

MINISTRY OF EDUCATION

2005-2006 Accessibility Plan



ISSN # 1708-4598

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Introduction

The recent passage of the landmark Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act, 2005 marks a new era of accessibility in Ontario. This legislation will make Ontario one of the world leaders in improving accessibility for people with disabilities.

While the government is moving forward to implement the new legislation, there will be a transition period during which government and parts of the broader public sector will continue to have planning and other obligations under the Ontarians with Disabilities Act, 2001 (ODA). These obligations will remain in effect until they are repealed and replaced by standards under the new act.

Under the ODA, Ontario government ministries, municipalities, hospitals, school boards, colleges, universities and public transportation organizations are required to develop annual accessibility plans to make policies, practices, programs, services and buildings more accessible to people with disabilities. These plans must be made available to the public. Accessibility planning efforts to date have developed a strong foundation for the development of accessibility standards that will ensure real and effective change.

This document is the third annual accessibility plan developed by the Ministry of Education (EDU). It highlights achievements of the 2004-05 plan and outlines commitments for 2005-06 so that no new barriers are created and, over time, existing ones are removed.

This ministry intends to build on its achievements by implementing initiatives that support the government's efforts and commitment to continue to make Ontario an inclusive and accessible province, where people of all abilities have a chance to fully participate and achieve their potential.

Message from the Minister



The Ministry of Education is strongly committed to improving the quality of education for all students in the publicly funded elementary and secondary school system in Ontario.

The achievements highlighted in this year's plan, as well as the commitments to make further improvements in the coming year, demonstrate the ministry's efforts to support the government's commitment to make Ontario's communities strong, vital and accessible to all people of all abilities.

The ministry reviewed the adequacy of resources provided for students with disabilities and determined that a further increase of \$100 million was warranted, and that boards should be required to spend \$83 million in recently acquired reserves as part of an overall strategy. This constitutes a sixty-five per cent increase in intensive support resources, representing the addition of \$365 million in annual funding since the Rozanski report in 2002.

We used that funding to create an \$83 million one-time Equity and Effectiveness Fund that is now at work across the province helping students to succeed. This year, \$62 million from the fund was made available to help boards support new students with high needs. This support provides up to \$17,000 for each new student who requires an intensive level of special education support. Approximately \$21 million were also provided to boards to recognize commitments they have made to support students with special needs. Other reforms are being addressed including relieving the board of challenges posed by the ISA process while a new process focussed on outcomes is being developed and a new transportation funding formula used to inform 2004/05 allocations including provision for special education transportation funding.

The ministry now provides over \$1.8 billion in dedicated funding for the education of students with disabilities. A working table on special education under the umbrella of the Education Partnership Table was established to develop essential changes to special education funding and policy. The working table includes parents of children with special needs, educators and other experts to ensure special education funding and policies truly support improved special education outcomes for individual students. A parallel process will be the ministry Efficiency and Effectiveness project that will ensure funding appropriateness, accountability and a mechanism for sharing of standards and best practices.

We are taking specific steps to ensure that our work to meet our key commitments will benefit all students. The government has set a target for 75 per cent of all Ontario students to meet the provincial standard on provincewide reading, writing and mathematics assessments by 2008. The Literacy and Numeracy Secretariat is establishing a new way of collaborating across districts to determine improvement strategies for achievement by all students.

Teachers are increasingly being called upon to accommodate a wide range of students' diverse abilities and needs within the regular classroom. To support the need for professional development the ministry established an expert panel of researchers and educators. They released a report at a ministry sponsored symposium in the spring recommending practices for improving the effective teaching of reading, writing and math to elementary students with special education needs.

The ministry is helping to build school and board capacity to support students with special needs. Earlier this year, the Ontario Council of Directors of Education received \$25 million to undertake a project that will provide teachers and school administrators with teaching strategies and information about how to better meet the needs of their students with special needs.

Inter-ministry cooperation has resulted in the introduction of a new program intended to enhance educators' knowledge and skills in helping students with autism spectrum disorders in the classroom. Through this program, consultants are available to boards to provide services to teachers, principals and teacher assistants.

