

MINISTRY OF EDUCATION

*2007-2008
Accessibility Plan*



ISSN 1708-4598

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Introduction

In June 2005, the Ontario government took a strong stand on accessibility when it passed the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act (AODA) into law.

The AODA lays out a comprehensive road map to make Ontario accessible to all people through the development, implementation and enforcement of new, mandatory accessibility standards for some of the most important aspects of people's lives.

Five key areas have been identified for the first accessibility standards: customer service, transportation, information and communications, the built environment, and employment.

The accessible customer service regulations were approved by the Lieutenant-Governor and will come into force on January 1, 2008.

An initial proposed standard on accessible transportation has been developed by the Transportation Standards Development Committee. It was posted for public review on June 27, 2007 and will be available for public comment until September 28, 2007.

The Standards Development Committee that will draft the proposed information and communications standard was established and began meeting in April, 2007. The committees developing the accessible built environment and accessible employment standards have been selected and will begin meeting in the fall of 2007.

While the government is moving forward to implement the AODA, there will be a transition period where government and the broader public sector will continue to meet their 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 These obligations will remain in effect until they are repealed and replaced by standards under the new act.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 mean real and effective change.

This document is the fifth annual accessibility plan developed by the Ministry of Education. It highlights the achievements of the 2006-07 plan and outlines the commitments for 2007-08 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 commitment to continue to make Ontario an inclusive and accessible province where people of all abilities have a chance to fully achieve their potential.

Message from the Minister



I am pleased to provide you with the Ministry of Education 2007-08 Accessibility Plan.

The *Ontarians with Disabilities Act, 2001*, requires all public sector and broader public sector organizations to have an annual Accessibility Plan and to make it available to the public. This is the fifth year in which plans have been written and are being implemented by organizations such as ours across the province.

This year marks the second anniversary of the landmark *Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act, 2005*, (AODA)--legislation that will foster the development, implementation and enforcement of accessibility standards in key areas of daily living.

Like all students, students with disabilities deserve a good outcome from public education, and we need to make sure they have every opportunity to succeed and reach their full potential. My ministry is committed to improving accessibility through identifying, removing and preventing barriers, working together within our ministry, across government and with our stakeholders in key areas of customer service, employment, communications and information, and the built environment to achieve this goal.

Within the Ministry of Education, we are building on the success of our previous four plans and continuing to look for ways to better meet the needs of people with disabilities who come into contact with this ministry, regardless of whether they are staff, members of the general public or ministry stakeholders.

For example, through the provision of \$25 million in funding to the Council of Ontario Directors of Education (CODE) this past year, the ministry has continued its partnership with CODE and Ontario school boards to enhance the capacity of teachers to develop more effective instructional strategies to improve the achievement of students with special needs.

During 2007-2008 this ministry will continue to work to better educate staff on accessibility and to raise awareness of disability issues among staff, particularly management staff. In addition, the ministry will continue to support our delivery

partners, school boards and school authorities, in their efforts to meet the needs of students with special educational needs.

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.

If you have any comments or concerns, I encourage you to send them using the contact information located at the end of this document.

Sincerely,

The Honourable Kathleen Wynne
Minister of Education

Report on Achievements

2006 - 2007 Accessibility Improvement Initiatives

The Ministry of Education was successful in achieving, and in some cases, surpassing, planned commitments for the past year, outlined in its 2006-2007 accessibility plan. This section provides a status report as of May 25, 2007.

Commitment

The ministry, as part of the review of the *Safe Schools Act*, will complete an examination of whether students with special needs are being accommodated appropriately.

Status

Complete

Action

On April 17, legislation was introduced (Bill 212, *Progressive Discipline and School Safety*) to amend the safe school provisions of the *Education Act*. Prior to introduction, the ministry assessed the new legislation to ensure that it is compliant with the *Ontarians with Disabilities Act* (in keeping with the ministry's commitment to assess any new Acts or Regulations). The bill is currently proceeding through the legislative process.

Commitment

The ministry will support English- and French-language school boards in using technology more effectively for students with disabilities by bringing together presenters, vendors and representatives from school boards, school authorities, faculties of education and advisory bodies at a province-wide *Assistive Technology Symposium, Tools for Learning: Effective Practice for the Use of Assistive Technology for Students with Special Education Needs (Kindergarten to Grade 12)* on September 26 and 27, 2006 in Toronto.

Status

Complete

Action

The *Assistive Technology Provincial Symposium* took place in Toronto in September 2006. More than 700 registrants attended, including 40 vendors. Feedback received from the delegates was very positive. Feedback will also be used to inform ministry recommendations for next steps regarding the effective use of assistive technology.

The A.T. Symposium was a result of the recommendations made in *Education for All*.

Commitment

The ministry, through the Provincial Schools Branch (PSB), will examine the feasibility of expanding access to learning materials in digital formats to all print-impaired students in district school boards and school authorities in order to ensure equity, improve service and reduce costs. Following a thorough review, a decision will be made regarding further efforts in future years.

Status

In progress

Action

Draft feasibility study has been completed; working group meeting.

Timeframe

Review feasibility study and make recommendations in 2007-08

Rationale

Cross-ministry working group has examined the feasibility of expanding access to learning materials in digital formats to print-impaired students and will make recommendations in 2007-08 after further analysis.

