Accessibility

At the Whistler Waldorf School, we value our school community's input in identifying barriers that impact participation in our school's life. We want to learn about specific barriers that people face when they are trying to:

- Access a school program, building or school information
- Receive a service or support

The WWS (Whistler Waldorf School) Accessibility Committee will review and consider your responses to the questions in our online feedback tool for the ongoing development of the WWS Accessibility Plan. The information can be submitted anonymously, or you can provide your contact details at the bottom of the form if you wish to be contacted.

Click here to share your feedback.

Table of Contents

Section 1: Introduction

About Our School Community

The Whistler Waldorf School is an independent school that serves approximately 170 kindergarten to grade 12 students and 32 playschool children at our EY Spring Creek campus.

Whistler Waldorf School is a non-profit fully accredited independent school with the B.C. Ministry of Education and is an Associate Member of the Association of Waldorf Schools of North America.

The school was launched in 2000, through the efforts of three founding families, and has grown exponentially thanks to the support and demand from the communities of Whistler and Pemberton for another choice in education in our region.

Our students learn from an early age to engage in their own learning process, appreciating the beauty and complexity of the world and building a strong foundation to meet it with resilience and hope.

The school includes a Principal, Director of Administration, HS (High School) Vice-Principal, Early Years Licensing manager, Director of Advancement and 34 Faculty and Staff.

The Whistler Waldorf School Board of Trustees is responsible for the school's fiscal, legal, and structural health. The Board of Trustees is a group of leaders who have an affinity to Waldorf education, the Whistler Waldorf School, and can make critical business decisions pertaining to the governance of the school that enable it to continue to grow and *support* its students, faculty, and administrative staff.

A Message from the Principal

Accessibility is more than just a buzzword. It is a fundamental principle that guides us in creating an inclusive and welcoming learning environment for all stakeholders in our learning community. A key element to supporting our community is the development of a Three-Year Accessibility Plan. This plan identifies system needs, priorities, and action plans, and draws on feedback from our school community and the work of the Accessibility Committee to enhance equity of access to programming and our facilities.

Territorial Acknowledgement

We acknowledge with respect that our school is located in the traditional territories of the Squamish and Lil'wat nations where we live, learn and play.

Definitions

Accessibility: The state of having programs, services and environments that allow all individuals to participate fully in society without encountering barriers.

Accessibility Committee: An official group formed by one or more organizations in collaboration with people with disabilities, to create an accessibility plan and feedback mechanism.

Accessibility Plan: A plan developed by an Accessibility Committee that identifies challenges and solutions for addressing accessibility barriers.

Barrier: Anything that hinders the full and equal participation in society of a person navigating needs or disabilities. Types of barriers in the educational setting:

1. Learning Barrier: any barrier that limits or prevents learning, whether it is through inadequate engagement, representation of the content, or expression of ideas and communication.
2. Architectural and Physical Barrier: A barrier resulting from building design, the area adjacent to the building, shape of rooms, the size of doorways, lack of accessibility features, blocked paths of travel, and so on.
3. Attitudinal Barrier: A barrier that arises from the attitudes of staff, students, and the school community, including discriminatory behaviors and a lack of disability awareness.
4. Policy or Practice Barrier: Rules, regulations and protocols that prevent a person from performing their job satisfactorily or participating in society. Policy, practice, and procedures that prevent a student from accessing the curriculum and fully participating in the school community.
5. Resource Barrier: Barriers resulting from inadequate technology, funding, staff, or tools.

6. Temporal Barrier: Barriers that occur during a specific time, such as busy times of day or during special events.

Disability: The state of being unable to participate fully and equally in society due to the interaction between an impairment and a barrier.

Impairment: A physical, sensory, mental, intellectual, cognitive limitation, whether permanent, temporary, or episodic.

Section 2: Framework Guiding Our Work

The WWS accessibility plan builds on global, national, provincial and WWS specific actions to promote and support accessibility.

Global Context – United Nations

In recent years, there has been an emphasis on increasing diversity, equity, and inclusion within the workplace and within the larger community. The United Nations has been instrumental in leading the importance of disability as a global health issue. In 2006, the United Nations led efforts to adopt the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD). In 2010, Canada ratified the CRPD and described the CPRD as follows:

"The Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities is an international human rights treaty aimed at protecting the rights and dignity of persons with disabilities without discrimination and on an equal basis with others. Parties to the Convention of the rights of Persons with Disabilities are required to promote and ensure the full enjoyment of human rights of persons with disabilities including full equality under the law."

