

Advice for the Government of Nova Scotia on Accessibility Standards in Education: **Step 1**

Plain language version

Given to the Minister of Justice
by the Accessibility Advisory Board

August 2020

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The Education Standard Development Committee is a group of experts.

They have met and talked about ways to make education in Nova Scotia more accessible.

This is important because everyone has a human right to education.

Members of the Education Standard Development Committee believe that we need to make a lot of changes, and make sure that everyone is doing the right thing, so that we all have an equal chance at getting an education.

The Committee gave a list of these changes to the Accessibility Advisory Board in July 2020. The Accessibility Advisory Board is a group of people from the community who give advice to government about accessibility.

The Accessibility Advisory Board agreed with the changes and gave them to the Minister of Justice. The Minister of Justice is in charge of the accessibility laws in Nova Scotia.

Most of the members of the Accessibility Advisory Board and Education Standard Development Committee are people with disabilities.

Introduction

Education as a Human Right

Every person is born equal.

We all have the same rights as everyone else. These are called human rights.

Human rights help guide how we live together and treat each other. Everyone must respect the human rights of other people, and no one can take away someone else's human rights. Some examples of human rights are the right to live freely, and to feel safe. Other examples are the right to be treated the same as everyone else, the right to have a job, and the right to have an education.

There are laws and agreements in Nova Scotia, in Canada, and with other countries that say what governments should do to make sure everyone has these human rights. They say that education is a human right and that everyone should have what they need to receive an education.

Making sure everyone can get an education means getting rid of the things that make it hard for people to have an education. These are called barriers.

It means listening to and including people with disabilities and making sure they are leaders in education. It also means making sure the system changes so that everyone can take part and make decisions about their education.

"People with disabilities" are the words we are using to describe people who have bodies that work differently and people who have brains that work differently. Some people with disabilities use other words to describe themselves. The advice we are giving in this report is meant to make education better for all of these people.

About the Accessibility Act

Nova Scotia's Accessibility Act is a law that says accessibility is a human right. It has a goal for Nova Scotia to be accessible by the year 2030. It allows the government to make accessibility standards.

Accessibility standards are rules that tell people, organizations, governments, and businesses what they must do to make sure people with disabilities can access their services and programs.

The Nova Scotia Government will make accessibility standards for each of the following:

- Education
- Buildings and outdoor spaces
- Buying and selling things, and accessing services like going to a gym or eating a meal at a restaurant
- Sharing information with each other (Communication)
- Employment
- Public transportation, like buses and taxis

About Accessibility Standards for Education

The education standards will be a set of rules that will make sure people with disabilities can have an education. People who work in education will have to follow these rules. This includes public and private early childhood, elementary, junior high, high school, university, and college, including the Nova Scotia School for Adult Learning.

In March 2019, the Accessibility Advisory Board created an Education Standard Development Committee. This committee's job is to help the Accessibility Advisory Board give advice to government about the education standard.

The Education Standard Development Committee is a group of community members who are experts in education and people who work for the government. Most of the committee members have a disability. (A list of committee members is at the end of this document.)

How the Committee Is Doing Its Work

The Education Standard Development Committee is doing its work in two steps:

Step 1: Decide what they think the most important changes in the education system need to be. This is the advice in this document.

Step 2: Decide which rules they think must be followed to make sure everyone can have an education. These will be given to government by March 2022.

To do the Step 1 work, the Education Standard Development Committee got information from over 700 students, parents, and staff across Nova Scotia. They used an online form in Spring 2019 to learn about what is stopping people from having a better education, and what needs to change. In March 2020, they met with Nova Scotians in person to hear what they liked about their advice for government and what need to be changed.

The Education Standard Development Committee learned about what other provinces and countries are doing. They also learned from others who work in education.

What Government Should Do with the Advice

The Standard Development Committee wants government to help everyone in the education system to start making changes now. The Education Standard Development Committee has decided that government should turn their Step 1 advice into a document that tells people who work in education how they should do their work so that it is accessible. This document would be called Guidelines or a Charter.

The Education Standard Development Committee also thinks that government should make a rule that universities, Nova Scotia Community College, Regional Centres for Education, *Conseil scolaire acadien provincial*, and Atlantic Provinces Special Education Authority must show how they will follow the guidelines. They will do this in their accessibility plans. Accessibility plans show how and when they will make changes so that all students can have an education.

During Step 2 of their work, the Standard Development Committee will give government more advice about how they can make accessibility rules for education.