Commitment

The ministry will include a component that focuses on students with special needs in the research design of the evaluation of the 2006-07 Learning to 18 funded projects implemented by school boards.

Status

Complete

Action

A component focusing on students at risk/struggling students and students with special needs has been included in the research design of the evaluation of the 2006-07 Learning to 18 funded projects.

Action

Additional Achievement:

A more comprehensive evaluation of the Student Success / Learning to 18 strategy going beyond the initial 2006-07 commitment is under development.

Status

In progress. Preliminary report due June 15, 2007

Commitment

The ministry will review its customer service practices, in preparation for the implementation of the Customer Service Standard under the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act (AODA), 2005.

Status

In progress

Action

A draft readiness assessment has been prepared by the ministry and has been reviewed by the Accessibility Directorate of Ontario.

Timeframe

2007-08

Rationale

The assessment will be revised and implemented upon release of the upcoming regulations to incorporate approved Customer Service Standards.

Ongoing Accessibility Improvement Initiatives

The Ministry of Education was successful in achieving, and in some cases, surpassing, its ongoing and multi-year commitments described in the accessibility plans it issued up to and including the year 2006 – 2007. This section provides a status report as of May 25, 2007.

Commitment

During 2006-07, the ministry commits to assess any new Acts or Regulations to ensure that they are compliant with the *Ontarians with Disabilities Act* (ODOA, 2001).

Status

Ongoing

Action

New Acts and Regulations are customarily assessed to ensure compliance with ODA.

Commitment

The ministry will ensure that Acts, Regulations, Guidelines and Standards reflect the principles of the *Ontarians with Disabilities Act, 2001* (ODA).

Status

Ongoing

Action

Existing Acts, Regulations, Guidelines & Standards continue to be assessed to ensure ODA principles are reflected.

Commitment

The ministry will continue to ensure that the ministry intranet and website meet or exceed accessibility requirements.

Status

Ongoing

Action

The ministry continues to ensure that the intranet and websites remain ODA-compliant.

Commitment

The ministry will continue to ensure that ministry publications are available in alternate formats on the website.

Status

Ongoing

Action

Publications remain available in HTML, PDF and/or plain text formats on the website.

Action

Additional Achievement:

The Ministry of Education is in compliance with internal standards - *New Guidelines for Accessibility of Memos* - to ensure that all Ministry employees with visual impairment or those who use text recognition software have access to our materials and communications.

Commitment

The ministry will continue to build on ministry managers' and employees' awareness of employment practices to ensure accessibility for persons with disabilities. Specifically the ministry will:

- strongly encourage all managers and supervisory staff to complete the on-line training module, *The Ontarians with Disabilities Act—Maximizing the Contributions of Employees with Disabilities*;
- develop and implement a communications effort, stressing that knowledge of the ODA and the AODA can both improve internal and external service and can avoid complaints by staff and customers;
- design and implement a web-enabled survey of all ministry staff, based on *May I Help You* to promote awareness, with survey results also serving as a "baseline" against which to evaluate progress;
- design, and encourage managers and employees to participate in, learning opportunities, based on *May I Help You* and
- make available more intensive training sessions, if requested by senior staff.

Status

Ongoing

Action

Training: In progress

Following the Accessibility Expo hosted jointly by the Accessibility Directorate of Ontario and the Ministry of Community and Social Services in May 2007, managers will be reminded again of their responsibility to complete the on-line training module.

Action

Communications: Ongoing

On December 5, 2006, the ministry published an online article, *Making Ontario Accessible* in The Gazette, the ministry's staff newsletter, with descriptions of the ODA and AODA. For additional information, links to relevant OPS websites on the ODA, AODA and accessibility planning were also included.

Action

Staff survey: Deferred

Ministry-wide staff survey of staff views/understanding of disability issues has been deferred.

Timeframe

Deferred to 2007-08

Rationale:

The staff survey will be implemented just prior to the launch of the new on-line training module and World Usability Day – scheduled for late 2007, to generate awareness of disability issues.

Action

Learning opportunities: Ongoing

All staff were encouraged to attend an Accessibility Expo – *Accessibility benefits us all – Be a champion*. The expo was hosted by the Ministry of Community and Social Services in Toronto, on May 28 and 29, 2007, and featured information, ideas and innovation that raised awareness of the benefits of accessibility by exploring the barriers to accessibility and the many and varied solutions to overcome these barriers.

Action

Additional Achievement: Complete

Information on *New Employment Accommodation and Return to Work Operating Policy and Support Materials* distributed to Ministry staff on March 30, 2007.

Links to the new policy and supporting materials were provided.

Materials include:

- updated Employment Accommodation/Return To Work Operating Policy and associated support materials;
- tips and best practices;
- questions and answers.

Commitment

The ministry will provide on-going expertise, quality assurance measures and consultation to ministry staff on ODA issues associated with Information and Information Technology (I&IT). The ministry will maintain the current checklist of software and applications, developed in 2004-05, designed to facilitate the integration of persons with disabilities in day-to-day work activities. In addition, the ministry will explore the feasibility of developing an OPS-wide available checklist and will investigate partnering with other ministries to leverage existing accessibility initiatives related to Information and Information Technology.

