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| **Survey on Accessibility in Education** |

**Overview**

The Government of Ontario has committed to identifying and addressing accessibility barriers in the education sector and to the development of a new accessibility standard for education.

The Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act, 2005, and accessibility standards provide a roadmap to an accessible Ontario, where people of all abilities can work, play and participate in all aspects of daily living. The purpose of a new accessibility standard for education would be to address barriers to accessibility in the delivery of education.

Under the Act and accessibility standards, organizations across Ontario have flexibility to provide accessible services in a way that meets the needs of people with disabilities and is appropriate to the organization’s unique circumstances.

Accessibility standards play an important role in setting a consistent baseline of accessibility throughout the province, raising awareness, and providing guidance to obligated organizations on identifying and removing barriers to accessibility.

Tell us your ideas about how we can identify proposed areas of focus for a new accessibility standard for education under the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act.

Your feedback will help us determine the scope of the standard and the mandate of a Standards Development Committee working on new accessibility standards for education in Ontario.

**Background**

Ontario’s government is committed to ensuring that every student has access to the supports they need to succeed in school. The Education Act, administered by the Ministry of Education, provides the legislative framework for accommodations for students that are required by school boards. At the post-secondary level, the Ministry of Advanced Education and Skills Development works with publicly funded colleges and universities to provide students with disabilities the necessary support services and accommodations they require.

In 2005, the government introduced the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act (the Act), which sets a provincial goal of an accessible Ontario by 2025. Under the Act, we have created enforceable standards for accessible customer service, information and communications, transportation, the design of public spaces, and employment.

Many of these standards have already begun to remove barriers in schools, colleges and universities. Ontario’s accessibility standards require that accessibility policies be in place, instructors are trained on accessible programs and curriculum, and that libraries are providing accessible formats. Working together with the programs, supports, and services provided through the education system, these requirements are intended to promote an accessible education for all students.

**About this Survey**

You have been invited to share your thoughts on proposed areas of focus for a new accessibility standard for education under the Act. The information you share will be provided to a Standards Development Committee responsible for making recommendations to government. Your experiences with barriers you have faced to achieving an accessible education for yourself, your child, your students, or colleagues, as well as success stories you have witnessed in your school, college or university, will help to inform the work of the Committee.

**Bottom of FormPotential Focus Areas**

The following section provides you an opportunity to comment on focus areas that could be considered for a new accessibility standard. These themes were drawn from a review of current requirements, programs, and policies that support accessibility in education, based on research about barriers faced by students with disabilities.

* Accessibility Awareness and Training
* Awareness of Accessibility Accommodations – Policies, Processes, and Programs/Supports
* Information, Communication, and Inclusive Decision-Making
* Transition Planning
* Inclusive and Accessible Learning Spaces

We welcome any additional comments on areas that are not addressed in these themes. Your input is valuable to shaping this important work.

**Accessibility Awareness and Training**

**Issue:** Ontario’s accessibility standards require that all employees and volunteers of an organization be provided with accessibility awareness training. In addition, accessibility standards require specific additional training on accessible course delivery for instructors. Instructors and staff may feel that they would benefit from additional training or professional development to be able to confidently support students with disabilities and to create an accessible classroom.

Examples:

* An instructor may feel they have insufficient knowledge or professional development resources to adequately support students with disabilities and diverse learning needs.
* Students without disabilities or their parents may also feel that they lack an understanding of accessibility and disability, limiting their ability to create an inclusive school, college or university environment.
* Students with disabilities or their parents may feel that they are required to repeatedly advocate for accommodation and cannot rely on their school, college or university to have the necessary knowledge base.

Questions:

**4. What could your school, college or university do to improve their awareness and consideration of the accessibility needs of persons with disabilities?**

**5. What resources or policies have you seen as most effective to support awareness of accessibility needs in your school, college or university**?

**Awareness of Accessibility Accommodations – Policies, Processes, and Programs/Supports**

**Issue**: In both the K-12 and post-secondary sectors, a variety of supports, programs, and services are provided to support students with diverse learning needs. Regulated accessibility standards also require educational institutions to provide students with disabilities with accessible or conversion-ready course information, student records, and educational resources. Barriers to accessibility can exist when students with disabilities or their parents are not aware of available supports and programs, or when instructors and staff are not aware of their requirements or their obligations.

Example:

* Parents of a child with a disability may not be aware of the range of supports that their child’s school, college or university offers that are tailored to their child’s specific needs.
* Staff at a secondary school may not be aware that the school is required to provide a student with accessible or conversion-ready formats of educational materials and resources.
* A professor may not be aware of their university’s established policies and processes governing disability accommodation needs, or of the supports available, creating uncertainty and inconsistency for a student making a request.

Questions:

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**\* 6. What challenges do students with disabilities face when accessing supports, programs, or services in their school, college or university?**

**7. In your experience, what resources, tools, or policies are most effective to promote better awareness of available supports and facilitate appropriate accommodations?**

**Information, Communication, and Inclusive Decision-Making**

**Issue:** Ensuring people with lived experience of disability are included in decision-making from an early stage is an important aspect of creating an accessible, inclusive school, college or university. Accessibility standards require educational institutions to consult with people with disabilities when creating or updating a multi-year accessibility plan, when developing transportation plans for students with disabilities, and when creating or redeveloping an outdoor play or recreation space, among others.

The first step in engaging students or, where appropriate, their parents in decision-making related to their education or their school, college or university is ensuring they have access to clear information and materials in a format that meets their needs.