Canadian Context and Legislation – Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms

Canada-wide, around one in five people had some form of disability in 2017. Nationally, Canadian accessibility legislation started in 1985 where disability was included in the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms and in 1986, Persons with Disabilities (PWDs) were included in the new federal Employment Equity Act. The Accessible Canada Act (ACA) came into force in 2019, with the overarching goal to realize a barrier-free Canada by 2040. This act applies to federally regulated entities. The ACA has seven focus areas, and was developed based on the following guiding principles:

1. All persons must be treated with dignity regardless of their disabilities.
2. All persons must have the same opportunity to make for themselves the lives that they are able and wish to have regardless of their disabilities.
3. All persons must have barrier-free access to full and equal participation in society, regardless of their disabilities.
4. All persons must have meaningful options and be free to make their own choices, with support if they desire, regardless of their disabilities.
5. Laws, policies, programs, services, and structures must consider the disabilities of persons, the diverse ways that persons interact with their environments and the multiple and intersecting forms of marginalization and discrimination faced by persons.

6. PWDs must be involved in the development and design of laws, policies, programs, services, and structures.

B.C. Context and Legislation - Accessible B.C. Act
The Accessible British Columbia Act, enacted in June 2021, and initially the accessibility planning requirements only applied to provincial government organizations.
The Accessible British Columbia Regulation, under the Accessible British Columbia Act, came into force on September 1, 2022. These regulations identify schools as accessible organizations, and school districts and independent schools will be required to have an Accessibility Committee, an Accessibility Plan, and a tool to receive feedback on accessibility by September 1, 2023:
The act's goal is to improve opportunities for people with disabilities and involve them in identifying, removing, and preventing barriers to their full participation in the province's life.
Principles in the Accessible B.C. Act:
The Accessible B.C. Act includes a list of principles that must be considered as organizations develop an accessibility plan. The Definitions are adapted from the foundational document BC (British Columbia) Framework for Accessibility Legislation.
1. Adaptability: Accessibility plans should reflect that disability and accessibility are evolving concepts that change as services, technology, and attitudes change.
2. Collaboration: Promoting accessible communities is a shared responsibility and everyone has a role to play. Accessibility plans should create opportunities for organizations and communities to work together to promote access and inclusion.
3. Diversity: Every person is unique. People with disabilities are individuals with varied backgrounds. Individual characteristics including race, gender, sexual orientation, religion, and lived experience inform the experiences of individuals. Accessibility plans should acknowledge the principle of intersectionality and the diversity within the disability community.
4. Inclusion: All British Columbians, including persons with disabilities, should be able to participate fully and equally in their communities.
5. Self-Determination: Accessibility plans should seek to empower people with disabilities to make their own choices and pursue the lives they wish to live.
6. Universal Design: The Centre for Excellence in Universal Design defines Universal Design as "the design and composition of an environment so that it can be accessed, understood, and used to the greatest extent possible by all people regardless of their age, size, ability or disability." An accessibility plan should be designed to meet the needs of all people who interact with the Organization.

Our Commitment to Accessibility:
Accessibility refers to the degree of ease with which people with disabilities can use and enjoy something such as a device, service, or place. At WWS, we are committed to providing an accessible and practical environment for all members of our diverse

community. We recognize the importance of conscious planning, design, and effort in ensuring that barriers are removed, and accessibility is increased.

Our school is committed to working collaboratively with the community to provide equitable treatment for people with disabilities in a way that respects their dignity. To achieve this goal, we have outlined the following commitments:

- Engage with staff, community members and people with disabilities in the development and review of our accessibility plan.
- Ensure that our school board policies and procedures align with the principles of accessibility.,
- Improve access to facilities, policies, programs, practices, and services for students, staff, parents/guardians, volunteers, and community members.
- Continually improve accessibility for people with disabilities in our school community.

Our Approach:

At WWS, we believe that all members of our community have the right to be treated with dignity, given an opportunity to participate, and provided with access to learning and community. In August 2023, we began establishing an accessibility committee and identifying barriers to accessibility in our school community. This process involved:

- Creating an internal committee
- Developing a draft accessibility plan
- Assessing the current physical and architectural accessibility of WWS
- Developing a school feedback tool
- Prioritization of actions to be taken
- Develop a monitoring process

Section 3: The Accessibility Committee
Purpose and Structure of the Accessibility Committee
Under the Accessible B.C. Act, organizations must establish an Accessibility Committee to assist with identifying and preventing barriers to individuals in or interacting with the organization. The accessibility committee's purpose is to work together to assess and improve community accessibility, focusing on the experiences of individuals with disabilities while encompassing the whole community. Our Accessibility Committee includes the Principal, teachers, parents, and students.

Section 4: Accessibility Feedback Tool
WWS developed an online feedback tool that included a series of questions about accessibility experiences that students, staff and members of the school community could complete. The tool will be posted to the main page of the school website. Feedback could be anonymous, or people could add their name and contact information if they wished to be contacted.

The following are the contents of the online Accessibility Feedback Tool.