Specifically, the ministry will support the Assistive Technology Symposium, Tools for Learning September, 2006.

Status

Ongoing

Action

Consultations were held with other ministries to support development of combined common checklist. Partnership delivered amalgamated common checklist and will posted online in June. IT will continue to review and update checklist as required.

I & IT ensured ODA-compliancy in Literacy & Numeracy and Adult Learning projects.

I & IT provided support to teachers at the Assistive Technology Symposium, Tools for Learning September, 2006 by demonstrating effective use of assistive technologies. To increase reach of learning to those not able to attend in-person:

- workshop components were posted online for access by any teacher; and
- 6 key workshops were delivered by webcast.

Commitment

The ministry will ensure that the new Standards for Barrier Free Design of Ontario Government Facilities released in October 2004 to improve barrier-free accessibility in ministry buildings, are implemented. The ministry will continue to improve accessibility when planning major capital projects, especially converting

washrooms to barrier-free washrooms. The ministry will undertake the same diligence with respect to the renewal of rental agreements to ensure that existing ministry properties are accessible.

Status

Ongoing

Action

Wherever feasible and possible, in office renovation projects all requirements have been met.

As well, all capital projects under Provincial Schools Branch are in full compliance.

Commitment

The ministry will continue to adhere to the guidelines for procurement of accessible goods and services.

Status

Ongoing

Action

Procurement of goods and services continues to adhere to the *Guidelines for Implementing the Procurement Provisions of the Ontarians with Disabilities Act, 2001*.

Commitment

The ministry will continue to support, through a \$25 million grant to the Council of Directors of Education (CODE), innovative projects among school boards that will improve instruction and assessment practices for a diverse range of learners for the 2006-07 school year.

Status

In progress

Action

The Council of Directors of Education (CODE) was provided \$25 million in each of the 2005/06 and 2006/07 school years to work in partnership with the Ministry of Education and collaboratively with Ontario's school boards to implement a number of the recommendations in *Education for All: The Report of the Expert Panel on Literacy and Numeracy Instruction for Students with Special Education Needs, Kindergarten to Grade 6 (2005)*.

The goal is to enhance the capacity of teachers to develop more effective instructional strategies, using the concepts of universal design for learning and differentiated instruction and assessment, as well as assistive technology and augmentative communication to improve the achievement of students with special needs.

A report on the project outcomes for teachers for the first year of the project is available on the CODE website: www.ontariodirectors.ca

The second year projects are ongoing and upon completion in June 2007, a report similar to the one above will be developed.

Timeframe

To continue in 2008

Commitment

The ministry will work with the Ontario College of Teachers (OCT) on their ongoing review of the Ontario College of Teachers Act, 1996, to ensure that the terminology used in the Act and regulation reflects current and acceptable language related to people with disabilities.

Status

In-progress.

Action

The OCT has submitted a comprehensive report with Teacher Qualifications Recommendations to the Minister. Implementation of the recommendations through regulatory amendments, as necessary, is a Ministry priority and will be developed in cooperation with the OCT.

Timeframe

To be completed within one to two years

Rationale

The review of the terminology can only be done as a more comprehensive review of the regulations.

Commitment

The ministry is also committed to creating a new Provincial Skills Certificate in order to give positive recognition for achievements to the small number of students not working toward, or unlikely to achieve the requirements for the secondary school diploma. This design and development work will be undertaken in consultation with key stakeholders in the special education community, and with full consideration given to respecting and meeting the needs of students with special education needs, consistent with provincial policies governing special education and the provisions of the *Ontarians with Disabilities Act*.

Status

In progress

Action

Stakeholder consultation is on-going. Research is underway to establish the skills continuum for the full range of student abilities. This continuum is a prerequisite to creation of the Provincial Skills Certificate.

This is part of the OSS and Report Card Review.

Scoping of options currently underway to address:

- Ontario Skills Passport (OSP) skills & work habits;

- Developmental level skill set;
- Learning skills from report card;
- Independent living skills;
- Technical skills; and
- Industry certifications.

We are implementing related resource materials/training in view of capacity building for teachers.

Timeframe

To continue over multiple years

Commitment

All Student Success/Learning to 18 implementation and training initiatives will be designed and planned to support the diversity of all students in Ontario schools. All professional development will acknowledge and support all students, including those with special education needs. Implementation and training initiatives include but are not limited to Elementary and Secondary Principals, Student Success Leaders in all English and French Language school boards and Student Success Teachers in secondary schools.

Status

Ongoing

Action

Provincial symposia, regional forums and board-level professional development held in 2006-07 emphasize success for all students, including students with special education needs and disabilities.

Commitment

The ministry supports the Minister's Advisory Council on Special Education (MACSE) to provide the minister with advice on special education matters.

Status

Ongoing

Action

Ministry staff continued to support MACSE and its sub-committees to respond to ministry proposals and offer advice on: Accountability and Partnerships, Student Learning and System Capacity. Council meets 3 times a year in February, June and October.

Commitment

The ministry will support school boards to reduce wait times for psychological assessments that are needed in order to provide students with appropriate special education programs and services, through a \$20 million grant to the Ontario Psychological Association.