Example:

* Students and parents may not be aware that there are opportunities for them to participate within their educational community, in planning related to their individual education or to broader decisions for the school, college or university as a whole.
* Organizations may make decisions that affect accessibility without consulting with people with disabilities to determine their needs and gather their advice.Bottom of Form

Questions:

**8. What barriers do students with disabilities or their parents face in participating in decisions that affect accessibility in their schools, colleges or universities?**

**9. In your experience, what resources, tools, or policies help to promote early engagement by persons with disabilities (or their representatives) in educational decisions and planning?**

**Transition Planning**

**Issue:** When students transition from child care to school, and from school to work, further education and/or community living, careful planning and coordination are required to ensure a smooth transition. An individualized transition plan that reflects a student’s strengths and needs can provide the foundation for a successful transitional experience to the next appropriate pathway for the student.
Guidelines developed by the Ministry of Education encourage K-12 schools in Ontario to provide opportunities and support for students to plan their individual pathways through school, determine their personal goals, and leave school with a clear plan. At the post-secondary level, universities and colleges have established disability support offices, with support from the Ministry of Advanced Education and Skills Development. Research indicates, however, that students with disabilities and their families may still experience challenges with transition planning, and that poorly implemented transition planning can affect student success.

Example:

* Children with disabilities transitioning from early learning and childcare into the kindergarten classroom may require additional supports for a smooth transition into a more formal learning setting.
* Secondary school students may not have fully benefited from supports and tools available to help them successfully transition to employment or to post-secondary education or training.
* Supports provided in K-12 may be different than those provided in post-secondary education and students may find it difficult to effectively bridge the transition.
* Supports provided in post-secondary institutions may not transition smoothly with students transferring between institutions, or be available consistently to students who are completing programs that bridge across partner institutions.

Questions:

**10. What challenges do students with disabilities face in transitioning across educational institutions or when completing programs that bridge partner institutions?**

**11. What challenges do students with disabilities face when planning for employment, for post-secondary education or training, or for community living?**

**12. In your experience, as a student, parent, or professional, what resources, tools, or policies have been effective to support smooth transitions?**

**Inclusive and Accessible Learning Spaces**

Issue: Students may face challenges navigating older buildings designed and constructed before current accessibility requirements were established. When K-12 schools, colleges, and universities include accessibility features throughout the built environment, from the classroom or student workspace to the building and exterior grounds, students with disabilities can participate in a shared educational experience with other students. **Example:**

* Educational spaces, from classrooms to laboratories, where students using assistive devices can easily navigate around the space and access any required supplies, support engaged learning for all students.
* Instructors may benefit from additional guidance on how to create an inclusive educational environment for all their students, such as how to adapt the principles of universal design (also known as “design for all people”) to the physical layout of the classroom.
* In addition to lifts, ramps, or elevators, building design features such as lighting, paint, carpeting or tiles can have a significant impact on accessibility.
* Accessible exterior spaces – playgrounds, picnic tables, or paths between buildings on a campus – foster an inclusive educational community and support better learning.

Questions:

**13. What challenges do students, instructors, staff and the public with disabilities face in navigating their educational built environment?**

**14. In your experience, what resources, tools, or design practices can best support improved accessibility in existing, often older, buildings?**

**15. What other elements should be considered to enhance the physical accessibility of K-12 schools, colleges and universities?**

**Additional Barriers to Accessibility in Education**

While our research has identified the challenges above, we are seeking your advice on other challenges and barriers that an accessibility standard for K-12 and post-secondary education could address.

Questions:

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**\* 16. As a student or parent, what other accessibility barriers have you experienced in pursuing your or your child’s education, and how could they be addressed through a new accessibility standard for education?**

**17. As a professional in the education sector, what other barriers have you experienced in providing an accessible, inclusive education, and how could they be addressed through a new accessibility standard for education?**

**Glossary:**

“Accessibility”: in the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act (AODA), the purpose of the Act being to… “achieve accessibility for Ontarians with disabilities with respect to goods, services, facilities, accommodation, employment, buildings, structures and premises on or before January 1, 2025.““Accommodation”: refers to the Ontario Human Rights Commission’s Guidelines on Accessible Education, and Policy and Guidelines on Disability and the Duty to Accommodate at www.ohrc.on.ca

“Disability”: as defined in the AODA means:

a)      any degree of physical disability, infirmity, malformation or disfigurement that is caused by bodily injury, birth defect or illness and, without limiting the generality of the foregoing, includes diabetes mellitus, epilepsy, a brain injury, any degree of paralysis, amputation, lack of physical co-ordination, blindness or visual impediment, deafness or hearing impediment, muteness or speech impediment, or physical reliance on a guide dog or other animal or on a wheelchair or other remedial appliance or device,

b)      a condition of mental impairment or a developmental disability,

c)      a learning disability, or a dysfunction in one or more of the processes involved in understanding or using symbols or spoken language,

d)      a mental disorder, or

e)      an injury or disability for which benefits were claimed or received under the insurance plan established under the Workplace Safety and Insurance Act, 1997; (“handicap”)

“Instructor”: anyone directly interacting with students, including but not limited to teacher, professor, Principal, Vice-Principal, Early Childhood Educator (ECE), Teacher’s Assistant (TA), Education Assistant (EA), behaviour expert, Speech Language Pathologist (SLP), social worker, administrative staff, etc.

“Parent”: also includes any person acting as a legal guardian for a student

“School”: any publicly-funded Ontario school (French, English, Public, Catholic)

“University/College”: any postsecondary institution operating in Ontario receiving operating grants from the Government of Ontario

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