Organizations and HDSB SEAC local associations	14
Accessibility Working Group Members	15
Additional Accessibility Services	15

# Overview of the Ontarians with Disabilities Act, 2001

## Halton District School Board Accessibility Plan

The *Ontarians with Disabilities Act, 2001 (ODA)* was proclaimed on September 30, 2002. The purpose of the Act is to improve opportunities for people 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. These barriers include physical, architectural, information, communication, attitudinal, technological and policies/practices barriers.

An important premise of the ODA is that improving accessibility is a shared responsibility. People with disabilities represent a significant and growing part of our population. Enhancing the ability of people with disabilities to have equal access to opportunities, live independently and contribute to the community will have positive effects on future prosperity in Ontario.

The *Ontarians with Disabilities Act, 2001* requires each school board to prepare an annual accessibility plan, to consult with people with disabilities in the preparation of this plan and to make the plan public. The Halton District School Board established the Accessibility Working Group in May 2003 to undertake this planning process. See page 15 for Accessibility Working Group Membership

The Accessibility Plan describes the measures that the board has taken in the past and measures the board will take this year to identify, remove and prevent barriers for people with disabilities who work in, use or attend school board facilities and use its services.

The Halton District School Board Annual Accessibility Plan is posted on the board website at [www.hdsb.ca](http://www.hdsb.ca).

Jacki Oxley  
Chair, HDSB Accessibility Working Group

## **Purpose and Use of the Handbook**

This handbook is designed to increase awareness and sensitivity about barriers for people with disabilities in our schools and other board facilities. It is also intended to encourage and promote fair and accurate portrayal of people with disabilities.

This handbook is a resource for schools to be consulted when working and interacting with people with disabilities including our students, staff, volunteers and members of our school communities. The handbook presents suggestions for creating accessible meetings, speaking with or interviewing people with disabilities, media coverage of events involving people with disabilities and other aspects of accessibility.

Remember that although some disabilities are not visible, it does not mean they are less real. Individuals with invisible disabilities such as epilepsy, diabetes, haemophilia, mental disorder, learning or developmental disabilities also encounter negative attitudes and barriers to full participation.

*Words and images should reflect an inclusive society.*

## **Terminology Guide Concerning People with Disabilities**

It is important to remember that each word in today's terminology has a precise meaning, i.e. the words are not interchangeable, therefore, when referring to people with disabilities, the following information is important.

“Disabled” and “handicapped” are not the same thing. A disability is a functional limitation or restriction of an individual's ability to perform an activity. A “handicap” is an environmental or attitudinal barrier that limits the opportunity for a person to participate fully. Negative attitudes or inaccessible entrances to buildings are examples of handicaps, e.g., “a person who is handicapped by....”.

The word “disabled” is an adjective, not a noun. People are not conditions. The appropriate terminology always refers to the person first, the disability second, e.g. a student with a learning disability, a person who is deaf, etc.

Similarly, references which cause discomfort, guilt, pity or insult, should be avoided. Words like “suffers from”, “stricken with”, “afflicted by”, “patient”, “disease” or “sick” suggest constant pain and a sense of hopelessness. While this may be the case for some individuals, a disability is a condition that does not necessarily cause pain or require medical attention.

Try to avoid categorizing people with disabilities as either super-achievers or tragic figures. Choose words that are non-judgmental, non-emotional and are accurate descriptions. Avoid using “brave”, “courageous”, “inspirational” or other similar words that are routinely used to describe a person with a disability.

The language and images used to portray people with disabilities is vitally important in changing perceptions. "People first" is a language that emphasizes the person rather than the disability.

