

# HWDSB



**HAMILTON-WENTWORTH DISTRICT SCHOOL BOARD**

# **MULTI-YEAR ACCESSIBILITY PLAN 2022-2027**

The HWDSB Multi-Year Accessibility Plan is posted online at [www.hwdsb.on.ca/about/accessibility](http://www.hwdsb.on.ca/about/accessibility) and is available in accessible formats upon request to [info@hwdsb.on.ca](mailto:info@hwdsb.on.ca)



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# MESSAGE FROM CHAIR AND DIRECTOR



At Hamilton-Wentworth District School Board (HWDSB), our Multi-Year Accessibility Plan details how we will meet our obligations under the Ontarians with Disabilities Act (ODA) 2001 and reinforces our commitment to this important work.

We do this work to ensure that all HWDSB students, families, staff and community members have equitable access to our buildings, programs and services. We take seriously our responsibilities under the Ontario Human Rights Code (OHRC), the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act (AODA) and the Integrated Accessibility Standards Regulation (2011).

As you will see, this plan highlights our recent progress in a variety of areas.

We have seen real improvements in areas such as recruitment, hiring and training practices, which highlight how we accommodate current and aspiring staff members. We have also made countless improvements to remove physical barriers and continue to support students with equipment that is essential for their special education needs.

We are also removing non-physical barriers so we can be a truly accessible and inclusive system, as shown in our work to remove barriers to how we share information and communication.

We will be proactive, removing barriers even before they impact students, staff, families and community members. We will continue to identify and address systemic barriers with new policies and procedures that can guide HWDSB as an organization.

Systemic barriers come in many forms – and we need to address these at HWDSB. In collaboration with senior leadership, we will continue to identify and eliminate barriers that would contravene the Ontario Human Rights Code (OHRC).

This plan will evolve as we learn and adapt. What remains unchanged is our deep respect for the human rights, dignity and independence of every person. We aim to address systemic and localized concerns quickly and effectively.

We invite you to review our Multi-Year Accessibility Plan for 2022-2027 and welcome any questions or feedback. Please see the final page of this plan for contact details.

Sincerely,



**Dawn Danko**  
Chair of the Board



**Sheryl Robinson Petrazzini**  
Director of Education

# INTRODUCTION

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The intent of the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act, 2005 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. The goal is for Ontario to be barrier-free, accessible, by 2025.

The Act requires that school boards to:

- review and revise the Multi-Year Accessibility Plan annually,
- consult with people with disabilities in the review and revision of Multi-Year Accessibility Plan
- make the revision of the Multi-Year Accessibility Plan public.

The Act allows organizations to determine their own priorities and implement them within existing planning processes and using existing resources.

This Multi-Year Accessibility Plan 2022-27 has been prepared by the Accessibility Committee at Hamilton-Wentworth District School Board. The plan describes:

- measures that the Board has taken in the past, and
- measures that the Board will implement during the period of 2022-2027 to identify, remove, and prevent barriers for people with disabilities.

## 1.0 Objectives

This Plan:

- 1.1 Describes the process by which HWDSB will identify, remove and prevent barriers
- 1.2 Reviews recent efforts by HWDSB to remove and prevent barriers
- 1.3 Describes the measures HWDSB will take in the period May 1, 2022 to December 31, 2027, to identify, remove and prevent barriers
- 1.4 Makes a commitment to provide an annual status report on HWDSB's implementation of the multi-year accessibility plan
- 1.5 Makes a commitment to review and update the multi-year accessibility plan at least once every five years
- 1.6 Describes how HWDSB will make this accessibility plan available to the public.

## 2.0 Terminology

**Disability:** The Ontarians with Disabilities Act (2001) adopts the broad definition for disability that is set out in the Ontario Human Rights Code. Disability is defined as:

- 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, 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
- 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 their disability.

Architectural barriers may result from the original design of the building, shape of rooms, size of doorways, or width of hallways, for example.