Status

Ongoing

Action

All school board Assessment Improvement Plans have been approved. Monitoring teams from the Ontario Psychological Association will be meeting face-to-face with all school boards in April and May 2007. The key outcomes will be to:

- Reduce wait time for JK-G4 students requiring professional assessments;
- Enhance teacher capacity to provide effective programming for students provided with professional assessments;
- Improve literacy/Numeracy for these students; and
- Sustain assessment process improvements for the long term.

Action

Additional achievement:

In cooperation with the Curriculum and Assessment Policy Branch (CAPB), Special Education Policy and Programs Branch (SEPPB) will be hosting a

Provincial Symposium in 2008 that will address Assessment and Student Evaluation; planning is underway.

Timeframe

2008

Commitment

Work is underway to revise/update the provincial policies governing secondary school programs and diploma requirements, in keeping with the government's announced policy commitments for Student Success/Learning to 18 Phase 3. Similar to the current policy provisions (under "Ontario Secondary Schools"), the revised/updated policies will apply to all students in secondary schools, including those with special education needs. The revision process includes an inter-branch steering committee overseeing the work, with representation on the committee by the Special Education Policy and Programs Branch.

Status

Ongoing

Action

The revision/updating process is being informed by findings, as applicable, in *Education for All: The Report of the Expert Panel on Literacy and Numeracy Instruction for Students with Special Education Needs*, the provisions of the Ontarians with Disabilities Act and provincial policies governing special education.

Updates on this revision process/Student Success Phase 3 have been provided to school board teams during regional training sessions in November 2006, and through status updates to stakeholders, e.g., Student Success Commission, Learning to 18 Working Table, Curriculum Ad Hoc, and Minister's Advisory Council on Special Education.

In launching the new Specialist High Skills Major (SHSM) designation within the OSSD in Fall 2006, the ministry developed an Implementation Handbook for school boards which includes guidelines when designing SHSM programs for students with special education needs.

Special Education Policy and Programs Branch (SEPPB) is represented on the inter-branch steering committee to help ensure that the policies and programs being developed are taking into account the needs of students with special education needs.

For example, SEPPB participation in the revision of the Ontario Secondary Schools (OSS), G9-12, Program and Diploma Requirements includes:

- Principles underlying the revision, i.e., response to student's strengths, interests and needs through universal design (integration/inclusion) and differentiated instruction;
- A Pathway for Every Student including Students with special education needs; and
- Classroom Instruction and Assessment: differentiated/responsive instruction.

Commitment

As revised curricula are released, the Introduction will include an enhanced section on Planning Programs for Students with Special Education Needs, and many specific curriculum expectations in the documents will include examples to address the teaching and learning needs of all students. The ministry will continue to ensure that the needs of all students are addressed in the revised curriculum.

Status

Ongoing

Action

The commitments made in the 2006-07 Accessibility Plan have been addressed in the following curricula:

- Revised English as a Second Language (ESL) / English Literacy Development (ELD), G9-12
- Revised Mathematics, G12
- Revised English, G9-12

ESL/ELD, Mathematics and English are currently in development.

Commitment

The ministry will take steps to improve program planning by clarifying the connection between a student's Individual Education Plan (IEP), the Ontario curriculum and the provincial report card with school boards. The ministry will also assist boards to streamline their administrative processes, so that they may focus their resources on program planning and implementation.

Status

Ongoing

Action

Nine regional meetings were held between February and April 2007, across the province, with one meeting in each region (two each in the London and Barrie regions) and one provincial francophone session. Very positive feedback was received from all participants.

School boards will receive an individualized report based on their IEPs as well as a report on provincial trends to better ensure that students with special needs are receiving timely and effective access to the curriculum modification and accommodation that they need to achieve their full potential.

Regional meetings held: February to April 2007
Reports due: June 30, 2007

Action

Additional Achievement:

A vendor-piloted initiative to improve IEPs was led in provincial schools by the Provincial Schools Branch. Waiting for feedback from pilot schools to determine whether changes to IEPs will be recommended.

Timeframe

Feedback to be provided for 2007-08 academic year

Commitment

To further support school boards, plans are underway to train Teachers' Assistants in effective practices to support students with ASD in the classroom. This project is supported with a \$5 million grant to Geneva Centre for Autism. In addition, an advisory committee will be set up to develop the training content, implementation and evaluation. The training is intended to take place over a two-year period.

Status

In progress

Action

Geneva Centre for Autism has established a provincial advisory group to inform project development. Training is being offered to cover a wide range of topics relevant to supporting individuals of all ages diagnosed with autism, pervasive developmental disorders/Asperger Syndrome.

Action

Additional Achievement:

Provincial Schools have developed courses called IDEA (Inservice Development for Educational Assistants) for Teachers' Assistants. These nine online courses demonstrate how to support the needs of special needs students.

Two new courses were developed and launched this year, supporting children with autism and supporting students with mental health issues.

Timeframe

To continue in 2008

Commitment

The ministry, through the Provincial Schools Branch (PSB), will continue to provide textbooks and learning materials in alternate formats to students who are blind or who have low vision and are in district school boards. A recently created facility enabling special needs advisors in district school boards to order publications online has improved the service provided

Status

Ongoing

Action

This year specifically, in April 2006, a free online order service was launched out of W. Ross Macdonald School. Teachers can register and have access to learning materials in Braille, audio text and large print formats for their students who are blind or visually impaired.

