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Ministry of Education 2015 Accessibility Plan

How the Ministry of Education identified and removed barriers in the Ontario Public Service in 2015 and future accessibility commitments for 2016.

ISSN: 1708-4598

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Executive summary

Under the *Ontarians with Disabilities Act, 2001 (ODA)*, ministries are required to produce, and make available to the public, annual plans that identify how ministries will identify and remove barriers to accessibility.

Like all ministries, the Ministry of Education (EDU) complies with the [Accessibility Standards for Customer Service \(ASCS\)](#) and the [Integrated Accessibility Standards Regulation \(IASR\)](#). These regulations establish phased-in requirements in the following accessibility standards:

- customer service
- information and communications
- employment
- transportation
- design of public spaces

In 2012, the Ontario Public Service (OPS) released its first multi-year accessibility plan (MYAP) entitled [Accessibility in the Ontario Public Service: Leading the Way Forward](#).

The Ministry of Education's 2015 ODA Plan, celebrates the tenth anniversary of the AODA and demonstrates how the measures taken in 2015 and proposed for 2016 support the key outcomes and deliverables of the OPS MYAP as we continue on our path to an accessible Ontario in 2025.

Section one: report on measures taken by the ministry in 2015

Customer service

OPS MYAP key outcome

People with disabilities who are OPS customers receive quality goods and services in a timely manner.

Measures taken by EDU in 2015

The Ministry continued to build on past achievements providing accessibility accommodations for internal and external meetings, events and public engagement activities. Specific measures included:

- monitoring public feedback on accessibility issues, including online and in-person, to collect information and data for use in accessibility planning and improvements to customer service
- developing an "Accessibility Checklist" for event planning and procurement activities
- restricting all major events to accessible venues to ensure that services are fully accessible for all participants
- ensuring that presentations, meeting and communications materials and documents are accessible and available in a variety of formats
- providing American Sign Language (ASL) interpreters at meeting and events
- developing and maintaining a roster of vetted and approved ASL translators for in-person translations, including la langue des signes québécoise (LSQ) translators
- providing teleconference and online options to remove barriers to accessing events
- incorporating a client feedback mechanism post-meeting/event to solicit feedback and promote continuous improvement
- in addition to a number of internal ministry meetings such as All Staff events and United Way and Federated Health campaigns, the ministry hosted five major accessible events in 2015:
 - Minister's Annual 2015 Parent Involvement Committee (PIC) Symposium
 - trustee orientation sessions

- Ontario Leadership Congress
- Learning Disabilities Association of Ontario Summer Educator's Institute
- Annual Applied Behavioural Analysis (ABA) Expertise Professional Learning Day

The ministry continued its focus on staff training on customer service obligations under accessibility legislation. Specific measures included:

- providing training on creating accessible documents
- incorporating mandatory accessibility training into orientation materials for new employees
- sending regular notices to all staff from the Chief Administrative Officer (CAO) reminding them to complete Mandatory Accessibility Training

Information and communications

MYAP key outcome

Information and Communications are available in accessible formats or with necessary supports to all OPS staff and customers.

Measures taken by EDU in 2015

The ministry continued to work toward making all information and communications materials accessible to all Ontarians and to promote awareness of and compliance with ODA and AODA accessible information and communications requirements. Specific measures included:

- staff were required to complete the OPS mandatory training "IASR – Information and Communications Standards" course
- specific training focused on building staff awareness and capacity to embed "Accessibility@Source" by regular promotion of both online resources and training from the I&IT Accessibility Centre of Excellence as well as in-person training on how to make documents accessible and write in plain language
- the ministry also promoted corporately-developed tip sheets and guides, as well as in- person training delivered by Treasury Board Secretariat on how to create accessible documents
- communications staff responsible for web content and webmasters received training on how to create accessible websites
- organized presentations for all ministry directors regarding the existing and upcoming 2016 accessible website requirements, including bringing together key partners in the Corporate Coordination Branch, Legal Services, Communications Branch and the Community Services I&IT Cluster (CSC)

established an [AODA-Compliance Task force \(AODA-CTF\)](#) which serves as a collaborative forum for [CSC](#) staff and the Accessibility Centre of Excellence team in remediating non-compliant code and applications, tracking remediation status and reporting on progress

