

Recommendations to the Minister of Justice on an Accessibility Standard in Education: Phase 2

Plain Language Summary

Accessibility Advisory Board
January 2023

This is a summary of recommendations made by the Education Standard Development Committee and given to the Accessibility Advisory Board in October 2022.

The Accessibility Advisory Board read the recommendations, made changes, and gave them to the Minister of Justice.

Introduction..... 3

- What is a disability?..... 3
- What is a barrier?..... 3
- What is accessibility? 4
- What is intersectionality? 4

Why are rules needed for an accessible education? 5

- What is the Accessibility Act?..... 5
- What is a standard?..... 6
- How is a standard made? 6
- What will an accessibility standard do for education?..... 7
- What approach did the Accessibility advisory Committee use? 7
- When will changes happen?..... 8

What is needed for Accessible Education?..... 9

What recommendations are being made in each area?.....10

1. All Groups..... 10
2. Early Years 11
3. Public Elementary and High Schools 11
4. Private Elementary and High Schools 12
5. Public Universities and Colleges 12
6. Private Colleges 13
7. Language Schools 13
8. Nova Scotia School for Adult Learning 13

Conclusion14

Introduction

This report is a summary. It is written in plain language. It is about education in Nova Scotia. It is about including people with disabilities in education. It has suggestions for the Minister of Justice. The suggestions will help people with disabilities. It will help them get an education. It will help them to be included.

What is a disability?

Any person can have a disability. Some people have more than one disability. A disability can affect a person's body or brain. It can affect the way a person thinks or feels. There are many kinds of disability. Some people have intellectual disabilities. Some are Deaf. Some are blind. Some use other words to describe themselves.

A person's disability can be the same all the time. Or it can change. Sometimes a person's disability is easy for others to notice. But other times it is not. A disability can be hard to notice. It can be invisible. Other people can't see it.

Another way to look at disability is not in the person. It is in the barriers they face.

What is a barrier?

A barrier is something that gets in the way. It stops people from doing what they want to do. Barriers often happen to people with a disability. Barriers can keep a person from doing some things.

There are barriers in many places. Here are some examples of barriers.

- A person can't get into a building. There is no ramp for their wheelchair.
- A person can't get a job. The company doesn't want to hire Deaf person.
- A person can't find a good place to live. The landlord doesn't want to rent to a person with a disability.
- A person can't get a good education. The school doesn't have a good plan for students with disabilities.

It is important to remove barriers. This helps everyone to be included. It helps the province to be accessible.

What is accessibility?

Being 'accessible' means there are no barriers in the way. It means that people with disabilities can do all the things they want to. They can do the same things as other people.

They can be involved. They can be included. They can get information the way they want. They can join in whatever way they like to. The things they need are there.

Being accessible is important. It takes away barriers. It helps more people be involved and included. It helps people be more equal. It makes our society better.

What is intersectionality?

The word intersectionality is about an idea. The idea is that people have many different things about them. These different things make them who they are. The idea is also about how people are treated. Some people are treated unfairly because of something about who they are. They may be discriminated against.

This may be because of their disability. But it could be about other parts of who they are. This could include their race or the colour of their skin. It could include who they love. It could include their gender. It could include the language they speak or other things about them.

This unfair treatment is also a barrier. It can add up for a person. They may face many barriers. Using the idea of intersectionality will help. It will show what barriers they face.

These ideas are all important. Accessibility and intersectionality are important. The way disability is defined is important. They are important in making sure everyone is included in education. They are important when making accessibility rules.

Why are rules needed for an accessible education?

Education is a human right. Everyone should be able to go to school. This includes people with disabilities.

Most countries agree on this. This includes Canada. Nova Scotia also agrees. There are many laws that protect this right. Some of these laws are used all around the world. Some are just used in Canada. And some are just used in Nova Scotia. These laws are listed below.

- United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities
- Universal Declaration of Human Rights
- Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms
- Nova Scotia Human Rights Act
- Nova Scotia Accessibility Act

Even with these laws, it is often hard for people with disabilities to get an education. Old barriers need to be removed. New barriers need to be stopped. Some barriers have been here for a long time. These barriers have hurt people with disabilities. They should be the first to be removed.