The ministry updated its Individual Education Plan Resource Guide in September 2004 to provide more detail about successful practices in the provision of accommodation for students with special education needs. Steps have been taken to ensure that students receive proper accommodations when writing provincial tests including the Ontario Secondary School Literacy Test. We have seen some promising signs of student achievement. The most recent OSSLT results show that 57 per cent of students with special needs passed the test. That is up from 46 per cent a year earlier.

Through work with the Learning Disabilities Association of Ontario the ministry has given boards access to an early screening and intervention tool. The tool allows teachers of students in Junior Kindergarten, Kindergarten and Grade 1 to observe learning difficulties, and select appropriate instruction strategies. After an initial period of pilot testing, the tool and training have been rolled out to all Ontario school boards.

Arrangements have been made for a \$2.8 billion renewal fund for school buildings with express requirement for existing disability access plans and new obligations to be taken into account in both initial projects and board's capital plans due in October 2005.

We are making significant strides in promoting the rights of students with disabilities by providing accommodation and equal access to education programs across Ontario. Students with special needs deserve a good outcome from public education, and we need to make sure they get real results.

Sincerely,

The Honourable Gerard Kennedy

Minister of Education

Report on Achievements of 2004-2005

Planning Commitments

Over the past year, the ministry continued to make progress on improving accessibility for persons with disabilities. The ministry's commitments and accomplishments for 2004-05 include:

Commitment:

Implement the *Guidelines for Procurement of Accessible Goods and Services*.

Status: Ongoing

Action and Timeframe:

- The ministry provided training to staff on procurement policies and practices including ODA requirements and will continue to provide training on an ongoing basis.
- To heighten ministry staff awareness of accessibility in procurement, the ministry posted the new MBS tools for procurement on its internal website and communicated it to staff. The tools included:
 - o An e-tutorial on Guidelines for Implementing Procurement Provisions of the Ontarians with Disabilities Act (2001);
 - o A Procurement Requirements Checklist, which provides employees with an easy-to-use tool for having regard to accessibility for persons with disabilities when purchasing goods or services;
 - o Qs & As (Questions and Answers) about accessibility in the procurement, by Ontario Public Service employees, of goods and services.

Commitment:

Build on the 2003-04 commitment to develop a checklist for software and applications dedicated to accessibility solutions.

Status: Ongoing

Action and Timeframe:

In 2004-05 the ministry continued to update the 2003-04 checklist. We maintain this checklist on an ongoing basis and it is available to staff.

Commitment:

Build on existing acts and regulations to improve barrier free accessibility in ministry buildings.

Status: Ongoing

Action and Timeframe:

- On an ongoing basis, design proposals are reviewed to ensure that barrier free requirements in all acts and regulations are met in ministry buildings.
 - The ministry is improving accessibility to all of its 70 provincial schools' buildings over a fifteen year period (2000-01 to 2015-16) as part of its long term capital plan. Approximately one third of the work planned had been completed by the end of 2004-05.
 - In 2004-05 the ministry undertook the following projects to improve accessibility at its provincial schools sites:
 - o A new elementary school at the W. Ross Macdonald School for the Blind in Brantford was completed and opened. It included barrier free entrances, washrooms, health services and residential space and other specific design accommodations for students who are blind or have low vision, for example, trail rails and different floor textures to help students find their way and special window and lighting treatments to eliminate glare.
 - o In addition, a number of renovation projects were initiated to improve accessibility including:
 - the renovation of a large residence in Belleville started in late 2004-05, to be completed in 2006-07
 - the renovation of a smaller residence in Belleville, to be completed in summer 2005
 - two renovation projects started in Milton and one in Brantford to be completed during the summer of 2006.
- These commitments are carried over to the 2005-06 commitments.
- As part of the ministry's *Emergency Evacuation Procedures*, developed in 2004-05, all directors are required to provide a cell phone/walkie talkie and assistance to employees requiring special assistance in the event of an emergency evacuation

Commitment:

Ensure that publications are available in alternate formats.

Status: Completed

Action and Timeframe:

The ministry continues to ensure that publications posted on its website are accessible to all.

Commitment:

Provincial Schools will provide publications in alternate formats to school boards and families of students.