Anticipated benefits include increased access to a larger series of resources, faster service and cost savings.

Commitment

The ministry will support the Learning Disabilities Association of Ontario (LDAO) to make the early screening and intervention tool, known as the Web Based Teaching Tool (WBTT), available to additional teachers in more school boards. It is anticipated that the expanded use of this tool will result in earlier identification of more students' learning difficulties and greater application of instructional strategies and targeted interventions. Specifically, in 2006-07, an evaluation of the tool will be completed and a pilot of the SK-Grade 1 made-in-Ontario Mathematics screen will be undertaken.

Status

Ongoing

Action

A new evaluation of the tool is in progress to assess its effectiveness in improving student achievement.

The pilots of the SK-Grade 1 made-in-Ontario Mathematics screen and Grade 2 French literacy screen are underway.

As of March 31, 2007, a total of 50 school boards and 17 school authorities were registered to use the WBTT.

Commitment

The ministry will continue to monitor EQAO assessment results to determine the progress of students with special needs.

Status

Ongoing

Action

Grade 3 students with special needs, excluding gifted, made improvements over the past year; those performing at or above the provincial standard increased by 3% in reading and writing, and by 2% in mathematics.

The percentage of Grade 6 students with special needs, excluding gifted, who were performing at or above the provincial average remained the same as last year, at 21%. The percentage of students who were performing at or above the provincial standard increased by 3% in reading and writing.

The success rate for students with special needs, excluding gifted, in the OSSLT dropped slightly by 2% to 55%, but remained high in comparison to the success rates from February 2002 to October 2003.

Action

Additional Achievement:

With the support and guidance of the Provincial Schools Branch and ASET, EQAO conducted a pilot project with 26 schools from 8 different boards and authorities. On the basis of the feedback from the pilot, a decision was made to offer this year's OSSLT test in all requested accessible formats.

Boards then received the OSSLT transcribed into the formats needed, ready to be used with text-to-speech software. This eliminated the need for board staff in individual schools across the province to convert a hard copy for their students. It also helped to level the playing field for students who receive text-to-speech as an assistive technology accommodation by guaranteeing that they all will be working with the same high quality transcription.

The same process was implemented for the Grades 3 and 6 tests in May, 2007.

Commitment

The ministry will continue to work with the Ministry of Children and Youth Services (MCYS) 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).

Status

Ongoing

Action

In February, 2007, Special Education Policy and Programs Branch (SEPPB) reviewed and commented on the inclusion of children with special education needs in the Early Learning Framework developed by the Best Start Expert Panel on Early Learning (MCYS). The Early Learning Framework addresses the learning needs of children in preschool and kindergarten programs and advocates a single integrated learning program.

SEPPB staff will continue to follow up with Ministry of Children and Youth Services.

Commitments — Measures to Prevent New Barriers

In the coming year, the ministry commits to assess its acts, regulations, policies, programs, practices and services to determine their effect on accessibility for persons with disabilities. This section summarizes these commitments.

Customer service

Commitment

The ministry will complete an initial review of the ministry's customer service practices, in preparation for the implementation of the Customer Service Standard under the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act, 2005.

Timeline

2007-08

Employment

Commitment

The ministry, led by the Corporate Finance and Services Branch, Facilities and Emergency Management Unit, will continue to support awareness initiatives for emergency preparedness for people with disabilities.

Timeline

Ongoing

Commitment

The ministry will continue to build on ministry managers' and employees' awareness of employment practices and continue to provide training opportunities to ensure improved accessibility for persons with disabilities.

Specifically, the ministry will

- implement a staff survey to promote awareness of disability issues and to promote the new on-line training module scheduled for release in 2007;
- promote corporate accessibility events/initiatives to staff;
- profile external accessibility initiatives such as World Usability Day – November 8, 2007;
- provide regular updates to senior management on AODA standards development process to ensure full participation and support, and readiness to implement; and
- continue to promote management training utilizing the online training module - *The Ontarians with Disabilities Act—Maximizing the Contributions of Employees with Disabilities*.

Timeline

Ongoing

Communications and information

Commitment

Lack of awareness of tools and resources on accessibility and the ODA can be a current and future barrier to the development of integrated, accessible I & IT business solutions.

The Technology and Business Solutions Branch of the Learning Ministries will commit to post on ClusterNET relevant ODA resource materials. (ClusterNET is a cluster-wide intranet that allows cross-ministry collaboration and information-sharing of I & IT knowledge.) Specifically, links to current ODA standards and policies, as well as tools for ODA-compliance will be made available for all staff across the seven ministries of the cluster.

Tools

Stellent and Adobe Acrobat 8 using the disability tools therein

Timeline

Beginning in 2007, this will be an ongoing commitment to post materials as directed by the Accessibility Resource Group.

Commitment

Successful integration into the workplace for persons with disabilities requires a variety of support tools (i.e. software).

The Technology and Business Solutions Branch of the Learning Ministries will continue its commitment to the maintenance and updating as required, of the current checklist of software and applications, developed in 2004-05, designed to facilitate the integration of persons with disabilities in day-to-day work activities.