Physical barriers refer to objects added to the environment, such as doors, windows, elevators, furniture, bathroom hardware, etc.

Information or communication barriers make it difficult for people to receive or send information. For example, a person with a visual disability may not be able to read print materials, read signs, locate landmarks, or see a hazard. A person with an intellectual disability may not understand information that is not expressed in plain language.

Attitudinal barriers refer to persons who do not know how to communicate with people with disabilities, or persons who display discriminatory behaviours.

Technology barriers refer to devices such as computers, telephones, inadequate or inappropriate assistive technologies.

Systemic barriers can result from an organization's policies, practices and protocols if they restrict persons with disabilities.

(From: Ministry of Community and Social Services: [www.mcass.gov.on.ca](http://www.mcass.gov.on.ca))

### 3.0 Commitment to Accessibility Planning

This plan will be established, reviewed, and updated with the advice of persons with disabilities, Special Education Advisory Committee (SEAC), Parent Involvement Committee (PIC), the Accessibility Working Group and other stakeholder groups as deemed appropriate.

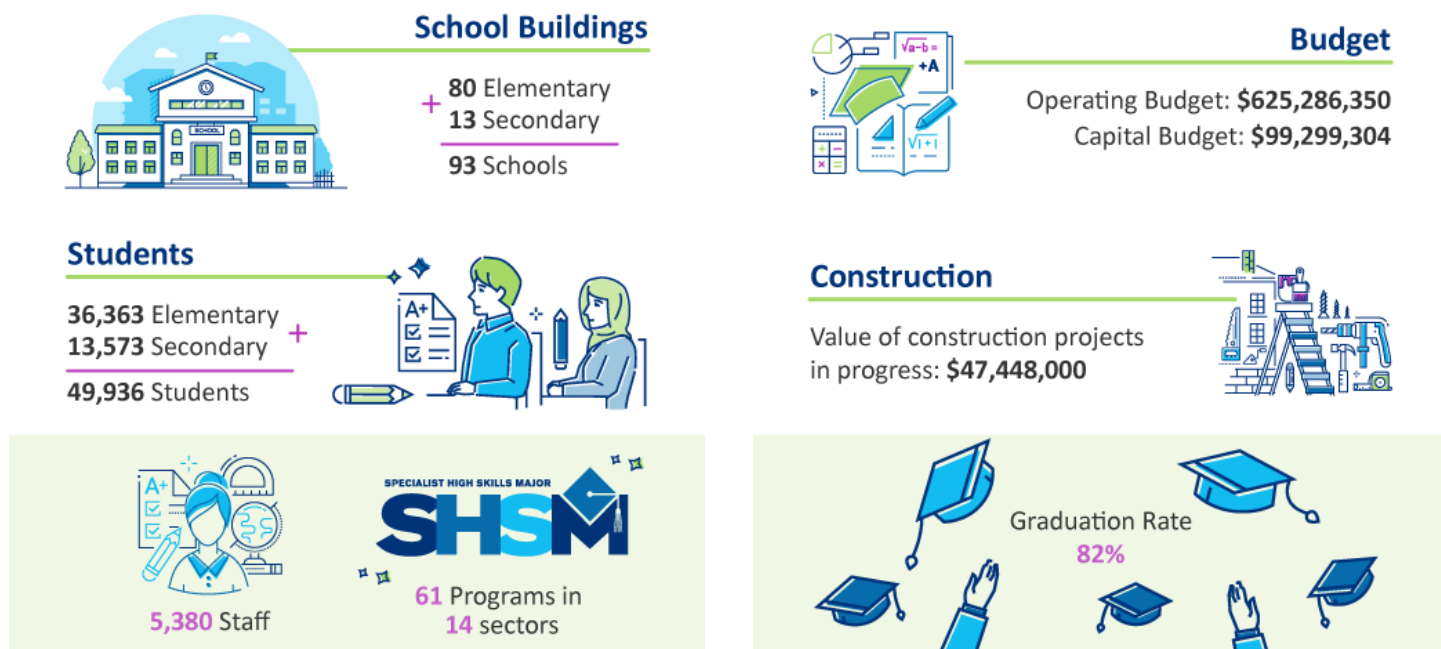
HWDSB is committed to:

- Maintaining an Accessibility Committee
- Continuing the process of seeking advice through the Special Education Advisory Committee (SEAC), Parent Involvement Committee (PIC) and with persons with disabilities
- Ensuring, wherever possible, that HWDSB policies, procedures and practices are consistent with the principles of accessibility and inclusive/universal design. The Accessibility Working Group will provide input re: accessibility issues, where appropriate, regarding new policies and procedures and to those under review
- Improving access to facilities, policies, programs, practices and services for students, staff, parent(s)/guardian(s), volunteers, and members of the community. Consideration of ongoing identification of barriers will be the responsibility of the Accessibility Committee and will, wherever possible, be incorporated in the multi-year plan.

### 4.0 About Hamilton-Wentworth District School Board

Hamilton-Wentworth District School Board provides education from Junior Kindergarten to Grade 12 in the City of Hamilton. Our Board of Trustees includes 11 elected officials and two Student Trustees. Trustees are accountable to the Ministry of Education and the citizens of the City of Hamilton.

Learn more at: [www.hwdsb.on.ca/about/](http://www.hwdsb.on.ca/about/)



# 1.0 ACCOMPLISHMENTS IN ACCESSIBILITY

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Hamilton-Wentworth District School Board has completed the following accessibility initiatives:

## 1.1 Customer Service Accomplishments

In January 2019, Trustees, permanent staff and staff working in Long-Term Occasional placements were required to participate in virtual Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act (AODA) training. Training records are held centrally through the Brightspace Learning Management System (also known as 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 school years. 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.

During 2020-2021, many different pieces of equipment were purchased to support student accessibility to curriculum. For example, 300 laptops and 1,200 iPads were received as a result of applications to Special Equipment Amount (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 Special Equipment Amount (SEA) device receives training from school personnel. Additionally, students with Learning Disabilities may be eligible to attend the Centre for Success to receive support with their devices and ensure that their academic needs are being met.

Learning Resource Teachers were able to access learning sessions 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, and professional development modules were delivered and made available to all staff to build capacity.

## 1.2 Information and Communication Accomplishments

The HWDSB website is compliant with the Web Content Accessibility Guidelines 2.0, and this is an ongoing commitment. The Communications and Community Engagement and Information and Instructional Technology departments continue to investigate intranet features.

The website 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 web page [www.hwdsb.on.ca/about/accessibility](http://www.hwdsb.on.ca/about/accessibility) also outlines new policies and/or how to identify any type of barrier that may be encountered while accessing services or supports.

throughout HWDSB. Through these submissions, relevant HWDSB staff will be alerted to issues and concerns that may arise from within the community.

In addition to these website changes, HWDSB's public library catalogue was also updated in July 2021 to ensure AODA compliance. Upon request, HWDSB can 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.

### **1.3 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. HWDSB's policies regarding guide dogs, service dogs and service animals were also updated.

### **1.4 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 five 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.

### **1.5 Design of Physical Environment Accomplishments**

Between 2019 and 2021, HWDSB's Facilities Management department 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, and installation of approximately fifty-five new touchless door operator systems.

# 2.0 STRATEGIES AND ACTIONS FOR 2022-2027

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## 2.1 Customer Service

Maintain compliance with the Accessible Customer Service Standard and adhere to customer service requirements by continuing to:

- Ensure all new hires receive AODA (accessible Customer Service) training during the onboarding process, and all employees continue to receive training throughout employment. The AODA training will be reviewed and revised as necessary
- Act in accordance with our Accessibility Policy regarding service animals and support persons
- Receive and respond to feedback regarding the way goods or services are provided to persons with disabilities
- Provide notice of service disruptions.