Status: Ongoing

Action and Timeframe:

The service is in place and has recently been upgraded to provide the special needs advisors in District School Boards with the facility to order publications online.

Commitment:

Ensure that the ministry intranet and website meet or exceed accessibility requirements by carrying out the following measures:

- Provide ongoing expertise, quality assurance measures and advice on achieving compliance with the Ontarians with Disabilities Act, 2001
- Carry out tests, as required, of community service cluster websites to ensure compliance with the Act
- Ensure that new web pages are accessible as defined by the Act
- Provide updates and information on accessibility issues to staff who develop intranet sites
- Implement the accessible intranet template ministry-wide
- Review new web pages to ensure they are accessible
- Update the software used for creating accessible web pages
- Purchase new/upgrades to software to create accessible web pages
- Ensure that the *Guide to Web Publishing* contains current accessibility guidelines.

Status: Completed

Action and Timeframe:

- All of the items listed above are carried out on an ongoing basis to ensure the ministry intranet and the public website are accessible.
- With the launch of its newly designed public website, the ministry continues to meet or exceed accessibility requirements. The ministry has also sought feedback from visitors regarding all aspects of the new website, including accessibility.
- In addition to the ministry intranet and public website initiatives, the ministry funded the production of teacher resources for literacy and numeracy, JK to Grade 6, hosted by TV Ontario on the website , <<www.eworkshop.on.ca>> or <<www.atelier.on.ca>> - French- Language equivalent. The website contains two types of navigation for better accessibility and has a “Tab Index” and an “Alt Text” property for greater accessibility. The Audio and Video streams are captioned in both English and French.

Commitment:

All new acts, regulations, policies, programs and services will be assessed with respect to their impact on people with disabilities.

Status: Completed

Action and Timeframe:

Acts, Regulations and Policies:

Actions include:

- An adjudication process was put in place, in the 2003-04 school year, to allow students eligible to graduate, but who were not able to write the Ontario Secondary School Literacy Test (OSSLT) or enrol in the Ontario Secondary School Literacy Course (OSSLC), an opportunity to obtain this graduation requirement. Directors of Education and School Authorities are able to establish Adjudication Panels at the local level to evaluate samples of student work and thereby determine if a student meets the literacy requirement according to criteria outlined in the Ministry guidelines.
- Direction and information was provided to school boards to support students in the fulfilment of the secondary school literacy graduation requirement, the OSSLC, the adjudication process, and the obligation of schools to provide accommodations for students writing the OSSLT. These supports benefit all students, including those with special needs, to meet graduation requirements.
- Sections of the elementary and secondary curriculum policy documents related to planning programs for students with special needs were enhanced by clarifying the options available for accommodating and/or modifying expectations based on student needs. These changes will also be reflected in revised curriculum documents.

Programs and Services

In addition to the stated commitments regarding field offices, employment practices and employment resources, the ministry:

- In cooperation with the Ministry of Children and Youth Services adopted a *Schools First* policy, meaning that schools are the location of first choice for child care centres and early learning and care hubs, and that school boards continue to build on measures to improve accessibility and opportunities for children, youth and students with disabilities.
- Clarified report card requirements and policies on the right of students with special needs to receive accommodations, so that student achievement is reported based on achievement of curriculum expectations, and not within the context of accommodations or services.
- Developed a resource guide to assist boards in understanding how to best provide individualized accommodations for students with special needs.
- Supported the work of an Expert Panel Report to assist Ontario's teachers in improving and reinforcing effective instruction of reading, writing, oral communication, and mathematics to Kindergarten to Grade 6 students with special needs.
- Provided the Learning Disabilities Association of Ontario with funding to develop and pilot a tool to assist teachers with early screening and intervention strategies for Junior Kindergarten to Grade 1 students at risk of having learning difficulties. Thirty-five school boards were using the tool by the end of the 2004-05 school year.
- Supported the Minister's Advisory Council on Special Education, which includes membership from all exceptionality areas as well as educator and professional groups working with students with special needs, Native representation, student and youth representation, and cross-representation from the French-Language and Catholic communities. Ministries with a mandate for children's services are also represented. The council's mandate is to advise the minister on matters related to the education needs of special education students.
- Established a Working Table on Special Education to review and recommend effective practices to improve outcomes for students with special needs.