Timeline

Ongoing

Commitment

The Communications Branch will continue to ensure that the ministry intranet and website meet or exceed accessibility requirements.

Timeline

Ongoing

Commitment

The Communications Branch will continue to ensure that ministry publications are available in alternate formats on the website.

Timeline

Ongoing

Built environment

Commitment

The ministry, through our Corporate Finance and Services Branch, will ensure that the new Standards for Barrier Free Design of Ontario Government Facilities released in October 2004 to improve barrier-free accessibility in ministry buildings, are implemented. The ministry will continue to improve accessibility when planning major capital projects, especially converting washrooms to barrier-free washrooms. The ministry will undertake the same diligence with respect to the renewal of rental agreements to ensure that existing ministry properties are accessible.

Timeline

Ongoing

Acts and regulations

Commitment

The Legal Services Branch will ensure that Acts, Regulations, Guidelines and Standards reflect the principles of the *Ontarians with Disabilities Act, 2001* (ODA).

Timeline

Ongoing

Commitment

The Teaching Policy and Standards Branch will work with the Ontario College of Teachers (OCT) on their ongoing review of the Ontario College of Teachers Act, 1996, to ensure that the terminology used in the Act and regulation reflects current and acceptable language related to people with disabilities.

Timeline

Ongoing

Commitment

During 2007-08, the Legal Services Branch in the ministry commits to assess any new Acts or Regulations to ensure that they are compliant with the Ontarians with Disabilities Act, 2001.

Timeline

Ongoing

Other barriers

Commitment

The ministry, led by the Corporate Finance and Services Branch, will continue to adhere to the guidelines for procurement of accessible goods and services.

Timeline

Ongoing

Commitment

Information technology goods and services (hardware/software) may pose barriers if there are no processes to check for ODA-compliance.

The Technology and Business Solutions Branch of the Learning Ministries will continue its commitment to OPS procurement guidelines to ensure that accessibility has been considered in the procurement of goods and services.

The ODA Procurement Requirements Checklist will be used to ensure ODA compliance across developing business solutions.

Timeline

Ongoing

Support for Ministry Partners:

In addition to fulfilling its commitments as

- an employer and
- a service provider,

the ministry will support its delivery partners. Following summarizes the commitments to prevent new barriers to persons with disabilities.

Support for School Boards and School Authorities

Commitment

Within the broad context of identifying any barriers/issues and opportunities that could impact people with disabilities, the Ministry of Education will be exploring, and enhancing where appropriate, the accessibility potential of processes related to the delivery of its e-learning policies and programs, including design, procurement, development/modification and implementation.

The Curriculum and Assessment Policy Branch (CAPB) will be responsible for these efforts.

Timeline

2007-08

Commitment

The ministry provided innovation funding to the 27 school boards launching the new Specialist High Skills Major (SHSM) in 2006-07. One of the deliverables associated with this funding support is the development of contextualized activities (teacher resources) to address the need for teaching/learning activities that are to be delivered in the context of the specific SHSM sector (e.g. learning activities in a Grade 11 or 12 English course that have contextualized activities geared to the Construction or Hospitality and Tourism sectors). During the review of these deliverables, and subsequent plans for province-wide

dissemination through vehicles such as the Ontario Education Resource Bank, and the EDU web-site, staff will incorporate a review process to address access considerations/barrier removal to address the accessibility needs to such teaching/learning resources by students/teachers with disabilities.

Plans for the 2007-08 SHSM expansion strategy are well underway, with final decisions and announcements of approved SHSM projects and board funding allocations imminent in June 2007. Subject to final decisions and confirmed commitments by school boards, the Ministry anticipates a significant increase in activity in 2007-08. This anticipated expansion will be in keeping with the Ministry's publicly stated goals and priorities for 2007-08, which are to add participation by as many of the 43 boards currently not offering an SHSM as are interested and eligible; to expand the number of partnerships involving co-terminous/neighbouring boards; to expand the number of SHSMs with a dual credit component, and to provide a second and final year of support for the current 27 SHSM pilots.

This will be accomplished under the guidance of the Student Success/Learning to 18 Strategic Policy Branch (SSL18SPB).

Timeline

2007-08

Commitment

The ministry will meet barrier free design standards on all new capital construction projects in the Provincial and Demonstration Schools. This includes provision of accessible washroom facilities and specialized life safety systems, way finding and lighting where necessary and feasible.

Provincial Schools Branch (PSB) and the Ontario Realty Corporation (ORC) are jointly responsible for ensuring that the design team (architect, engineers, et cetera) design projects to meet current and anticipated building code requirements, ORC and PSB standards and guidelines applied by design team.

Monitor construction to ensure project is built as designed and approved.

Timeline

Ongoing

Commitments — Barriers to be Addressed

The Ministry of Education commits to identify and remove barriers to persons with disabilities in the coming year. This section summarizes these commitments.

Communications and information

Barrier:

Lack of access to textbooks and learning materials in digital formats for use with assistive technology.

Commitment

The ministry, through the Provincial Schools Branch (PSB) and le Centre Jules-Léger, will continue to provide textbooks and learning materials in alternate formats to students who are blind or who have low vision and are in district school boards. A recently created facility enabling special needs advisors in district school boards to order publications online has improved the service provided.