Everyone who works in education needs to help. They need to listen to people who face barriers. They need to work with them to make education accessible.

Education makes peoples' lives better. People with education are more likely to have a job. They make more money.

People with disabilities usually have less education than others. They are less likely to work. They make less money. In Nova Scotia, people with disabilities are less happy with their lives than other people.

An accessibility standard will make it easier for people with disabilities to get education. This will make their lives better. They will be able to find work and make money like everyone else.

What is the Accessibility Act?

Nova Scotia passed the Accessibility Act in 2017. It is a law. It says accessibility is a human right. It has ways to make the province accessible. There is a timeline to get things done. Nova Scotia should be accessible by 2030.

What is a standard?

The government will do this by making standards. A standard is a set of rules. It says what people need to do. It tells them how to do it. It tells them how to make places accessible. It tells them how to make activities and events accessible. These standards will help to include people with disabilities.

How is a standard made?

The Minister of Justice makes standards. The Minister works with the Accessibility Advisory Board. It is just called the Board in this report. They are accessibility experts. They tell the Minister what to put in the standards.

These are the steps to make a standard.

1. The Board creates a committee. This is a group of people who work together. The committee talks to people who will use the standard.
 - People who provide services
 - People with disabilities
 - People who help people with disabilities

They work together with the Board to decide what to tell the Minister.
2. The Board tells the Minister what to put in the standard. This is public. Everyone can see what the Board said.
3. The Minister makes the new standard. It can include what the Board suggested. It might not include everything. The Minister can make changes.
4. People read the new standard. They tell the Minister what they think. They have sixty days to do this.
5. The Minister and the Board look at what people said. They change the standard if they need to.
6. The Minister sends the standard to the government. The government decides if they will make it part of the law.

What will an accessibility standard do for education?

An accessibility standard for education will make sure people with disabilities can go to school. It will be for all kinds of education. This includes the following areas.

- Childcare
- Pre-schools
- Elementary schools
- Junior high schools
- High schools
- Universities and colleges
- Nova Scotia School for Adult Learning
- Private career colleges
- Language schools

The Board created the Education Standard Development Committee. It is just called the Committee in this report. The Committee helped the Board make the new standard.

The people on the Committee are from the community. They know a lot about education and schools. Some are teachers. Some are experts. Some are from the government. Most of them are people with disabilities.

What approach did the Accessibility Advisory Committee use?

There are many kinds of education. There are many kinds of schools. Many things affect accessibility. The Committee looked at all of these.

The Committee listened to experts. They talked to more than 900 people across Nova Scotia. They heard from teachers, parents, students, and disability advocates.

The Committee did its work in two steps.

In Step 1 the Committee decided what was most important. These are changes that have to happen to make education accessible.

In Step 2 the Committee decided what to put in the standard. These are changes to make education accessible.

When will changes happen?

Making the changes will take time. The committee thinks that different groups should follow the standard at different times, as below.

- Government of Nova Scotia – by 2025
- Other public groups – by 2026
- Everyone else – by 2027

The most important changes should be made first. Schools can start by training staff and teachers. They need to learn about accessibility. This will make it easier for them to make other changes.

There will be rules to make sure people follow the standard. If the standard is not followed, it could cause a barrier. Students and teachers will need help when they find these barriers. The rules have to make sure barriers are removed.



What is needed for Accessible Education?

Many changes have to happen to make education accessible. There are some basic ideas everyone should agree on. These ideas are below.

Commit to human rights. Education is a human right. People with disabilities have the right to accessible education.

Use First Voice experts. People with disabilities are the experts. They know about accessibility. What they say is important. They need to be listened to.

Make sure there is equity. People need different things. They have different experiences. They should all be included. Everyone should have what they need to learn.

Use inclusive decision-making. People should make their own decisions. Some people need help with this. They should have support to make decisions about their education.

Use an intersectional way of looking at barriers. Everything about a person is connected. People have different abilities and experiences. They can belong to more than one group. This affects how they learn. It affects what they need.

