



ANNUAL ACCESSIBILITY PLAN

for the

**SUPERIOR NORTH CATHOLIC
DISTRICT SCHOOL BOARD
2003-2004**

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COMMITMENT TO ACCESSIBILITY PLANNING

The Superior North Catholic District School Board is committed to removing and preventing barriers to accessibility for all students, staff and visitors with disabilities. As a Catholic school community, our organization recognizes the need to provide barrier free access to all who use our facilities. The Accessibility Planning Committee is establishing an Annual Accessibility Plan that will list, identify and plan for the removal of all barriers to accessibility.

INTRODUCTION

The purpose of the *Ontarians with Disabilities Act, 2001* (ODA) 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. To this end, the ODA 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.

This is the first annual plan (2003 - 2004) prepared by the Accessibility Working Group of the Superior North Catholic District School Board. The plan describes: (1) the measures that the Superior North Catholic District School Board has taken in the past, and (2) the measures that the Superior North Catholic District School Board will take during the year (2003 - 2004) to identify, remove and prevent barriers for people with disabilities.

This year, the Superior North Catholic District School Board committed to the continual improvement of access to school board facilities, policies, programs, practices and services for students, staff, parents/guardians, volunteers and members of the community with disabilities. The plan also reports on the participation of people with disabilities in the development and review of its annual accessibility plans.

The Accessibility Working Group will identify barriers for people with disabilities. Over the next several years, the Accessibility Working Group recommends focusing on a number of different barriers. This will be accomplished within the financial resources of the Board and its ability to fund the projects.

1. Aim

This plan describes the measures that the Superior North Catholic District School Board has taken in the past and measures that will be taken during the next year (2003 - 2004) to identify, remove and prevent barriers for people with disabilities who work in, use or attend school board facilities and services.

2. Objectives

This plan:

1. Describes the *process* by which the Superior North Catholic District School Board will identify, remove and prevent barriers for people with disabilities.
2. Reviews efforts at the Superior North Catholic District School Board to remove and prevent barriers for people with disabilities during the past year.
3. Lists the policies, procedures, programs, practices and services that the Superior North Catholic District School Board will review in the coming year to identify barriers for people with disabilities.
4. Describes the measures the Superior North Catholic District School Board will take in the coming year to identify, remove and prevent barriers for people with disabilities.
5. Describes how the Superior North Catholic District School Board will make this accessibility plan available to the public.

3. Commitment to Accessibility Planning

The Superior North Catholic District School Board is committed to taking a pro-active approach to accessibility planning. The Board is committed to working with its community to build on what has already been accomplished locally and board-wide in its efforts to remove and prevent barriers. This will be done by:

- . Establishing an Accessibility Working Group.
- . Consulting with people with disabilities in the development and review of its annual accessibility plans.
- . Ensuring school board policies and procedures are consistent with the principles of accessibility.
- . Improving access to facilities, policies, programs, practices and services for students, staff, parents/guardians, volunteers and members of the community.

The Director of Education has authorized the Accessibility Working Group to prepare an accessibility plan that will enable the Superior North Catholic District School Board to meet these commitments.

The Mission of the SUPERIOR NORTH CATHOLIC District School Board is to provide superior Catholic Education in which students and staff reach their full potential through devotion to gospel values, active partnerships and the celebration of excellence.

4. Description of the Superior North Catholic District School Board

The history of the Superior North Catholic District School Board with its impact on present operations is understandable by going back in time to 1976 when a number of small communities united together in order to offer Catholic Education. This was not a decision implemented in the 60's when county boards were formed, but rather, was the judgement and decision of local communities. This motivation by individual communities to launch the North of Superior Roman Catholic Separate School Board explains the ownership, deep dedication and commitment to Catholic Education for their communities.

The Superior North Catholic District School Board was created by provincial legislation to amalgamate two former school boards, effective January 1, 1998. The Geraldton Roman Catholic Separate School Board and the North of Superior Roman Catholic Separate School Board jointed together to form the new Superior North Catholic District School Board.

Our board geography is over 17,000 square kilometers which is significant and contributes to the uniqueness of this publicly-funded system in two main areas: (1) the distinct Catholic philosophy and nature of the board with fewer than 1,000 students; and (2) uniqueness in that this board services only elementary education. Each community supports only one secondary school.

The Superior North Catholic District School Board is often referred to as the "Smallest, Largest Catholic Board" in the province. This dichotomy prevails through all the operational practices and some of the attitudes of the personnel and community members.

Amalgamation has achieved an improvement in the instruction of students and placed greater focus on resources for the classroom. The governance and administrative structure has enabled significant progress in the achievement of students. The Trustees and Principals are enthusiastic and optimistic as they look forward to equity in the future for our students. Once equity is achieved, then the instruction and progress for our students will improve tremendously.

5. The Accessibility Working Group Members

The accessibility working group was formally constituted in April 2003 and consists of the following members:

Senior Staff
Employee Groups
Human Resources
Trustee
Special Education Superintendent

6. Recent Barrier-removal Initiatives

During the last several years, there have been a number of informal initiatives at Superior North District School Board to identify, remove and prevent barriers to people with disabilities. The designs for new schools have architectural features that incorporate principles of universal design as much as possible. Any renovations to existing buildings have accessibility for people with disabilities addressed in the plans.

In conjunction with the Special Ed plan and the Special Ed Coordinator, the Board has addressed access for students with disabilities through modifications and accommodations for programs and services.

Accessibility has been facilitated with the inclusion of automatic door openers on major school interior and exterior doorways as well as provisions of accessible washrooms.

As students or staff with disabilities are acquired, every effort to make accommodations accordingly is undertaken by the Board.