- What do you find challenging in terms of fully participating in school life?
- Why do you feel these factors pose a challenge for accessibility at the school?
- What measures do you believe would improve the situation?
- Is there anything else you would like us to be aware of?
- Would you like to be contacted? If so, please provide your contact details (name, email, phone).

Section 5: Our Three-Year Plan (2023-2026)

Objectives	Actions	Timeline
Summarize and celebrate current accessibility in the learning environment	Conduct a physical audit of the building and surrounding grounds	Sept/Dec. 2023
Identify areas needed for further staff training on accessibility issues	Provide information to staff about current learning accessibility barriers within the school	Sept/Dec.2023

*For years two and three of this plan, we will be having ongoing discussions and planning meetings with the Municipality of Whistler, whose relationship and partnership we value, and under whose jurisdiction our physical spaces belong.

Section 6: Monitoring and Evaluation

The Accessibility Planning Committee meets (quarterly) to review progress and evaluate the effectiveness of the plan's implementation and plan for increased accessibility throughout the school. The committee will ensure the following steps are taken regarding the Three-Year Accessibility Plan:

7. Prepare an annual status report on the progress of the measures taken to implement the plan.
8. Review and update the Three-Year Accessibility Plan every three years in consultation with persons with disabilities and other relevant community

Section 7: Appendices
Appendix A: About The Disability Continuum

Although there is no universally accepted meaning for the word "disability". However, the Ontario Human Rights Code provides definitions of disability that form our guiding principles. Definitions of disability can be placed on a continuum. At one end, disability is explained in terms of medical conditions (medical model). At the opposite end, disability is explained in terms of the social and physical contexts in which it occurs (environmental model).

The medical model focuses on deficiencies, symptoms, and treatments. The World Health Organization's (WHO) 1976 definition for disability, for example, is "any restriction or lack (resulting from an impairment) of ability to perform an activity in the manner or within the range considered normal for a human being." Medical model definitions promote the idea that disability is a deviation from the norm.

Many people with disabilities are troubled by definitions that regard disability as abnormal, preferring instead to portray disability as commonplace, natural, and in fact, inevitable. As people age, they experience gradual declines in visual acuity, auditory sensitivity, range of motion, bodily strength, and mental powers. Significant functional limitations affect almost half of people between the ages of 55 and 79, and over 70% of people over 80 (World Health Organization (WHO) report titled "Ageing and health", 2015). Beyond middle age, disability is the norm.

The environmental model explains disability in relation to social and physical contexts. In this view, the environment, not an individual's medical condition, causes disability. For example, during an electrical blackout, a person who is completely blind can effortlessly navigate around the home, hammer nails, and, if a Braille user, read a novel. A sighted person would be unable to perform these tasks easily, if at all. In this example, the environment disables the sighted person.

The environmental model emphasizes that people with disabilities are capable individuals, and it is the barriers in the built and human environments, not their medical conditions, that create disability. Disability occurs when the world is designed only for a certain way of living, without considering the natural variation among human beings. Barriers are created by humans, and modifying how we live, the tools we use, and our understanding of the proper way to do things can eliminate or minimize design problems that cause barriers. Systematic barriers can be eliminated by modifying policies, plans, and processes. Attitudes that cause barriers can be addressed through disability awareness, respect, and positive interactions with people with disabilities.

Appendix B: Suggested References/Resources
Global, Canadian and Local Accessibility Context and Legislation
United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities
Canada Ratifies the UN (United Nations) Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms
British Columbia Framework for Accessibility Legislation Accessible British Columbia Act
BC Accessibility Legislation Plain Language Summary
Accessibility Planning Resources for Schools and School Boards:

BC Accessibility Hub
Developing Your First Accessibility Plan: A Guide for BC Prescribed Organizations
Creating an Accessibility Committee Universal Design
Special Education Technology BC (SET BC) Accessible Resource Centre - BC Standards Council of Canada
B6521-95 Barrier-Free Design
A Guide to Creating Accessible Play Spaces (Rick Hansen Foundation)

Canadian National Institute for the Blind (CNIB)

Provincial Resource Centre for the Visually Impaired (PRCVI
Canadian Hard of Hearing Association
Canadian Hearing Services
Provincial Outreach Program for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing (POPDHH)
Auditory Outreach Provincial Resource Program
Provincial Outreach Program for Students with Deaf blindness Provincial Inclusion Outreach Program (Complex Needs) Provincial Outreach Program for Autism and Related Disorders Provincial Outreach Program for Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder
Multiple Sclerosis Society of Canada
Learning Disabilities Association of Canada
Brain Injury Canada
Spinal Cord Injury Canada
Tourette Canada
Kelty Mental Health (BC Children's Hospital)
Gifted Children's Association of BC
Specialist Association of Gifted Educators in BC