Introduction

About Our School District Community

Rocky Mountain School District No. 6 serves communities in the East Kootenay region of British Columbia in communities from Golden to Kimberley. There are 18 schools including three alternate schools and one online school in three zones, Golden, including the community of Nicholson, Windermere, including Edgewater, Invermere, and Canal Flats, and Kimberley, including Marysville.

The district serves approximately 3500 students and employs approximately 700 staff. Nine Trustees make up the Board of Education

Our district provides many different school programs that enrich or complement our students' educational studies. We host Rocky Mountain International School, early learning programs, and a French Immersion program. As well, we support our students with disabilities through District and School-Based Inclusive Education Programs.

A Message from the Superintendent

At Rocky Mountain School District No. 6 we are committed to providing a learning and work environment that supports all students and staff and provides equitable opportunities to support our diverse 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.

Our Accessibility Committee is a diverse and multi-disciplinary team that meets regularly to affirm our commitment to identify priorities and develop and monitor action plans highlighted in the Three-Year Accessibility Plan. The plan identifies actions across the pillars of the Accessibility Act, supporting equal opportunity for persons with disabilities by identifying, removing, and preventing barriers of access.

We recognize the importance of accessibility for not only those with disabilities, but also for the benefit of the entire community. We are committee to advancing the efforts of the Accessibility Committee to improve equity and ease of access to services, as well as access to our facilities. Through the actions in this Three-Year Accessibility Plan, we commit to continuous improvements in developing an environment that supports all students, staff, and the larger school community.

Territorial Acknowledgement

Rocky Mountain School District No. 6 is located on the traditional unceded shared territory of the Ktunaxa and Secwépmec peoples and the chosen home of the Métis**.**

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 prevents a person with a disability from fully participating in all aspects of society because of their disability. This includes physical/environmental, attitudinal, information, communications, policy or practice, and technological barriers. Types of barriers include:

  a) Physical/Environmental Barrier: A barrier resulting from building design, smells/sounds, lighting, the area adjacent to the building, shape of rooms, the size of doorways, and so on.

  b) Attitudinal Barrier: A barrier that arises from the attitudes of staff, students, and the school community, including discriminatory behaviours and a lack of disability awareness.

  c) Communication Barrier: A barrier that arises from difficulties receiving information in person, by telephone or online, interacting with teachers, peers, receptionists, or other staff, and receiving training.

  d) Information Barrier: A barrier that arises from inadequate or incomprehensible signage, difficulties reading brochures, forms, manuals, websites, fax transmissions, equipment labels, computer screens, and soon.

  e) 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.

  f) Technological Barrier: Barriers resulting from computers, photocopiers, fax machines, telephones, and switches, including the lack of assistive technologies.

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

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

Framework Guiding our Work

The Rocky Mountain School District No. 6 Accessibility Plan builds on global, national, provincial and school district 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 right 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 on 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 take into account the disabilities of persons, the different 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.
7. The development and revision of accessibility standards and the making of regulations must be done with the objective of achieving the highest level of accessibility for PWDs.

B.C. Context and Legislation - Accessible B.C. Act

The Accessible British Columbia Act was enacted in June 2021. 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 and school districts as accessible organizations, required to have an Accessibility Committee, an Accessibility Plan, and a tool to receive feedback on accessibility by September 1, 2023. The goal of the act is to improve opportunities for people with disabilities and involve them in identifying, removing, and preventing barriers to their full participation in the life of the province.

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 Framework for Accessibility Legislation.](#)

a. **Adaptability:** Accessibility plans should reflect that disability and accessibility are evolving concepts that change as services, technology, and attitudes change.
b. **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.
c. **Diversity:** Every person is unique. People with disabilities are individuals with varied backgrounds. Individual characteristics including race, gender, sexual orientation, religion, and lived experience greatly inform the experiences of individuals. Accessibility plans should acknowledge the principle of intersectionality and the diversity within the disability community.
d. **Inclusion:** All British Columbians, including persons with disabilities, should be able to participate fully and equally in their communities.
e. **Self-Determination:** Accessibility plans should seek to empower people with disabilities to make their own choices and pursue the lives they wish to live.

f.   **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 Rocky Mountain School District No. 6, we are committed to providing an environment that is accessible and practical 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 district 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 its 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. disabilities.

Our Approach

At Rocky Mountain School District, 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. Our approach is grounded in the core provincial principles of accessibility, including adaptability, collaboration, diversity, inclusion, self-determination and universal design.

In April 2023, we began the process of establishing an accessibility committee and identifying barriers to accessibility in our school district community. This process involved:
- Calling for applications for members of the Accessibility Committee
- Assessing the current physical and architectural accessibility of our schools
- Developing a district-wide feedback tool
- Prioritization of actions to be taken
- Establishing a monitoring and evaluation process

Our approach is designed to recognize the gaps and opportunities to improve accessibility in our community. By engaging in thoughtful planning, meaningful engagement, training, and direct action, we aim to deliver lasting accessibility improvements for all members of our community.