<b><i>DO NOT USE or SAY:</i></b> words with strong negative connotations	<b><i>DO USE OR SAY:</i></b> more affirmative and reflect positive attitudes
Handicapped (the)	Disabled or person with a disability
Handicapped parking spot	Accessible parking spot or barrier-free parking spot
Handicapped washroom	Accessible washroom
The Blind, Visually Impaired	Person who is blind, visually impaired or person with low vision
Confined to a wheelchair, wheelchair-bound	Person who uses a wheelchair, a wheelchair user
Diabetic	Person who has diabetes
Epileptic	Person with epilepsy
Physically challenged	Person with a physical disability
Victim of cerebral palsy, multiple sclerosis, arthritis, etc	Person who has cerebral palsy, multiple sclerosis, arthritis, etc. or Person with a mobility impairment
Use images that isolate or call special attention to people with disabilities unless appropriate to the subject matter	Use images that show people with disabilities participating in society
Use actors/models without disabilities to represent people with disabilities	Use actor/models with disabilities to portray people with disabilities
Always depict the super-achieving individual to represent all people with disabilities	Depict whenever possible, the typical individual who has a disability
Normal	Person who is not disabled
The Deaf, Hearing Impaired	Person who is deaf or is hard of hearing. A person with a hearing loss
Mentally challenged or retarded	Person with an intellectual disability or a developmental disability

People with disabilities are comfortable with the terminology used to describe daily living activities. People who use wheelchairs go for "walks", people with visual impairments "see" what you mean, etc.

A disability may just mean that some things are done in a different manner; however, that does not mean the words used to describe the activity must be different.

## **Communicating with People with Disabilities**

You don't have to feel awkward when dealing with a person who has a disability. If you are ever unsure about what to do or say with a person who has a disability, just ask. As in any new situation, everyone will feel more comfortable if you relax.

### **Meeting Someone**

People who use wheelchairs may have a variety of disabilities. Some have use of their arms and some do not. When you meet someone, extend your hand to shake if that is what you normally do. A person who cannot shake hands will let you know. He or she will appreciate being treated in a normal way. If you are meeting a person who is blind, identify yourself. If you have met before, remind him/her of the context; s/he won't have the visual clues to jog his memory.

### **Helping**

Do not automatically give assistance; ask first if the person wants help. Follow the person's cues, and ask if you are not sure. Be the assistant, not the director; let a person who is blind hold your arm and follow you. Don't be offended if someone refuses your offer of assistance. It's his or her choice to be as independent as they can be.

### **Communication**

Talk directly to the person, not to an aide, friend, or interpreter. If the person has a speech impairment, listen carefully and patiently. Ask him/her to repeat if you don't understand. If the person doesn't understand you when you speak, try again. Don't let him/her think your communication with him/her is not worthwhile to you. If the person is deaf or hard of hearing, follow his or her lead; use gestures or write. If the person uses a wheelchair, sit and converse at his/her level.

### **Socializing**

Do not leave a person with a disability out of a conversation or activity because you feel uncomfortable or fear that s/he will feel uncomfortable. Include him or her as you would anyone else. He or she knows what they can do and want to do; let it be their decision whether or not to participate.

### **Disability**

Treat the person as an individual. Don't assume that the person's disability is all s/he can talk about or is interested in. Find a topic of small talk, the way you would with anyone. Don't treat the person as a disability.

### **Environments**

Be sensitive about the setting. A noisy or dark environment, or people talking simultaneously, might make it difficult for people with a vision, speech, or hearing disability to participate in a conversation. Be aware of clear paths of travel for people who use mobility aids or who are blind. Describe the goings-on and surroundings (especially obstacles) to a person who is blind. A person with

chemical sensitivity may have a reaction to smoke, perfume, cleaning products, or other forms of toxins in the environment.

### **Touching**

Do not pet guide or service dogs and do not touch a person with a disability unless there is a good reason (such as shaking hands in greeting or if the person has requested assistance). However, you may gently touch a person who is deaf to get his/her attention. Never push a person's wheelchair without his or her permission. Please do not recoil if you meet a person with a disability. Your acceptance means a lot.

### **Invisible Disabilities**

Not all disabilities are apparent. A person may have trouble following a conversation, may not respond when you call or wave, may make a request that seems strange to you, or may say or do something that seems inappropriate. The person may have a invisible disability, such as low vision, a hearing or learning disability, traumatic brain injury, mental impairment, or mental illness. Don't make assumptions about the person or his or her disability. Be open-minded.

### **Learning More**

Lack of knowledge or misinformation may lead you to shy away from interacting with people with certain disabilities. Preconceptions about mental illness, cerebral palsy, Tourette's Syndrome and other disabilities often lead to a lack of acceptance by those around the person. Remember that we are all complex human beings; ***a disability is just one aspect of a person.*** Learning more about the disability may alleviate your fears and pave the way for you to see the person for whom he or she is.