The Standard Development Committee's Advice

We are telling government that the education system in Nova Scotia must make important changes and promises so everyone has the human right to have an education. We explain the changes and promises in this report.

The Most Important Promise

Everyone must understand that being able to have an education is an important human right. Everyone in Nova Scotia must be able to have an education. Everyone who works in the education system must take away any barriers or problems that stop people from being able to have an education.

- **We need to hear from people with disabilities. They are the experts, and they need to be listened to. This is called First Voice.**

People who work in Nova Scotia's education system must understand that people with disabilities are experts in accessibility. What they know about how to remove barriers to education is the most important thing to understand when doing this work.

- **We need to make sure that everyone has what they need to learn. This is called Equity.**

Everyone will be able to have an education when everyone is included and has what they need to learn.

- **We need learners and their families to be able to make decisions about their education. This is called Inclusive Decision-Making.**

All learners and their families or people who support them must have the help and information they need to understand and make decisions about their education.

- **We need to understand that everything about a person is connected. This is called Intersectionality.**

People who work in Nova Scotia's education system must understand that each person's abilities, experiences, and feelings of belonging to a group are connected. They are all different, and they affect how we learn and get an education.

- **We need to work together. This is called Collaboration and Consistency.**

People who work in Nova Scotia's education system must make sure that everyone works together to offer programs and services.

- **We need enough money and people. This is called Sufficient and Sustainable Resources.**

People who work in Nova Scotia's education system must make sure there is enough money and people to make the changes in this document.

- **We must always be learning and making things better. This is called Continuous Learning and Improvement.**

When we learn new information, we must change how we do things to make sure Nova Scotia's education system is always getting better.

Promises that the Education System Must Make

People who work in Nova Scotia's education system must make promises in six areas.

1. Capacity Building (making sure everyone understands and can do something)

We should make sure that staff, students, families, and supporters have the information and knowledge they need so that everyone can have an education:

- Everyone in Nova Scotia's education system knows that people with disabilities have human rights. They know that everyone has a right to have an education and that everyone should learn together. Everyone in the education system knows how to make sure everyone has what they need to learn.
- Nova Scotia's education system helps staff to learn how to teach and support all learners.
- All of the courses and activities in Nova Scotia's education system include information about accessibility and disability.
- People with disabilities have jobs in all areas of Nova Scotia's education system.
- Nova Scotia's education system helps learners and their families or supporters make decisions about their education.
- Nova Scotia's government and schools understand how their rules affect people with disabilities. They make changes to the rules to make sure everyone can have an education.

2. Teaching and Learning

We should make sure that learners and staff can learn and teach in ways that work for everyone:

- All educators and learners can take part in the spaces where people teach and learn. Some spaces are in buildings, some spaces are outside, some spaces are online.
- Courses, activities, and materials are accessible for everyone.
- Learners can show what they have learned in different ways.
- There are many ways for people to be students at Nova Scotia's universities and colleges.

3. Accessibility Services (the services, technology, and support that learners need)

We should make sure that learners and staff have what they need to learn and teach in ways that work for everyone:

- People who learn and people who teach have all the support, services, devices, and technology that they need to teach and learn.
- Learners, and their families or supporters, have the help they need to make decisions about what they need to learn.
- The voices and choices of learners and their families or supporters are the most important things when planning how a learner will change classes, grades, or schools, or move into a job or the community.
- Transition plans change as a learner's needs change.
- Learners are able to have the same services and technology when they change grades or schools or move into the community.

4. Communication and Navigation (making sure everyone can get and share information)

We should make sure that learners and their families or supporters have the information that they need:

- Learners and their families or supporters have the help they need to find information and support from Nova Scotia's education system and tell staff what learners need.
- Information is accessible, and easy to understand and find.
- Learners and their families or supporters can easily share information with people who work in the education system.

5. Research (learning new information to make better decisions)

To help us make better decisions, we should learn new information about how learners and people who work in the education system are doing:

- Nova Scotia's education system uses information shared by people with disabilities to make decisions.
- Nova Scotia's schools and government support research on accessibility and disability issues, especially research done by people with disabilities.
- Nova Scotia's education system collects and shares information about learners with disabilities. This could be information about how they are learning and how happy and healthy they are. This information is used to make the education system better.

6. Accountability (making sure change is being made)

We should make sure that people working in the education system follow the accessibility rules:

- People who work outside the education system make sure the system is following the accessibility rules when they are made. This helps us know when we are doing a good job and helps us to make education better.

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