

## Hamilton Wentworth District School Board Bi-Annual Accessibility Report

### Introduction

The Hamilton Wentworth District School Board has continued its commitment to meet and support the objectives of the AODA, 2005.

The purpose of this report is to identify the practices and accomplishments aimed at removing barriers for all members of our community thereby continuing to create an environment that builds and respects the independence, inclusion and integration of all. (Please note that the work on our Multi-Year Accessibility Plan was severely disrupted by the sanctions of 2019 and the subsequent closure of Board facilities in 2020-21 due to COVID 19. Consequently, a revised plan will be available for 2022-2025 by the end of 2022).

### Objectives

This report supports and reflects the objectives of the HWDSB Multi-Year Accessibility Plan (2018-2022) to:

- Describe the process by which HWDSB will identify, remove and prevent barriers;
- Review recent efforts by HWDSB to remove and prevent barriers;
- Describe the measures HWDSB will take in the period of January 1, 2018 to December 31, 2022 to identify, remove and prevent barriers;
- Make a commitment to provide an annual status report on HWDSB's implementation of the multi-year accessibility plan;
- Make a commitment to review and update the multi-year accessibility plan at least once every five years; and
- Describe how HWDSB will make this accessibility plan available to the public.

### Customer Service Accomplishments

In January 2019, all permanent HWDSB staff, trustees and staff working in LTOs were required to participate in virtual AODA training. Training records are held centrally through the HUB.

In March of 2019, all occasional staff were also required to participate in the same training. To capture new hires since this training was initially rolled out, all casual staff were required to participate in AODA training through a third party website ([www.aoda.ca](http://www.aoda.ca)) in the 2020/2021 schools year.

Further, as of September 2020 all new hires are required to complete this training as part of the onboarding process. This ensures all new employees complete this critical training. Physical copies of these training records are held within the employee files.

Lastly, all post-secondary placement students are required to participate in training prior to beginning their placement, where training records are recorded through the HUB. The training provided meets the requirements of the accessibility standards and are appropriate for the duties of participants.

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During 2020-2021, many different pieces of equipment were purchased to support student accessibility to curriculum.

For example, 300 laptops and 1200 iPads were received as a result of applications to SEA during the period of June 2019 to December 2021. All these devices have the Microsoft Suite with assistive features like the immersive reader, the math tool, voice to text capabilities, etc.

Every student who receives a SEA device receives training from our SEA EAs. Additionally, students with Learning Disabilities are eligible to apply to the Centre for Success to receive support with their devices to ensure that their needs are being met.

Learning Resource Teachers were able to access in-services about many accessibility topics, including Assistive Technology software training, how to order technology and general Assistive Technology information. Student/school specific training was undertaken on an as needs basis or by request. Many training sessions were offered through PD Place and professional development modules were delivered and made available to all staff to build capacity.

## **Information and Communication Accomplishments**

The HWDSB website is compliant with the Web Content Accessibility Guidelines 2.0 and this is an ongoing commitment. The Communication and IIT departments are also continuing to investigate intranet features.

The website itself has been updated and currently provides notice of disruption of services at all Board facilities for the public.

All school websites have added an Accessibility Section under their “About Us” tab. This will be where schools can add any disruptions specific to their site. Notices will also be posted on the main entrance of the site where the disruption is occurring.

The [www.HWDSB.on.ca/about/compliance/accessibility](http://www.HWDSB.on.ca/about/compliance/accessibility) webpage also outlines new policies and/or how to identify any type of barrier that may be encountered while accessing services or supports throughout the Hamilton Wentworth School Board. Through these submissions, relevant HWDSB staff will be alerted to issues and concerns that may arise from within the community.

In addition to the aforementioned website changes, HWDSB’s public library catalogue was also updated in July 2021 to ensure AODA compliance. Upon request, HWDSB is able to create accessible versions of print and school library resources. From magnification of print to online audio versions, HWDSB is committed to making communication and information accessible to all community members in a user-friendly format that suits their needs.

During this reporting period the following accessibility resources have also been made available to all staff and students: MS Teams accessibility and immersive reader features (e.g., text to speech features, magnification of text font, language translation, and picture dictionary options for word choice); Brightspace Learning Management System (i.e., The Hub), which conforms to web content accessibility guidelines 2.0 level AAA standards; HWDSB’s virtual library, which offers a variety of accessibility resources in both audio and visual formats; resources purchased for remote learning (e.g., Bayfield, Spark Reading, Edwin), which are in digital format to ensure accessibility features are available to all learners.

## **Employment Accomplishments**

Hamilton Wentworth District School Board is committed to ensuring that people with disabilities have the same opportunity of access to our services and employment.

To that end, the procedures regarding Accessibility in Employment, Accommodation of Staff and Accommodation of Staff Disability Support were reviewed and revised in 2020. Further, the policies regarding guide dogs, service dogs and service animals for both staff and students were reviewed and updated.

## **Transportation Accomplishments**

Hamilton Wentworth Student Transportation Services (HWSTS) is responsible for the provision of safe, accessible and efficient transportation services to eligible students at HWDSB.

During the past two years, HWSTS has continued to ensure that transportation services are accessible for students with disabilities.

Since 2014, HWDSB has consulted with parents/guardians and school personnel to develop individual school transportation plans.

During the current reporting period, a noteworthy accomplishment was the digitalization of student personalized transportation plans; this has resulted in more efficient, communicative and detailed access to transportation accommodation information. All digitalized updates also adhere to relevant regulations and rules of confidentiality resulting in an increased level of control over personal student medical information.

## **Design of Physical Environment Accomplishments**

Between 2019 and 2021, HWDSB's Facilities Services has demonstrated an ongoing commitment to ensure that new facilities are designed to comply with the Ontario Building Code requirements for accessibility.

Some school-based accessibility projects that have been completed during this reporting period include: three newly installed elevators, rearrangement of electrical change table and plug-in outlets to ensure accessibility, push button access to school washroom, door modifications to ensure wheelchair and walker accessibility, as well the installation of approximately 55 new touchless door operator systems.

## **Next steps**

Hamilton Wentworth District School Board remains strongly committed to meeting the objectives of the AODA, 2005.

In HWDSB's ongoing pursuit to create an environment that respects the independence, inclusion and integration of all, the following list outlines some next steps that will be considered while updating our Multi-Year Accessibility Plan (to be made available in 2022):

- Consult people with disabilities to collect feedback on aspects of accessibility projects. Seek out feedback from students and/or board staff with disabilities, to ensure that accessibility projects are inclusive and take a variety of perspectives into consideration;

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- Continue to review updated recommendations provided through the AODA website, particularly any standards that are relevant to the education sector. This is an ongoing endeavour; HWDSB's Executive Council has already provided feedback about how to prioritize ADOA work and will continue to review and discuss pertinent updates as they become available;
- Enhance the process of tracking and understanding student accessibility needs from preschool to graduation, through: digitalization of IEPs, IEP audits, strengthening student voice in the IEP and IPRC processes and continuing to review data tracking programs such as Power School and Special Programs;
- Ensure that a diverse planning committee meets on an ongoing and frequent basis to update the Multi-Year Accessibility Plan and efficiently track ongoing projects that will be included in the annual status report.

## Summary

This report is strong evidence of Hamilton Wentworth District School Board's ongoing commitment to removing barriers for all members of our community and continuing to create an environment that builds and respects the independence, inclusion and integration of all.

It is available to the public on the Board website and is available in alternative formats upon request.