## **Overall Attitudes and Approach**

As you meet people with various physical disabilities, you will likely find that you are apprehensive about how you should behave towards that individual. Every person is different and some will find it easy to work with such individuals, whereas others will find it difficult adjusting to working with people with physical disabilities. Always remember that a person with a disability is a person. He or she is like anyone else, except for the limitations of their disability.

The most important thing is to be honest. If you do not understand someone because they have difficulty with their speech, or they use some form of communication aid, please do not assume that they do not understand. If you have difficulty understanding them, then admit it, and try to get someone to translate for you. People in such situations will not get upset if you are honest, and in time, you will learn to understand what they are saying to you.

## **How to help**

- Introduce yourself and offer assistance.
- Don't be offended if your help is not needed.
- Ask how you can help and listen for instructions.
- Be courteous, but NOT condescending.
- Assist people with disabilities when necessary or requested, but do not discourage their active participation.
- Allow a person DIGNITY to do what he or she wants to do for him or herself.

## **Things to remember**

- Treat people as you would like to be treated yourself.
- Do not show pity for people with disabilities. It makes them feel demoralized.
- People with disabilities are NOT alike and have a wide variety of skills and personalities. We are all individuals.
- Most people with disabilities are not sick, incompetent, dependent, unintelligent or contagious.
- A mobility device/aid is part of the user's personal space and must be respected. It is not a leaning post.

## **When you meet a person who is non-verbal or non-vocal**

- Some people who are non-verbal or non-vocal prefer to write their communications down on paper, some use sign-language and some use other types of communication aids. These methods can be slow and require patience and concentration.
- Try to keep in mind that communication is the important thing
- You might try using more yes/no questions

## **Suggestions for communicating with people using communication devices**

1. Expect people to communicate
2. Ask the person to show how they indicate "yes". Once you have noted this, ask them how they indicate "no".
3. Find out if they:
  - a. feel like talking to you, and
  - b. have the time to talk with you
4. If there are instructions visible for communicating with this person, take a moment to read them
5. Make sure the person's communication system is within their reach
6. Find out how the person "points" (with their finger, eyes, fist, etc.)
7. Ask one question at a time
8. Ask open-ended, rather than yes/no questions, whenever appropriate
9. Wait for a response

## **Creating Accessible Meetings**

Depending on the type of disability, you may need a sign language interpreter, FM system or hearing-assist system for people who are deaf or who are hard-of-hearing, clear doorways/entrances and additional open space for people with a physical disability using mobility aids or you may need to accommodate a person with a disability who travels with a service dog. It is correct to inquire from the person with a disability what type(s) of accommodations are needed to facilitate their involvement. Refer to technical aids in factual, non-emotional terms. Avoid prolonged focus on support equipment.

When advertising a meeting include the phrase "Should you require accessibility accommodations for participation in this meeting, please contact.....at (phone number or e-mail address).

## **Communication Suggestions**

All communication e.g. media releases, letters to parents, newsletters, student agendas, staff handbooks, etc. should reflect the suggestions regarding use of terminology and *People First Language* as outlined in this handbook.

## **Guiding Principles for Reviewing Policies/Practices**

When reviewing and amending policies, procedures or other practices at the school or board level, the following guiding principles need to be kept in mind.

- Use inclusive language - *people first language*
- Use appropriate terminology
- If a print publication, include the phrase "available in accessible formats upon request"
- When organizing a professional development session or holding a public information session, please include the phrase "Should you have accessibility accommodation requirements, please contact the organizer of the in-service/meeting with your request."

## **Accessibility Accommodations for Employees**

The following are some general suggestions for accommodating employee accessibility needs.