## 2.2 Information and Communication

Support accessibility through several communication and community engagement projects that will place emphasis on:

- Creating communication standards that reinforce the importance of using 'plain' language (i.e., easy to understand language that does not include complicated terminology), digitalized platforms and AODA compatible website formats to improve accessibility when messages are shared with parents/guardians, community members and staff
- Using programs and initiatives that embed AODA strategies, such as training modules via WordPress with a section on AODA compliance and how to add Alt tags to images and descriptions for visually impaired users
- Ensuring image descriptions and alt tags are required while uploading an image to WordPress. HWDSB has created a script that identifies images that do not contain alt tags, which allows missing descriptors to be added to images as per AODA requirements.

## 2.3 Transportation

Monitor and improve transportation accessibility for students with disabilities at HWDSB by continuing to:

- Review, renew and update the approval process for transporting students with disabilities to ensure that forms are completed and available to the HWSTS office in a time efficient manner. This will prevent delays in service and proactively allow students with disabilities to receive the highest level of transportation service
- Actively review processes and best practices for procuring specialized transportation (e.g., taxi service) to assist with transportation of students with disabilities

- Analyse transportation operations to secure safe, effective transportation services for students with disabilities
- Review, edit and update HWSTS's website and online services with a lens of inclusion to ensure web-based content meets all accessibility requirements.

## **2.4 Physical environment**

Remain committed to improving accessibility within our built environments by continuing to:

- Build all new HWDSB facilities in accordance with the latest accessibility requirements as per the current Ontario Building Code
- Implement accessibility improvements across our facilities, where possible
- Allocate funding on an annual basis to improve accessibility
- Work with Specialized Services to prioritize and identify areas for improved accessibility throughout our facilities
- Consider feedback from families, including safety concerns parents/guardians raise about snow coverage on school blacktop areas. Beginning next winter, funding will be allotted to ensure that service providers clear approximately 50 per cent of HWDSB's asphalt play space, with the goal of increased safety and accessibility for students with mobility challenges
- Modify and improve the way that facility condition is assessed and presented to the public. As of 2021, 62 percent of HWDSB school facilities met associated requirements of accessible and equitable facility rating and 88 percent met at least one component category.

## **2.5 Employment**

Ensure the HWDSB's employment policies and practices are inclusive of people with disabilities by continuing to:

- Inform all employees and successful applicants with disabilities about available supports and accommodations
- Inform applicants with disabilities about available accommodations during the recruitment, assessment and the selection processes
- Consult with employees to provide and arrange for accessible formats and communication supports
- Provide to employees, upon request, individualized workplace emergency response information
- Maintain a return-to-work process and provide individual documented accommodation plans for employees with disabilities when required
- Consider the needs of the employees with disabilities for the purposes of performance management, career development, advancement and redeployment.

## 3.0 REVIEW OF THE PLAN

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The Accessibility Working Group meets throughout each year to review the progress and evaluate the effectiveness and implementation of the Plan's actions and goals.

The Accessibility Working Group will ensure that in respect of the future of the Plan, the following steps will take place:

- an annual status report on the progress of the measures taken to implement the plan is prepared and posted on the Board website
- the plan will be reviewed and updated with the input and advice of people with disabilities, the Special Education Advisory Committee (SEAC), Parent Involvement Committee (PIC), the Accessibility Working Group, Executive Council, The Board of Trustees, including Student Trustees, and other stakeholder groups as deemed appropriate.

## 4.0 COMMUNICATION OF THE PLAN

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We welcome feedback about the Multi-Year Accessibility Plan. This feedback may be directed to:

**HWDSB Communications and Community Engagement**  
**Mailing Address: P.O. Box 2558, Hamilton, Ontario L8N 3L1**  
**Street Address: 20 Education Court, Hamilton, Ontario L9A 0B9**

or

The contact form at [www.hwdsb.on.ca/contact/](http://www.hwdsb.on.ca/contact/)

or

By email to [info@hwdsb.on.ca](mailto:info@hwdsb.on.ca)