- ongoing communications from the Chief Administrative Officer (CAO) via regular memos to management regarding the existing and upcoming 2016 accessible website requirements
- promoted staff attendance at “Accessibility Meet-Ups” which focused on ways in which [I&IT](#) can promote enhanced online accessibility
- participated in a cross-ministry accessibility community of practice to develop a 101 guide on creating accessible documents to build staff capacity and demonstrate key concepts behind creating accessible documents
- liaised with enterprise-wide partners including, the Accessibility Centre of Excellence, Web Coordinators Committee and the Digital Accessibility Advisory Group, to clarify the interpretation of legislative requirements and enterprise-wide requirements
- provided management and staff with the information necessary to make informed decisions related to website remediation and compliance
- created a new Website Compliance Tracker and Instruction Guide to assist staff in reporting on the status of website remediation efforts and plans for future remediation work

In compliance with the Integrated Accessibility Standards Regulation (IASR) and Web Content Accessibility Guideline Standards (WCAG 2.0 Level AA), the ministry conducted a review and inventory of all internal and external websites. Specific measures included:

- testing websites and web content, including applications, for accessibility
- removing outdated content
- remediating non-accessible content
- converting [PDF](#) documents to [HTML](#) pages
- ensuring that only accessible material and documents are posted online going forward
- ensuring webinars include closed captioning
- ensuring that documents are made available in alternative formats upon request

The ministry remediated over 1,450 documents and ensured that documents on the main Ministry were accessible. Examples include the following documents:

- School Climate Surveys and online tools (available to schools and school boards)
- Board Leadership Development Manual
- A Parent’s Guide: Human Development And Sexual Health In The Health And Physical Education

Curriculum Grades 1-6 and Grades 7-12

- Capacity Building Series: Secretariat Special Edition #32 Inquiry –based Learning May 2013
- A Framework For French As A Second Language In Ontario Schools Kindergarten to Grade 12 (2013) Ontario Early Years Policy Framework (2013)

The ministry incorporated accessibility requirements into video and digital production to ensure access to digital resources for Ontarians with learning disabilities and the hearing and visually impaired. Specific measures included:

- using closed captioning in all video productions
- including descriptive captioning for pictures in videos
- ensuring transcripts are available upon request
- including American Sign Language (ASL) video translations of web content for the hearing impaired

In order to improve student programs and enhance educators' capacity, the ministry provided funding to the following groups/programs:

- the Canadian Hearing Society (CHS)
- VOICE for Hearing Impaired
- educational programs for students in government-approved Care and/or Treatment, Custody and Correctional (CTCC) facilities
- Learning Disabilities Association of Ontario (LDAO)
- Geneva Centre for Autism

The ministry released accessible curricula to address the teaching and learning needs of all learners, including students with special needs:

- The Ontario Curriculum, Grades 1-8: Health and Physical Education, 2015
- The Ontario Curriculum, Grades 9-12: Health and Physical Education, 2015
- The Ontario Curriculum, Grades 11 and 12: Canadian and World Studies, 2015

Employment

MYAP key outcome

OPS employees with disabilities participate fully and meaningfully in their employment.

Measures taken by EDU in 2015

The ministry worked to remove barriers to employment for staff in the ministry by promoting staff training and promoting awareness of employment obligations under accessibility legislation, including:

- promoting enterprise-wide communication about the Ontario Public Service compliance requirements under the Employment Standard, including the mandatory e-course on the Employment Standard “IASR - Employment Standards”, sharing with managers and staff through memos from senior management, and by posting information on the ministry intranet
- expanding training to include specific training for managers and staff in Human Resources (HR) on accessibility issues and employer obligations, such as training on accommodations procedures in the new HROntario’s comprehensive Disability Support Strategy
- notifying employees of the availability of employment accommodation in accordance with the Ontario Human Rights Code and the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act (AODA)
- all HROntario developed tools, resources and guidelines related to employment obligations under the accessibility legislation were promoted within the ministry through memos from the Chief Administrative Officer
- incorporating mandatory accessibility training into orientation materials for new employees
- the Education and Labour Relations Division incorporated the commitment to accessibility in staff performance plans