- For school staff using mobility aids, assign indoor supervision duties rather than outdoor duties
- Provide staff with their own elevator key to accommodate accessibility needs
- Provide staff with a staff washroom with accessible features
- Ensure that snow and/or ice is removed from a wide enough path to accommodate mobility aids from the accessible parking spaces to building entrance
- Ensure that automatic door openers are in good working condition and are switched to the “on” position at all times
- Check ramps for winter damage that may leave broken asphalt or ridged asphalt impeding accessibility
- Review school “lockdown” and “area of refuge” procedures for accessibility accommodation plans

## **The Accessible Classroom for Teaching & Support Staff**

Creating an accessible classroom or other working environment is personalized to meet the individual employee’s accommodation needs; however, there are some common features for consideration.

- Provide clear pathways to classroom and/or workroom areas as well as clear access to doorways/entranceways
- Furniture in classrooms should be arranged in a double horseshoe manner to accommodate movement for staff using mobility aids
- Classroom needs a low cart for an overhead projector or a data projector for teachers using wheelchairs or other mobility aids
- electrical outlets and wall-mounted light switches may need to be relocated to accommodate access
- Dropdown desk leaf and dropdown blackboards or white board may need to be installed
- A portable microphone for voice projection may be needed

***Contact the Disability Management Coordinator at 335-3663 ext 3393 for specific, individual employee accommodation needs***

## **Glossary of Terms**

### **Disability**

The *Ontarians with Disability Act* adopts the broad definition for disability that is set out in the *Ontario Human Rights Code*. “Disability” is:

- (a) any degree of physical disability, infirmity, malformation or disfigurement that is caused by bodily injury, birth defect or illness and, without limiting the generality of the foregoing, includes diabetes mellitus, epilepsy, a brain injury, any degree of paralysis, amputation, lack of physical co-ordination, blindness or visual impediment, deafness or hearing impediment, muteness or speech impediment, or physical reliance on a guide dog or other animal or on a wheelchair or other remedial appliance or device.
- (b) a condition of mental impairment or a developmental disability;
- (c) a learning disability, or a dysfunction in one or more of the processes involved in understanding or using symbols or spoken language;
- (d) a mental disorder, or
- (e) an injury or disability for which benefits were claimed or received under the insurance plan established under the *Workplace Safety and Insurance Act*, 1997.

### **Barrier**

A “barrier” is anything that prevents a person with a disability from fully participating in all aspects of society because of his or her disability, including a physical barrier, an architectural barrier, an informational or communications barrier, an attitudinal barrier, a technological barrier, a policy or a practice.

### **HDSB Diversity Foundation Statement**

The Halton District School Board is committed to providing the highest quality education that prepares our students for success as responsible, participating citizens of the global community. HDSB believes a system wide commitment to diversity competency is a crucial component of establishing itself as an inclusive learning organization prepared to serve a growing diverse population of students, parents and staff, now and in the future.

The Board recognizes that certain groups in society receive inequitable treatment because of individual and systemic biases related to differences of race, colour, ethnicity, linguistic origin, faith, ancestry, nationality, place of origin, religion, age, ability, gender, sex, sexual orientation, socio-economic status, family status, and marital status. The Board is committed to countering this bias by promoting fairness, equity and inclusion as principles of our system that are reflected in all our policies, programs, operations, practices and curricula.

## Resources

Primary sources of information cited in this handbook were *A Way with Words, Using Words with Dignity* and *Word Choices: A Lexicon of Preferred Terms for Disability Issues*.

Human Resources Development Canada, *A Way With Words* @ [http://www.hrsdc.gc.ca/en/hip/odi/documents/wayWithWords/08\\_copyright.shtml](http://www.hrsdc.gc.ca/en/hip/odi/documents/wayWithWords/08_copyright.shtml)

Community Resources for Independence, *Using Words With Dignity*, @ <http://www.crinet.org/dignity.php>

Accessibility Directorate of Ontario, April 2002, *Word Choices: A Lexicon of Preferred Terms for Disability Issues*, @ <http://www.gov.on.ca/citizenship/accessibility/english/Word%20choices.pdf>

The *Ontarians with Disabilities Act, 2001* <http://www.gov.on.ca/citizenship/accessibility/english/act2001.htm>

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](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](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>

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

In addition to these resources, school board employee groups are encouraged to consult the links provided on the Ministry of Citizenship's website (<http://www.gov.on.ca/citizenship/accessibility/index.html>) and the Paths to Equal Opportunity website ([www.equalopportunity.on.ca/eng\\_g/links](http://www.equalopportunity.on.ca/eng_g/links))