Commitment:

Work with the Ontario College of Teachers on their ongoing review of the Ontario College of Teachers Act, 1996 to ensure that the terminology used in the regulation reflects current and acceptable language related to people with disabilities.

Status: In progress to 2006

Action and Timeframe:

The Ontario College of Teachers is conducting a three-phase review of Regulation 184/97 of the Ontario College of Teachers Act, 1996 (teachers' qualifications). The regulation specifies the qualifications necessary for obtaining certification and registration with the Ontario College of Teachers and the requirements for obtaining basic and additional qualifications and principal's and supervisory officer's qualifications. As part of the regulation review, terminology with respect to special education will be updated appropriately and the regulation will be updated to provide for appropriate pre-service and in-service training for teachers in the special education needs of students with a variety of exceptionalities.

Consultation and research for phase one of the Teacher Qualification Review, dealing with initial teacher education, was completed in May, 2005. The College has begun Phase 2 of its review of teacher qualifications, which examines ongoing education of teachers (e.g., Additional Qualification courses). Focus group discussions with College stakeholders, including providers of Additional Qualification (AQ), Principal's Qualification Program (PQP) and Supervisory Officer's Qualifications Program (SOQP) and employers will be held in summer 2005. The first focus group session took place on June 21st, 2005.

The entire review is expected to conclude by December 2005. In 2006, the regulation will be re-drafted based on input received from consultations.

This commitment is carried over to the 2005-06 commitments.

Commitment:

Build on 2003-04 commitment to review all ministry field offices to identify communication barriers to staff and the public and to develop an implementation plan.

Status: Ongoing

Action and Timeframe: The ministry continued to explore opportunities to build on accessibility in communications in its field offices.

Commitment:

Continue to build on employment practices and processes to ensure accessibility for people with disabilities.

Status: Either completed or in progress as indicated below

Action and Timeframe:

- The ministry's employee orientation package has a component on accessibility for all employees; the manager's orientation package contains a tip sheet on what accessibility means and the manager's role in ensuring employees have access to supports. (Completed)
- Applicants in the ministry's recruitment process are supported with information in accessibility/alternate formats. (Completed)
- The Ministry of Government Services' computer-based learning on accessibility, *Maximizing the Contribution of Employees' with Disabilities*, is communicated to and offered to all managers/supervisors. (Completed)
- The ministry's human resources website is being re-designed to clarify links (information and links on the existing site are under Accommodation). (In Progress)
- The ministry's human resources website design format is in compliance with the Ontarians with Disabilities Act (2001) accessibility format. (Completed)
- Outreach material for external recruitment, which is under development, will be in accessible formats. (In Progress)

Commitment:

Provide staff with a new e-mail guide that includes information on best practices in e-mail communications.

Status: In progress

Action and Timeframe:

Ministry staff have conducted research with respect to email best practices, including practices for accessible email communications. Based on that research, staff have developed a plan and are proceeding to draft a guide for internal use. The new guide will be completed during the month of September and a final draft will be presented by early October.

Commitment:

Raise staff awareness of accessibility issues and how to remove barriers for the public and staff.

Status: Completed

Action and Timeframe:

Initiatives undertaken by the ministry in 2004-05 to raise staff awareness include:

- A staff "Lunch & Learn" session with an invited guest speaker, Catherine Frazee, who has lectured and published extensively in Canada and abroad on issues related to disability rights, disability culture and the disability experience. The session topic was

Accommodation: More than a Hotel Room. The session addressed: How does the “Duty to Accommodate” affect me? What is it and how does it matter?

- The United Nations designated December 3, 2004 as International Day of Disabled Persons. Its theme for the year “Nothing About Us Without Us” is based on the goal of full and equal enjoyment of human rights and participation in society by persons with disabilities. On December 1, an article, published in the ministry’s internal newsletter, the *Gazette*, challenged each employee to consider whether there is one thing they can do at home or in their community to help remove barriers and improve awareness of persons with disabilities and to take action. Some of the ideas included in the article were:
 - o Thank a store-owner or proprietor for installing an accessibility feature (e.g., Braille markings on elevators, electric doors).
 - o Write a letter to a community or entertainment centre that needs to pay more attention to accessibility issues.
 - o Start or support a “circle of friends” for someone in your community who has a disability. Find ways to help that person participate as fully in community life as they would like.