7. Preventing New Barriers

From this point forward, all school board programs, policies, practices and services will be subject to the guiding principles of inclusionary practice. We will strive to create an environment that is accessible to all people, regardless of age or ability. Through the annual accessibility planning process, Superior North Catholic District School Board's programming, policies and practices will be assessed to ensure continuous improvement in accessibility.

8. **Barrier-identification Methodologies**

The Accessibility Working Group used the following barrier-identification methodologies. Staff with disabilities will be consulted throughout this process.

- a) Presentation to Senior Staff.
This will provide input and feedback as the plan evolves. The consultation will be ongoing.
- b) Presentation to Employee Groups
This will provide information regarding the plan and help the working group to prioritize the removal of barriers.
- c) Presentation to Trustees
This will provide information regarding the plan and will be done prior to the submission of the plan.
- d) Data Gathering
Information will be gathered from all Superior North Catholic District School Board stakeholders to identify barriers and measures that would make the Superior North Catholic District School Board more accessible to people with disabilities.

Data will be gathered using interviews, focus groups and surveys from three sources; the Board and central office, schools and individuals. In addition, data will also be gathered through the document analysis (e.g. review of policies). The ODA Toolkit for School Boards will be used to guide the development of interview schedules, surveys and other data-gathering instruments and all areas will be addressed (i.e., physical, architectural, communication, information, attitudinal, technological, policy and practice).

In gathering the data, every effort will be made to encourage participation from people with disabilities. This will include extensive communication of the plan and widespread invitations for input and feedback.

9. **Barriers Identified**

In its review, the Accessibility Working Group identified many barriers. Over the next several years, the Accessibility Working Group has decided to focus on the following:

| Type of Barrier | Description of Barrier | Strategy for its removal/prevention |
|------------------------|--|---|
| Physical | The front doors of several schools are very heavy and may be difficult to open for a wheelchair user or someone with limited strength. | Install power-operated doors or change the doors to lighter ones. |
| Physical | Benches in front lobby/hallways of several buildings obstruct paths of travel of people who are blind and visually impaired. | Re-organize lobbies and hallways. |
| Physical | In several school libraries, the aisles are wide enough for wheelchair users, but there is not space to turn around at the ends of the aisles. | Re-organize the shelving configuration in libraries. |
| Physical | The front doors at several schools are not at grade level | Install ramps at these schools. |
| Architectural | Reception Counters at several schools are not at eye level for wheelchair users. | Re-configure reception counters. |
| Architectural | Public telephones in schools: space cannot accommodate wheelchair users. | Redesign/reconfigure public telephone areas. |
| Architectural | Inaccessible washrooms in several elementary schools. | Re-model washrooms. |
| Information | Student records are only available in print, which are not accessible to students with learning disabilities and students who are blind and visually impaired. | Working group to consult with learning disability specialist and the Canadian National Institute for the Blind. |
| Information | Many forms and records are only available in print. | Make all forms available on the web, on disk or in other electronic formats. |

| | | |
|-----------------|--|--|
| Information | Student information and brochures are sometimes difficult to procure in alternative formats. | Working Group will discuss concern with Ministry of Citizenship (Accessibility Directorate of Ontario). |
| Attitudinal | Teaching and non-teaching staff members are often unaware/lack knowledge of non-physical disabilities (i.e. students with mental health disabilities). | Education sessions for staff and preparation of material for the staff orientation binder. |
| Attitudinal | Several students and parents have identified bullying and social isolation as significant problems in several elementary schools. | Explore possibilities for disability sensitivity and awareness programming for classmates. |
| Technological | Board website is not accessible to people who are blind and visually impaired or who use screen-reading software. | Enrol Information Technology staff in courses on accessible web design. Make necessary changes to website. |
| Policy/Practice | No central location for raising and addressing accessibility issues. | Establishment of Accessibility Working Group and Internal communications re: their role. |
| Policy/Practice | The school board's policies for accommodating employees with disabilities conflict with other employment policies. | Establishment of employment accommodation working group to review policies. |

10. Barriers to be Addressed in 2003 - 2004

In its approach in its first year of formal accessibility planning, Superior North Catholic District School Board will consider the year as a "transition" year and the first plan as the beginning of a longer term process. The plan includes tasks that are feasible to be accomplished in the first year. Awareness raising and identification of barriers will be the main focus.

The attitudinal barrier has been identified as a major obstacle to total accessibility. Members of the Catholic community including staff, students and parents are often unaware or lack the knowledge of physical and non-physical disabilities of members of its community. During the 2003-04 school year, the Board will raise the awareness of accessibility through sensitivity training and preparation of materials for all its community.

The committee will review the results of the data gathering and a prioritize barriers to be addressed. Budget constraints will be a factor as the Board strives to meet its many obligations.

The committee will be examining the gaps between what presently is in place at Superior North Catholic District School Board for total accessibility and where the Board should be over the next five to ten years. From this gap analysis the Board will be able to develop short term (annual) and long-term plans to address barrier removal throughout its policies and practices.

Year two of the plan will build on the previous year's identification of barriers. This process will continue over the next several years with the ultimate goal of making Superior North Catholic District School Board totally accessible.

11. Review and monitoring process

The Accessibility Working Group meets regularly during the planning year to review progress. Throughout the year, evaluation of the effectiveness in implementing the barrier-removal and prevention strategies will be ongoing in preparation for the second year of accessibility planning.

The Working Group reminds staff about roles in implementing the plan. Minutes of meetings will be available.

12. Communication of the plan

The Superior North Catholic District School Board's accessibility plan will be posted on the board website at www.sncdsb.on.ca and hard copies will be available. The plan can be made available in accessible formats. The plan may be included within the school board orientation package to new staff.

Contact information for accessible format requests: 807-825-3209.