About Our Committee

Purpose 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 purpose of the accessibility committee is to work collaboratively to assess and improve accessibility within our organization, focusing on the experiences of individuals with disabilities while encompassing the whole community. The Accessibility Committee also advises the district on strategies to reduce social, physical, sensory and other barriers that prevent people from fully participating in all aspects of school community life.

Recruitment of the Accessibility Committee Members

As guided by the Accessible B.C. Act, the accessibility committee is comprised of:

- At least half the members are persons with disabilities (PWD), or individuals who support or are from organizations that support PWDs;
- At least one member is an Indigenous person; and
- Members who reflect the diversity of persons in B.C.
- Individuals who are members of Rocky Mountain School District as staff, parents, students or Trustees.

A callout for applications to the Accessibility Committee was conducted in March, 2023 to recruit a diverse representation as outlined above. The Accessibility Committee was formally constituted in May, 2023.

Accessibility Committee Membership

We would like to thank the following committee members for their time and commitment to accessibility and inclusion:

- Rhonda Smith, Trustee, RMSD
- Marla Norquay, Teacher, RMSD
- Bridget McGuire, Teacher, RMSD
- Alan Frogley, Community Link Student Support Worker, RMSD
- Kristin Insull, Dictrict Vice Principal, RMSD
- Al Ure, Director of Operations, RMSD

- Surrena Craig, District Health and Safety Officer, RMSD
- Michelle Porteus, Human Resources Coordinator, RMSD
- Sharon Collin, Director of Instruction, RMSD

Barrier Identification Methodologies

The Accessibility Committee used the following methods to identify barriers:

- Audit of policies and practices - A review of current policies and practices that promote accessibility and inclusion was conducted by key staff members. Completion date: April, 2023
- Physical Accessibility Audit - An Assessment for our school's physical accessibility was completed by key staff members. Completion date: April, 2023
- District Accessibility Feedback Tool - A feedback tool was developed and posted to the district website. Information about the tool was shared with district and school stakeholders (i.e., students, staff, outside professionals and parents/guardians).
- Accessibility Committee - The Accessible Committee reviewed the input and feedback from the district audits and feedback tool. The Committee collaborated to suggest priority areas to target in the Accessibility Plan. This was shared with administrators and the Board, who gave the final approval of priority areas for the plan.

Feedback Mechanism

Feedback Mechanism Development

Rocky Mountain School District No. 6 has developed an online feedback tool that includes a series of questions about accessibility experiences that students, staff and members of the school district community can complete. The tool is posted to the main page of the district website and an information announcement about the tool has been provided to students, staff, and parents/guardians. Feedback can be anonymous, or people can add their name and contact information if they wish to be contacted.

Report an Accessibility Barrier

At Rocky Mountain School District, 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.*

Your responses to the questions below will be reviewed by the Rocky Mountain School District Accessibility Committee for their consideration. This information can be submitted anonymously, or you can provide your contact details at the bottom of this form if you wish to be contacted.

1. *Please provide the date the barrier was experienced.*
2. *Please select the location the barrier was experienced.*
3. *What were you or someone you know trying to access?*
4. *Accessibility Barrier Details (Be as specific as possible).*
5. *Do you have any recommendations for what would make it better?*
6. *Please provide your name and email or phone number if you would like to be contacted. (optional)*

Thank you for providing your valuable feedback! You will be contacted shortly if you have provided your contact details.

Accessibility Accomplishments and Barriers

Accessibility Accomplishments

The guiding principles of inclusive practice inform the Rocky Mountain School District No. 6 programs, policies, practices, and services to reduce and minimize barriers to accessibility for people with disabilities. We strive to create an environment that is accessible and to ensure continuous improvement in accessibility.

There are several initiatives at Rocky Mountain School District No. 6 currently underway to identify, remove and prevent barriers for people with disabilities.

A.   Information and Communication

1.   Shared information on the accessibility act with district/school staff, students, and parents/guardians.
2.   Our school's libraries maintain a suite of documents accessible to school staff outlining the various methods by which the librarian can support student and staff requests for accessible library resources such as audiobooks, high interest/low vocabulary books, and closed-captioned videos.

B.   School Policies and Practices

1.   Adaptations for Students:

- The district and schools continue to assess student accommodation requirements on a case-by-case basis and use all relevant information to respond to each scenario.
- The district has established practices and procedures by which adaptations are offered throughout our schools.

2.   Mental Health and Well-being Supports

- The district recognizes the importance of mental health and well-being of its students and staff. Initiatives have taken place to assess and improve the mental health and well-being of students and staff to ensure support and positive outcomes.
- Training programs are offered to staff to promote student mental health and improve personal mental health and well-being and reduce stigma associated with mental illness.

3. Accessibility Awareness Training

- Ongoing training continues to be provided to staff and students that supports accessibility awareness, obligations, and inclusive environments.

C. Physical and Architectural Environment

1. The district conducted a Physical and Architectural Environment Audit of all of our schools.
2. The district has invested in several upgrades to existing facilities to new standards that support accessible school communities. Investments have been targeted to upgrade washroom accessibility, ramps and door operators, elevator renewal and upgrades as well as new elevators, upgraded fire alarms complete with strobes, and parking and curb cut enhancements to support main entrance access improvements. Lighting in classrooms has been selected to support individuals with visual impairments.