Additional measures taken by the ministry included:

- providing parking accommodations to Provincial Demonstration Schools staff with mobility issues
- providing facilities and services to staff with service animals or other assistive devices
- improving practices on employment accommodations and return to work by:
 - reviewing the 2014 OPS Employee Survey results to identify issues and develop best practices on accessibility based on OPS-wide policies and procedures
 - implementing recommendations from the 2013 disability management review
 - providing managers with clear and concise checklists that promote actions articulated in the Disability Accommodation Policy

The ministry continued to promote mental health issues, including:

- providing mental health information and training, and promoting awareness of the new corporate resources available on the OPS Human Resources intranet
- delivering “Let’s Talk” staff workshops to 16 groups and manager workshops to six groups across the province
- participating in and promoting the OPS Wellness webcast on Mental Health and Addictions
- sending an all staff memo from the CAO promoting World Mental Health Day and promoting that the

Employee Assistance Program is available to all staff in the OPS

During the 5th year of the Diversity Mentoring Partnership Program, 54 ministry staff participated. The program is designed to provide an inclusive environment for reciprocal learning in which mentors and employee partners engage in honest, open and meaningful dialogue about diversity, accessibility and inclusion.

The ministry representative on the Disability Advisory Council (DAC), which discusses internal obstacles and challenges faced by staff, continued to participate in the work of the council and champion the interests of staff with disabilities.

Built environment

MYAP key outcome

There is greater accessibility into, out of and around OPS facilities and public spaces.

Measures taken by EDU in 2015

The ministry provided mandatory training and information about the new requirements for the built environment standard that came into effect on January 1, 2015, for key staff such as facilities managers. Specific measures included:

- providing specialized training for key ministry staff (e.g. facilities managers) to promote understanding and awareness of staff obligations under the new standard
- training key staff in all branches to provide an overview of accessibility in the built environment standard
- participating in training provided by the Diversity Office
- posting information to the ministry intranet about accessibility in the built environment, including best practices regarding physical structural changes in the workplace, and updates to the OPS Guidelines for Barrier Free Design of OPS Facilities

The ministry continued implementation of Phase 2 of an accommodation plan that will reduce the workplace footprint while providing flexible and accessible design features to address staff-identified work station accommodation needs. Specific measures included:

- renovating ministry offices on the 8th, 15th and 16th floors of Mowat Block at 900 Bay Street in Toronto to provide an accessible and barrier-free workplace, including offices, cubicles, washrooms and public spaces
- installation of new proximity card readers and AODA compliant signage for way-finding at 777 Bay Street offices

- initiating the following projects, as a partnership between the Provincial Schools Branch (PSB) and Infrastructure Ontario (IO), to make school facilities in Ontario accessible:
 - design and installation of wheel chair ramps for the auditorium stage at Sir James Whitney School for the Deaf
 - installation of a visual doorbell system in the residences at the Sir James Whitney School for the Deaf
 - design and construction of an accessible running track at the W. Ross Macdonald School for the Blind with high contrast running lanes and wheel chair access
 - design for kitchen renovations at W. Ross Macdonald School for the Blind to provide barrier-free access for students and staff including an innovative closed circuit television (CCTV) system used to magnify teacher demonstrations
 - installation of automatic doors at the Provincial Demonstration Schools across Ontario

General outcomes

MYAP key outcome

OPS staff is able to identify barriers to accessibility, in OPS policies, programs, services and facilities, and actively seek solutions to prevent or remove them on a continuing basis throughout the organization.