The ministry, through the Provincial Schools Branch (PSB) and le Centre Jules-Léger, will continue to examine the feasibility of expanding access to learning materials in digital formats to all print-impaired students in district school boards and school authorities in order to ensure equity, improve service and reduce costs. Following a thorough review, a decision will be made regarding further efforts in future years.

Timeline

Recommendations by end of 2007

Built environment

Barrier

The Provincial Schools Branch (PSB) is responsible for approximately 70 buildings. They are not all built to adhere to barrier-free construction guidelines; nor do they all meet the specialized needs of the student population who are Deaf, blind and/or severely learning disabled.

Commitment

To bring the buildings up-to-standard requires significant capital expenditures. In 1999-2000, the PSB created a 15-year capital plan with the Ontario Realty Corporation (ORC) to improve the quality of accessibility, and address accessibility problems with the PSB's building stock. In past years, the PSB and ORC have requested and received capital funds from Public Infrastructure and Renewal, formerly SuperBuild, to address these problems.

The PSB and ORC will continue to request capital funds until all the outstanding issues have all been addressed.

Timeline

Ongoing

Other

Barrier

Students with special needs, as well as English Language Learners and boys in literacy acquisition, are groups that consistently underperform on the EQAO provincial assessments.

Commitment

Providing equity of outcome for Ontario students is one of the nine strategies identified by The Literacy and Numeracy Secretariat. In working with school districts to improve the achievement of all Ontario students, the LNS will identify initiatives designed specifically to address the performance of students in designated groups. Although improving, more needs to be done for students in

special education, English language learners, boys and other members of our diverse community who have a history of underperformance. LNS will work with the Aboriginal Unit to address the special needs of First Nations, Métis and Inuit students.

Timeline

Ongoing

Barrier

Students with special needs may have difficulty meeting curriculum expectations in Education Quality and Accountability Office (EQAO) assessments. Data from these assessments are widely used as an additional tool to guide improvements in education at the individual, school and provincial levels.

Commitment

The ministry will continue to monitor EQAO assessment results to determine the progress of students with special needs.

Timeline

Ongoing

Support for Ministry Partners:

In addition to fulfilling its commitments as

- an employer and
- a service provider,

the ministry will support its delivery partners. Following summarizes the commitments to identify and remove barriers to persons with disabilities.

Support for Ministry Agencies

Barrier

Students with special education needs may face barriers accessing education.

Commitment

The ministry supports the Minister's Advisory Council on Special Education (MACSE) and will continue to provide the minister with advice on special education matters.

Led by the Special Education Policy and Programs Branch (SEPPB), Ministry staff will continue to support MACSE and its sub-committees to respond to ministry proposals and offer advice on:

- Accountability and Partnerships,
- Student Learning; and
- System Capacity.

Timeline

Ongoing

Support for School Boards and School Authorities

Barrier

Students with special education needs may face barriers in their level of achievement due to the lack of effective instructional strategies using differentiated instruction and assessment.

Commitment

The ministry will continue to support, through the Council of Directors of education (CODE), innovative projects among school boards that will improve instruction and assessment practices for a diverse range of learners for the 2007-08 school year.

The Special Education Policy and Programs Branch (SEPPB) retains responsibility for this initiative.

Timeline

Ongoing

Barrier

Students with special education needs face barriers that prevent them from fully participating in Student Success/Learning to 18 initiatives.

Commitment

All Student Success/Learning to 18 implementation and training initiatives will continue to be designed and planned to support the diversity of all students in Ontario schools, including those with special education needs. The ministry will continue to work with boards around implementing the Learning to 18 legislation and provide guidance on issues such as Supervised Alternative Learning for Excused Pupils. The Learning to 18 Working Table and Student Success Commission will continue to provide advice on implementation and program development.

The Student Success/Learning to 18 Implementation, Training and Evaluation Branch (SSL18ITEB) will be responsible for these efforts.

Timeline

Ongoing

Barrier

Students with special education needs may face barriers if they are not taken into account in the revision/updating of provincial policies governing secondary school programs and diploma requirements.

Commitment

Work is underway to revise/update the provincial policies governing secondary school programs and diploma requirements, in keeping with the government's announced policy commitments for Student Success/Learning to 18 Phase 3. Similar to the current policy provisions (under "Ontario Secondary Schools"), the revised/updated policies will apply to all students in secondary schools, including those with special education needs. The revision process includes an inter-branch steering committee overseeing the work, with representation on the committee by the Special Education Policy and Programs Branch.

The Student Success/Learning to 18 Strategic Policy Branch (SSL18SPB) continues to be responsible for this work.

Timeline

Ongoing

Barrier

Some students with special education needs, who are not working toward, or unlikely to achieve the requirements for the secondary school diploma, may not receive positive recognition for their achievements.

Commitment

The ministry is committed to creating a new Provincial Skills Certificate in order to give positive recognition for achievements to the small number of students not working toward, or unlikely to achieve the requirements for the secondary school diploma.