Accessibility Barriers

A. Information and Communication Barriers

1. Some community members identified that it was difficult to navigate the school and district websites and to locate information they hoped to access. Several people with low vision and with English as a second language had to rely on family members to read or translate information on the websites.

2. Email communication to parents/guardians and staff were not always written in language that was easy to understand or had directions that were sometimes confusing.

3. Communication with students and parents/guardians about assignments was provided inconsistently in various classes, resulting in some students not knowing or understanding what they needed to do for homework.

4. Some staff indicated they needed more training to help them interact with students with specific disabilities.

B. Physical and Architecture Environment Barriers

1. Many classrooms have noise issues that make it difficult for some students due to auditory sensitivities.
2. Most classrooms do not have sound fields to support students with hearing impairments or attention issues.
3. Some larger spaces within our schools have sound echo issues.

C.   Attitudinal Barriers

1. Some students identified that they felt misunderstood by staff who made assumptions that they were lazy or uncooperative or lacked motivation.

D.   Technology Barriers

1. Teachers and students are not familiar with the accessibility features on district/school laptops/computers such as voice to text, text to voice, web readers and other features.

E.   School Policy and Practice Barriers

1. Parents/guardians and staff identified a gap in staff training on a variety of disabilities and accessibility issues.
2. Systematic transition planning processes are not evident for all students with disabilities.
3. Emergency evacuation protocols, individual plans and evacuation equipment are not in place for students with various disabilities.

Our Three-Year Plan

Overview

This Accessibility Plan outlines the measures that Rocky Mountain School District No. 6 will take to remove and prevent barriers and to promote inclusion for individuals with disabilities in our school district community. The plan is based on the Accessibility Principles of adaptability, collaboration, diversity, inclusion, self-determination, and universal design, as set out in the Accessible B.C. Act.

Accessibility Priorities

Based on the feedback gathered from staff, parents/guardians, and students, and the physical environment Audit, the Accessibility Committee has identified the following areas as the top priority for improving accessibility in the school district community.

Priority #1:   Information and Communication

Rocky Mountain School District No. 6 will enhance the accessibility of information and communication for all individuals, including those with disabilities, through the following actions:

- Ensure that all communication to staff, students, and parents/guardians is written in plain language and is available in alternate formats upon request.
- Survey parents/guardians to determine their preferred method of communication and format.
- Develop guidelines and examples for communication to all stakeholders.
- Improve the number and type of accessible format resources for students with disabilities.
- Librarians will provide accessible book and website suggestions for class units of study.
- Increase training in the use of accessible format materials for classroom teachers and educational assistants.
- Provide staff training on the various types of accessible materials available and how to use them.

Priority #2:   Physical and Architectural

Rocky Mountain School District No. 6 will seek to improve the accessibility of the physical and architectural environment for all individuals, including those with disabilities through the following actions:

- Develop a standard for both vision and hearing impairment related accessibility issues (including sound and light sensitivities).
- Provide sound fields in all classrooms to support students with hearing impairments and attention issues.
- Assess noise issues and determine solutions in classrooms and other areas of our schools.
- Provide alternative learning spaces for students with diverse needs and disabilities.
- Determine the current needs of students who may require alternate learning spaces from time to time.
- Conduct an audit of current alternate learning spaces that can meet the identified needs.
- Create a plan and budget for the provision of additional alternative learning spaces or accommodations to address the needs identified.

Priority #3:   School Policy and Practice

Rocky Mountain School District No. 6 will review and revise policies and practices to ensure they align with the principles of accessibility, and to address any identified gaps in staff training or knowledge on accessibility issues.

- Summarize and celebrate current accessibility practices within the district.
- Provide information to staff about current accessibility practices within the district.
- Identify areas needed for further staff training on accessibility issues.
- Develop priorities for staff accessibility training.
- Develop an implementation plan to provide the accessibility training needed for current staff and new staff induction.
- Develop Emergency Plans for people with disabilities.
- Develop evacuation procedures for students and staff who encounter various barriers (including mobility, vision, hearing, learning).
- Provide staff training and practice the plans in emergency drills by January 2024.
- Improve transition planning for students with diverse needs and disabilities.
- Collaborate with MCFD navigators to develop transition plans starting in grade 9 for students with developmental disabilities.
- Develop a transition planning process for all students in grades 9-12 by October 2023.
- Develop a transition planning process for all students transitioning to a new school by October 2023.

Priority #4:   Technology

RMSD will increase awareness and training on assistive technology for students with disabilities.
- Increase awareness of specific assistive technology needs for students with disabilities.
- Conduct school reviews of technology needs for students.
- Provide training for staff on the various technology needs of students.
- Provide access and training for the various technology tools needed.

Monitoring and Evaluation

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

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

How to Give Us Feedback

In addition to the public availability of the plan, Rocky Mountain School District will continue to post an annual status report on the progress of the Three-Year Accessibility Plan on the district website. Accessible formats of the plan will be made available upon request. Questions, comments or feedback regarding the Accessibility Plan may be directed to:
Sharon Collin - Director of Instruction (sharon.collin@sd6.bc.ca).