Commitments and Strategies for 2005-2006

This section represents the ministry’s plan, including new commitments and initiatives for the coming year.

Customer Service

Programs and Services

Commitment:

Continue to work with the Ministry of Children and Youth Services to ensure that child care and service hubs developed under the Best Start Strategy are designed in compliance with the Ontarians with Disabilities Act, 2001 (ODA).

Timeframe: Throughout 2005-06

Commitment:

Support the Advisory Council on Special Education to provide the minister with advice on special education matters.

Timeframe: Full council meetings are scheduled for October 2005 and February and June 2006; other support is ongoing.

Commitment:

Support the Learning Disabilities Association of Ontario to make the early screening and intervention tool available to more school boards. It is anticipated that the use of the tool will result in earlier identification of students' learning difficulties and application of instructional strategies and targeted interventions. In 2005-06, an evaluation of the tool's effectiveness will be undertaken, and assessment of Grade 2 students and a math screen will be added.

Timeframe: 2004-05 through to 2006-07 school years

Commitment:

Continue to monitor EQAO assessment results to determine the progress of students with special needs.

Timeframe: Ongoing

Commitment:

Include in the research design of the evaluation of 2004-05 Learning to 18 funded projects implemented by school boards, a component that focuses on identifying impacts on students with special needs.

Timeframe: 2005-06

Commitment:

Review the training package, "May I Help You" - Welcoming Customers with Disabilities, developed by the Accessibility Directorate of Ontario, and determine how it can best be used within the ministry. The package is to be used to deliver a workshop on providing services to customers with disabilities. The purpose of the workshop is to raise the level of disability awareness and increase the knowledge of staff about how they can meet the needs of their customers with disabilities.

Timeframe: 2005-06

Procurement**Commitment:**

Continue to incorporate the *Guidelines for Procurement of Accessible Goods and Services* into the ministry's procurement of goods and services.

Action:

Continue to make training presentations to ministry staff on procurement policies and practices, including ODA requirements.

Timeframe: Throughout 2005-06

Commitment:

Provide on-going expertise, quality assurance measures and consultation to ministry staff on ODA issues associated with Information and Information Technology (I&IT).

Action:

- Maintain expertise and currency with software and applications designed to facilitate persons with disabilities in their day-to-day work activities.
- Investigate I&IT accessibility-related technology used in provincial schools to determine its possible use throughout the ministry.

Timeframe: 2005-06

Commitment:

Investigate partnering with other ministries to leverage existing accessibility initiatives related to Information and Information Technology.

Action:

Research SNOW (Special Needs Opportunity Window), which is an information technology application used in Provincial Schools, for possible partnership opportunities with other ministries.

Timeframe: 2005-06

Internet Accessibility**Commitment:**

Continue to ensure that the ministry intranet and website meet or exceed accessibility requirements by carrying out the following measures:

- Continue to obtain feedback from stakeholders regarding the accessibility of the ministry website
- Provide ongoing expertise, quality assurance measures and advice on achieving compliance with the Ontarians with Disabilities Act, 2001 (ODA)
- Carry out tests, as required, of community service cluster websites to ensure compliance with the Act
- Ensure that new web pages are accessible as defined by the Act
- Provide updates and information on accessibility issues to staff who develop intranet sites
- Implement the accessible intranet template ministry-wide

- Review new web pages to ensure they are accessible
- Update the software used for creating accessible web pages
- Purchase new/upgrades to software to create accessible web pages
- Ensure that the *Guide to Web Publishing* contains current accessibility guidelines.

Timeframe: Throughout 2005-06

Employment

Commitment:

Continue to build on ministry managers' and employees' awareness of employment practices to ensure accessibility for persons with disabilities.