Under the direction of the Student Success/Learning to 18 Strategic Policy Branch (SSL18SPB), this design and development work will be undertaken in consultation with key stakeholders in the special education community, and with full consideration given to respecting and meeting the needs of students with special education needs, consistent with provincial policies governing special education and the provisions of *the Ontarians with Disabilities Act*.

Timeline

Ongoing

Barrier

Students with special education needs may face barriers if their needs are not addressed in the revised curricula.

Commitment

As revised curricula are released, the Introduction will include an enhanced section on Planning Programs for Students with Special Education Needs, and many specific curriculum expectations in the documents will include examples to address the teaching and learning needs of all students. The ministry will continue to ensure that the needs of all students are addressed in the revised curricula.

The Curriculum & Assessment Policy Branch (CAPB) retains responsibility for this initiative.

Timeline

Ongoing

Barrier

Students with special education needs may not reach their full education potential if appropriate Individual Education Plans (IEPs) are not developed and/or implemented.

Commitment

The ministry will continue to take steps to improve program planning by clarifying the connection between a student's Individual Education Plan (IEP), the Ontario curriculum and the provincial report card with school boards. The ministry will also assist boards to streamline their administrative processes, so that they may focus their resources on program planning and implementation.

The ministry, under the guidance of the Special Education Policy and Programs Branch (SSEPB), is currently exploring the possibility of creating a voluntary electronic IEP template for school boards.

Timeline

2007-08

Barrier

Students with special education needs may not benefit from special education programs and services if issues are not addressed in a timely and effective manner.

Commitment

The ministry will establish a formal dispute resolution pilot and an effective practice guide to address issues regarding special education programs and services.

Following recommendations made by the Working Table on Special Education, the Special Education Policy and Programs Branch (SEPBB) initiated a project on informal dispute resolution and mediation. One of the deliverables includes a resource guide for parents and educators. Consultation sessions on the resource guide were held with English and French-language education stakeholders in January 2007. Participants included: parents, students,

educators, parent advocates and a mediator. Feedback from the sessions will be incorporated into the guide, which is planned for release in June 2007. Professional Development to support the guide is intended to take place in the Fall 2007.

A Provincial advisory committee has been formed with representation from parents, students, educators and dispute resolution specialists to assist in the development of a formal dispute resolution pilot. This pilot is planned for September 2007 in selected school boards.

This initiative is conducted by the ministry under the guidance of the Special Education Policy and Programs Branch (SSEPB).

Timeline

2007-08 and beyond

Barrier

Students with Autism Spectrum Disorder may face barriers in the classroom if they do not receive effective support from school board staff.

Commitment

To further support school boards, the ministry has funded Geneva Centre for Autism to provide training for Teachers' Assistants in effective practices to support students with Autism Spectrum Disorder in the classroom. A provincial advisory group was set up to develop the training content, implementation and evaluation. The training is taking place over a two-year period up to August 31, 2008. The ministry has also provided support to Geneva Centre for Autism in 2007-08 to support team training for school boards in the use of Applied Behavioural Analysis.

The Special Education Policy and Programs Branch (SEPPB) is responsible for this initiative.

Timeline

2007-08

Barrier

Students with special education needs may face barriers if their learning difficulties are not identified at an early stage.

Commitment

The ministry will continue to support the Learning Disabilities Association of Ontario (LDAO) to make the early screening and intervention tool, known as the Web Based Teaching Tool (WBTT), available to additional teachers in more school boards. It is anticipated that the expanded use of this tool will result in earlier identification of more students' learning difficulties and greater application of instructional strategies and targeted interventions. A new evaluation of the tool is in progress to assess its effectiveness in improving student achievement.

This work continues to be led by the Special Education Policy and Programs Branch (SEPPB).

Timeline

Ongoing

Barrier

Students with special education needs face barriers if they do not receive timely assessments and subsequent effective programs and services.

Commitment

The ministry will continue to support the Ontario Psychological Association (OPA) to work with school boards to reduce wait times for students who require assessments and to enhance the capacity of teachers to provide appropriate special education programs and services. Monitoring teams from the OPA will be meeting face-to-face with all school boards. In cooperation with the Curriculum and Assessment Policy Branch (CAPB), Special Education Policy and Programs Branch (SEPPB) will be hosting a Provincial Symposium in 2008 that will address Assessment and Student Evaluation.

The Special Education Policy and Programs Branch (SEPPB) retains responsibility for this project; the completion of the OPA Assessment Project is scheduled for Fall 2008.

Timeline

2007-08

Barrier

Students with special education needs or disabilities may not benefit from the evaluation of the 2006-07 Learning to 18 projects if they are not adequately factored in through the evaluation process.

Commitment

In evaluating the Student Success / Learning to 18 strategy's implementation and impacts, the evaluators will look for evidence of inclusion in and/or exclusion from and barriers to and/or enablers of accessibility for all students to the benefits of the initiative. Particular attention will be given to subpopulations of students needing extra supports, including students with disabilities or with special education needs.

This will be completed under the direction of the Student Success/Learning to 18 Strategic Policy Branch (SSL18SPB).

Timeline

2007-08

For More Information

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

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Visit the Ministry of Community and Social Services Accessibility Ontario web portal at: 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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TTY Service: 1-800-268-7095

Queen's Printer for Ontario

ISSN 1708-4598

Ce document est disponible en français.