Measures taken by EDU in 2015

As part of the ministry's initiatives to promote compliance with ODA and AODA requirements, the ministry:

- provided the Deputy Minister with accessibility performance measures to include in his annual performance plan
- sent regular memos from the CAO to management and staff reminding them to complete mandatory accessibility training modules through the Centre for Leadership and Learning (CFL) and LearnOn
- continued to support staff and managers by providing information and resources (e.g. Accessibility@Source materials) regarding:
 - accessible customer service policies
 - accessibility considerations in procurement practices
 - training options for creating accessible documents
 - OPS policies for accessible employment (OPS Employment Accommodation and Return to Work Operating Policy)
- provided direction and support to Divisional Accessibility Leads in completing the Annual Accessibility (ODA) Plan, including:
 - providing background briefings and information about obligations under the ODA and AODA

- providing advice, communications materials and links to resources and tools to assist Divisional Leads to supporting staff on a range of accessibility obligations
 - created a SharePoint site to host and share ministry Accessibility Plans and resources to assist Divisional Leads in reporting annual accessibility updates and divisional accomplishments
- promoted accessibility related events on the ministry's Intranet, including the Annual Joint Conference and Accessibility Expo at the Toronto 2015 Pan Am and Parapan Am Games
- worked with the Diversity Office and the OPS Accessibility Leads Forum to develop more centralized and collaborative processes to improve OPS- wide compliance efforts and to better support ministry staff and management in complying with accessibility obligations
- the Provincial Demonstration Schools hosted a half day learning event for all OPS Accessibility and Diversity Leads that focused on:
 - employee accommodations at schools for the hearing and visually impaired
 - physical building strategies to accommodate the needs of hearing and visually impaired staff and students
 - tour of E.C. Drury School for the Deaf

Procurement

- incorporated accessibility criteria into all procurement documents posted on the ministry's Ontario Tenders Portal (public procurement website)
- reviewed and revised procurement contracts to ensure that AODA requirements are captured
- implemented a mandatory accessibility checklist for all I&IT procurement activities to be completed by the project manager and senior manager and kept on file for ongoing audit purposes

American Sign Language (ASL) Immersion Camp

- hosted the annual American Sign Language (ASL) Immersion Camp for staff, led by the Provincial Schools Branch (PSB)

Students with special needs

Policy and program development, capacity building initiatives, and resources related to student achievement have focused on students with special needs including:

- partnering with district school boards to work on closing achievement gaps by focusing on differentiated instruction to meet the needs of students with special education needs
- revising the Special Education Grant (SEG) to make it more responsive to the needs of students in special education programs

Capacity to support mental health

The ministry works with the Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care and the Ministry of Children and Youth Services to support the alignment of mental health initiatives to support students.

Support continues to be provided to School Mental Health ASSIST, an implementation support team designed to help school boards and school authorities in their efforts to promote student mental health and well-being by building system and school capacity.

The ABCs of Mental Health from the Hincks-Dellcrest Centre was translated into French and posted online.

Section two: report on measures proposed by the ministry for 2016

In 2016, the ministry will focus on three priority goals, each with specific measures, which support the OPS multi-year accessibility plan deliverables and the individual accessibility standards.

1. Capacity development

Ensure staff and managers have the knowledge and tools needed to incorporate accessibility requirements and accommodations into their work. Specific measures include:

- developing a Learning Ministries accessibility community of practice to promote increased staff and management awareness of Accessibility Legislation requirements and sharing of best practices
- re-developing the ministry's intranet content to include an expanded, easy-to-use accessibility section. Focus will be on practical information including:
 - plain language guide to all standards (including plain text and visual explanations)
 - staff and manager obligations and to-do lists under each standard
 - links to resources on accessibility issues including training materials, guides and resources for creating accessible documents
 - key contact information, including ministry and key enterprise contacts with responsibility for accessibility issues in Procurement, Human Resources, Legal Branch, Facilities, etc
- calendar of events regarding accessibility such as conferences and meet-ups
- revising Strategic Human Resources Branch orientation materials for new employees to ensure that recent AODA requirements are incorporated
- continuing to explore online methods and options for delivering regional training
- encouraging all managers and staff to complete Inclusion Lens training by December 2016 so they can understand how to apply an accessibility lens to all aspects of their work,

including policy development and program delivery

- continuing to provide managers and staff with opportunities to expand their knowledge of accessibility issues and solutions by participating in or attending the annual JOIN conference and other accessibility related events

2. Accountability

Strengthen accountability for meeting ministry accessibility requirements and compliance assurance. Specific measures include:

- developing and implementing a ministry-wide tracking report for all AODA requirements and accomplishments, such as staff training, performance plan commitments and attendance at the annual JOIN conference
- implementing a ministry-wide consolidated accessibility planning and compliance reporting system which includes simplified reporting templates and facilitates quarterly updates to senior management teams on status

3. Relationship building and partnerships

Develop partnerships with staff and clients with disabilities by establishing regular opportunities to solicit their input and feedback on ministry accessibility issues, progress and ideas for improvement. Specific measures include:

- outreach to both staff and clients with disabilities to be communicated as a priority by senior management
- consulting with the OPS Disability Advisory Council (DAC) on how best to implement feedback mechanisms, for clients and staff, such as focus groups and confidential surveys
- tracking the results of the feedback for continuous improvement purposes

Customer service

MYAP key outcome

People with disabilities who are OPS customers receive quality goods and services in a timely manner.

Measures proposed by EDU for 2016

The ministry will continue to demonstrate leadership in accessible customer service by:

- ensuring that the ministry is in compliance with all requirements under the customer service standard
- exploring new ways of supporting the participation of staff and clients with disabilities in all ministry programs and events
- ensuring that all events and meetings hosted by the ministry are accessible, including:

- using accessible venues
- using American Sign Language (ASL) interpreters
- providing closed captioning for videos
- ensuring that transcripts are available upon request
- ensuring that accessibility services are available upon request including wheel chair access, ASL interpreters, and costs for a personal support worker if required

Mandatory staff training on customer service obligations under accessibility legislation will continue to be a priority for the ministry, including:

- tracking and reporting on staff training
- providing more opportunities for staff training on accessibility obligations, and assistive devices and technology

Proposed accessible events for 2016 include:

- Chairs'/Directors' Roundtable
- Ontario Leadership Congress
- Parent Involvement Committee (PIC) Symposium

Information and communications

MYAP key outcome

Information and Communications are available in accessible formats or with necessary supports to all OPS staff and customers.

Measures proposed by EDU for 2016

The ministry will continue to ensure that all communications materials, documents, websites and technology solutions employ accessibility best practices, including:

- redeveloping the ministry's intranet content to make the Accessibility section more robust and user-friendly, by:
 - linking to the I&IT Accessibility Centre of Excellence training videos and guides
 - providing plain language versions of the accessibility legislation and staff obligations under each standard
 - developing "To Do" lists for staff and managers under each standard
 - posting training and tools for staff on creating accessible documents

ensuring that all material posted online is accessible and meets the Web Content Accessibility Guideline Standards (WCAG 2.0 Level AA)

- promoting a “Creating Accessible Documents” guide developed in partnership with other ministries and the ministry communications branch as the new ministry-wide standard
- developing a ministry wide-training strategy, to ensure all staff knows how to create accessible documents
- remediating online pre-2012 documents, according to the OPS Guide to IASR criteria
- ensuring that all new video productions and digital resources are closed captioned and contain descriptive captioning for pictures in videos or presentations
- including American Sign Language (ASL) video translations of web content for the hearing impaired
- launching a langue des Signes Québécoise (LSQ) version of the Provincial Schools Branch (PSB) external website to provide accessible information to staff, students and parents, and posting intranet content to provide accessible information on employee policies
- French Language Education Policy and Programs Branch (FLEPPB) has initiated a working group with Centre Jules-Léger to re-write and adapt existing langue des Signes Québécoise (LSQ) curriculum
- publishing educational guides and curricula in accessible formats, including:
 - special Education in Ontario: Kindergarten to Grade 12
 - classical Studies and International Languages, Grade 9-12
 - First Nations, Metis and Inuit Studies, Grade 9-12
 - Kindergarten Program

Employment

MYAP key outcome

OPS employees with disabilities participate fully and meaningfully in their employment.