Action:

Initiatives will include:

- A Lunch & Learn series on accessibility that would include the following topics:
 - Accommodation, building on the initial session held earlier in the year on what accommodation means, why it matters and how "duty to accommodate" affects each individual
 - Accessibility aspects of return to work requirements.
- On-going enhancement of the HR website related to accessibility, including communication to managers and employees of information to be found on site
- Communication to managers regarding the MGS-developed computer-based learning module on accessibility
- Incorporating accessibility principles into performance and learning planning support materials for managers.

Timeframe: March 2006 and ongoing

Commitment:

Maintain the current checklist of software and applications, developed in 2004-2005, designed to facilitate persons with disabilities in their day-to-day work activities. In addition, explore the feasibility of developing an OPS-wide available checklist.

Timeframe: 2005-06

Communications and Information

Commitment:

Continue to ensure that ministry publications are available in alternate formats.

Timeframe: Throughout 2005-06

Commitment:

Continue to provide textbooks and learning materials in alternate formats to students who are blind or have low vision and are in district school boards. A recently created facility enabling special needs advisors in DSBs to order publications online has improved the service provided.

Timeframe: Ongoing

Commitment:

The ministry will release a *Resource Guide on Planning Entry to School/ Guide de planification de l'entrée à l'école*, which will share effective practices for preparing children, including those with special need for school and learning.

Timeframe: Fall 2005

Built Environment

Commitment:

Build on existing acts and regulations, guidelines and standards, including the new *Standards for Barrier Free Design of Ontario Government Facilities* released in October 2004, to improve barrier free accessibility in ministry buildings.

Action:

- Review design proposals to ensure that barrier free requirements in all acts, regulations and standards are met in ministry buildings.
- Continue to undertake renovation projects to improve accessibility at provincial schools' sites:
 - o The renovation of a large residence in Belleville started in late 2004-05 is to be completed in 2006-07. It will provide barrier free access to washrooms, residential and recreational space. It will also include other accommodations specifically designed for students who are deaf or hard of hearing, for example, visual fire alarms and door bells.
 - o Work will continue on the following renovation projects to improve accessibility: two renovation projects in Milton and one in Brantford to be completed in summer 2006.
- Complete the annual review of the built environment needs in provincial schools as part of the long range planning process and continue to incorporate the changing accessibility needs of its students.

Timeframe: As described above.

Acts and Regulations

Commitment:

Work with the Ontario College of Teachers on their ongoing review of the Ontario College of Teachers Act, 1996 to ensure that the terminology used in the regulation reflects current and acceptable language related to people with disabilities.

Action:

The Ontario College of Teachers is conducting a three-phase review of Regulation 184/97 of the Ontario College of Teachers Act, 1996 (teachers' qualifications). (See the report-back in the 2004-05 Accessibility Plan Commitments section for a description of the regulation). As part of the regulation review, terminology with respect to special education will be updated appropriately, and the regulation will be updated to provide for appropriate pre-service and in-service training for teachers in the special education needs of students with a variety of exceptionalities.

Consultation and research for phase one of the Teacher Qualification Review, dealing with initial teacher education, was completed in May, 2005. The College has begun Phase 2 of its review of teacher qualifications, which examines ongoing education of teachers (e.g., Additional Qualification courses).

The entire review is expected to conclude by December 2005. In 2006, the regulation will be re-drafted based on input received from consultations.

Timeframe: Expected completion date for review is December 2005; regulation redrafted in 2006.

Commitment:

As part of the review of the Safe Schools Act, an examination will be undertaken of whether students with special needs are being accommodated appropriately.

Timeframe: 2005-06

For More Information

Questions or comments about the ministry's accessibility plan are always welcome.

Please phone:

General inquiry number: 416-325-2929 or 1-800-387-5514

TTY number: 1-800-263-2892

E-mail: info@edu.gov.on.ca

Ministry website address: www.edu.gov.on.ca

Visit the Ministry of Community and Social Services Accessibility Ontario web site at: <http://www.mcass.gov.on.ca/accessibility/index.html>. The site promotes accessibility and provides information and resources on how to make Ontario a barrier-free province.

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Queen's Printer for Ontario

ISSN 1708-4598