<b>A Few Ontario Disability Organizations</b>	<b>HDSB Special Education Advisory Committee (SEAC) Local Associations</b>
Canadian National Institute for the Blind <a href="http://www.cnib.ca">http://www.cnib.ca</a>	VIEWS: Support for the Families of Blind and Visually Impaired Children <a href="http://www.cnib.ca/divisions/ontario/">http://www.cnib.ca/divisions/ontario/</a>
Canadian Hearing Society <a href="http://www.chs.ca">http://www.chs.ca</a>	Voice for Hearing Impaired Children <a href="http://www.voicefordeafkids.com">www.voicefordeafkids.com</a>
Canadian Mental Health Association <a href="http://www.ontario.cmha.ca">http://www.ontario.cmha.ca</a>	Ontario Association for Families of Children with Communication Disorders <a href="http://www.oafccd.com">www.oafccd.com</a>
AboutFace International <a href="http://www.aboutfaceinternational.org">http://www.aboutfaceinternational.org</a>	Community Living Ontario <a href="http://www.oacl.on.ca">http://www.oacl.on.ca</a>
Multiple Sclerosis Society of Canada <a href="http://www.mssociety.ca/ontario">http://www.mssociety.ca/ontario</a>	The Easter Seal Society – Ontario <a href="http://www.easterseals.org">http://www.easterseals.org</a>
Ontario March of Dimes <a href="http://www.dimes.on.ca">http://www.dimes.on.ca</a>	Ontario Federation of Home & School Associations <a href="http://www.ofhsa.ca">www.ofhsa.ca</a>
Little People of Ontario <a href="http://www.lpo.on.ca">http://www.lpo.on.ca</a>	Association of Bright Children of Ontario (ABC) <a href="http://www.abcontario.ca">www.abcontario.ca</a>
Ontario Brain Injury Association <a href="http://www.obia.on.ca">http://www.obia.on.ca</a>	Autism Society of Ontario <a href="http://www.autismsociety.on.ca">www.autismsociety.on.ca</a>
Canadian Down Syndrome Society <a href="http://www.cdss.ca/Home.html">www.cdss.ca/Home.html</a>	Down Syndrome Association of Ontario <a href="http://www.dsao.ca">www.dsao.ca</a>
Le Phénix <a href="http://www.lephenix.on.ca">http://www.lephenix.on.ca</a>	Tourettes Syndrome Association of Ontario <a href="http://www.tourettesyndromeontario.ca">www.tourettesyndromeontario.ca</a>
Learning Disabilities Association of ON <a href="http://www.ldao.on.ca">http://www.ldao.on.ca</a>	
Canadian Paraplegic Association – ON <a href="http://www.canparaplegic.org/on">http://www.canparaplegic.org/on</a>	

## HDSB Accessibility Working Group Membership

School & Community Liaison  
Human Resources  
Student Services  
Facility Services  
Elementary and Secondary Administration  
Teachers  
Special Education Advisory Committee (SEAC)  
School Councils  
Diversity Coordinator, Community Relations  
Disability Management Coordinator

### Additional Accessibility Services

Sign language Interpreter service 1 (905) 608-0271  
(contact: Ontario Interpreter Services,  
Canadian Hearing Society, Halton-Peel,  
Booking Coordinator)

TTY/Teletypewriter service (905) 825-3743

Foreign Language Interpreter service (905) 335-3663 ext 2222  
(contact HDSB Coordinator :ESL, French as a  
Second Language, International Languages  
for guidelines and information)

For detailed information about organizing accessible meetings, visit the Greater Toronto Hotel Association website at [www.gtha.com](http://www.gtha.com), click on Hospitality Checklist or

Accessibility Directorate of Ontario's document *Planning for Accessible Meetings* at <http://www.gov.on.ca/citizenship/accessibility/english/accessiblemeetings.htm>

For clarification about any part of the Handbook, please contact Jacki Oxley at (905) 335-3663 ext 3208 or by e-mail at [oxleyj@hdsb.ca](mailto:oxleyj@hdsb.ca)

*See the **Ability**  
in Disability*

Rick Hansen