Work with others and work towards the same goals. Everyone who works in education can help. They should work together. All programs and services should be accessible. Have enough people and funds to do accessibility work. There has to be enough money and people to make the changes.

Keep learning and improving the system. Everyone should keep learning. When they learn something new, they can make changes. This will make the education system better.

What recommendations are being made in each area?

The Committee recommended these different kinds of changes.

- A. **Make changes to accessibility standards, or rules.** These are in the Accessibility Act.
- B. **Make changes to rules in other Acts.** Other Acts have parts that can help make education accessible.
- C. **Make accessibility guidelines.** These are suggestions government would make. They are not part of a law.
- D. **Follow other recommendations.** These are other suggestions. They are not part of a law.

The Committee recommended these changes in the following areas.

1. All Groups

All groups should make changes in some of the same areas. There are suggested accessibility standards and guidelines. There are also changes to other Acts and changes that are not in laws. These changes are for the following areas.

- Making sure people follow the rules
- Training teachers and others
- Teaching and testing
- Courses and activities
- Moving around in the education system
- Communicating
- Accessibility services

Some of the recommendations are meant for certain groups. The groups are based on the type of education. These recommendations are below.

2. Early Years

These recommendations are for the following groups.

- Licensed childcare centres
- Family home childcare agencies
- Pre-school programs
- Nova Scotia Early Childhood Development Intervention Services
- Atlantic Provinces Special Education Authority
- Department of Education and Early Childhood Development

There are suggested accessibility standards and changes to other Acts. There are also changes that are not in laws. These changes are for the following areas.

- How children get into early learning
- Places and spaces for early learning
- Working with families
- Play materials
- Planning education programs
- Language access
- Getting ready for public school
- Collecting information

3. Public Elementary and High Schools

These recommendations are for the following groups.

- Regional Centres for Education
- Conseil scolaire acadien provincial
- Atlantic Provinces Special Education Authority
- Department of Education and Early Childhood Development

There are suggested accessibility standards. There are also changes that are not in laws. These changes are for the following areas.

- Places and spaces
- Learning materials
- Language access
- Getting students ready for what comes next
- Collecting information

4. Private Elementary and High Schools

These recommendations are for the following groups.

- Small private schools with fewer than 200 students
- Large private schools with more than 200 students
- Special education private schools
- Department of Education and Early Childhood Development

There are suggested accessibility standards and guidelines. These changes are for the following areas.

- Learning materials
- Language access
- Getting and sharing information

5. Universities and Nova Scotia Community College

These recommendations are for the following groups.

- Universities
- Nova Scotia Community College
- Department of Advanced Education
- Department of Labour, Skills, and Immigration

There are suggested accessibility standards. There are also changes that are not in laws. These changes are for the following areas.

- How students get into universities and colleges
- Places and spaces
- Learning materials
- Getting students ready for what comes next
- Collecting information

6. Private Career Colleges

These recommendations are for the following groups.

- Small private career colleges with fewer than 200 students
- Large private career colleges with more than 200 students
- Department of Advanced Education

There are suggested accessibility standards and changes to other Acts. There are also changes that are not in laws. These changes are for the following areas.

- How students get into private career colleges
- Learning materials
- Getting and sharing information

7. Language Schools

These recommendations are for the following groups.

- Language schools at universities
- Other language schools
- Department of Advanced Education

There are suggested accessibility standards and guidelines. There are changes to other Acts. There are also changes that are not in laws. These changes are for the following areas.

- How students get into language schools

8. Nova Scotia School for Adult Learning

These recommendations are for the following groups.

- Department of Labour, Skills, and Immigration
- Community Learning Organizations

There are suggested accessibility standards and guidelines. There are also changes that are not in laws. These changes are for the following areas.

- How students get into adult learning
- Learning resources



Conclusion

The Board made these suggestions about education in Nova Scotia. They will help people with disabilities to get an education and be included. The Board gave these suggestions to the Minister of Justice. The Minister will read them and use them to make the accessibility standard in education. The Minister will share the new standard before it is finished. People will be able to give feedback. People with disabilities and people working in education can say what they think about the standard. The Minister can use the suggestions. They can make changes to the standard before it becomes a law.