Measures proposed by EDU for 2016

The ministry is committed to providing barrier-free access to all ministry employees by:

- ensuring that employees are aware of their rights under accessibility legislation
- ensuring that employee accommodations address the accessibility needs of staff
- ensuring that all new employees and their managers are provided with information about their accessibility responsibilities as part of the new employee orientation training and materials
- encouraging all staff and managers to incorporate at least one accessibility commitment in their

2016-17 performance plan

- supporting the OPS Disability Advisory Council (DAC) activities, including promoting staff participation in and attendance at learning events
- working with the ministry DAC representative to secure feedback from employees with disabilities at least once a year on priority issues
- supporting 47 ministry staff enrolled in the 6th year of the Diversity Mentoring Partnership Program
- providing a series of educational sessions on mental health awareness over the course of the year and encouraging staff to take the OPS Mental Health in the Workplace Training

Built environment

MYAP key outcome

There is greater accessibility into, out of and around OPS facilities and public spaces.

Measures proposed by EDU for 2016

The ministry is committed to making the built environment accessible and barrier-free. Ministry priorities include:

- ministry staff will work with Infrastructure Ontario and Facilities staff to improve accessibility and comply with barrier-free design standards on an ongoing basis
- the Leadership and Learning Environment Division's Employee Engagement Team will review alternative workstations for staff where needed
- conduct an accessibility study, in partnership with Infrastructure Ontario, across all Provincial Demonstration Schools to ensure that PSB's accessibility needs are addressed and to remove barriers for the visually and hearing impaired
- continue with upgrades and refurbishment of Provincial Demonstration Schools to improve accessibility
- French Language Education Policy and Programs Branch (FLEPPB) will establish an internal advisory team to discuss the needs of employees with disabilities

General outcomes

MYAP key outcome

OPS staff is able to identify barriers to accessibility in OPS policies, programs, services and facilities, and actively seek solutions to prevent or remove them on a continuing basis throughout the organization.

Measures proposed by EDU for 2016

Funding

- the ministry will continue to fund diverse education, parent and equity stakeholders to support implementation of the Equity and Inclusive Education Strategy and Parent Engagement Policy
- Transfer Payment Agreements will continue to stipulate that products are to be ODA compliant

Students with special needs/special education

The ministry will:

- develop a dedicated provincial alternative curriculum for students who do not have access to the provincial curriculum to provide consistency and uniformity of programming and assessment for all students and to remove barriers to access to education for students with special needs
- develop continuous improvement of Individual Education Plans (IEPs) and transition plans to help students with special needs access education and transition to higher levels of education and learning
- publish a comprehensive guide to Special Education in Ontario: Kindergarten to Grade 12 to set out the policies and requirements that govern special education programs and services in publically funded elementary and secondary schools to ensure consistency across Ontario and remove barriers to access to special education programs and services

Section three: addressing the identification of barriers in legislation

Introduction

Prior to its repeal, the ODA provided that a ministry's accessibility plan shall include the measures in place to address the identification, removal and prevention of barriers to persons with disabilities in the Acts, regulations, policies, programs and services administered by the ministry.

In 2005, the government introduced the *Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act*, with the goal of making Ontario accessible by 2025. In support of this goal, the government subsequently committed to review Ontario legislation to identify and address accessibility barriers, and undertook a coordinated review of 51 statutes considered to have a high impact on persons with disabilities. This review has now been completed.

Our ministry remains committed to the goal of ensuring that Ontario legislation does not create barriers to persons with disabilities. We will continue to report through our accessibility plan, the actions taken to identify and remove barriers in ministry Acts, regulations, policies, programs and services and those to be reviewed in the coming year. The findings of the coordinated review of high impact statutes will inform our ministry's approach to carry out this work.

Measures currently in place

The following measures are in place to assess our ministry’s proposals for new Acts, regulations, policies and programs and services to determine their effect on persons with disabilities:

- the Legal Services Branch will continue to provide advice for the purpose of identifying and avoiding potential barriers to persons with disabilities in proposed statutes and regulations, and when amendments are proposed to existing legislation

Actions taken in the past year

In 2014, the government completed a review of 51 statutes considered to have a high impact on persons with disabilities. As part of this review, the Ministry of Education reviewed the *Education Act* and, during 2015, worked on possible amendments to address potential barriers contained in it.

Upcoming plans for review

In the coming year, the Ministry of Education will continue to review proposed statutes and regulations, and proposed amendments to existing legislation, for the purpose of identifying and eliminating potential barriers for persons with disabilities.

Updated: June 24, 2016

Published: June 17, 2016

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An accessible Ontario by 2025

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