

MINISTRY OF EDUCATION

*2004-2005
Accessibility Plan*



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Introduction

In December 2001, the Ontarians with Disabilities Act, 2001 (ODA) was passed into law. Its purpose is to improve opportunities for people with disabilities and to provide for their involvement in the identification, removal and prevention of barriers to their full participation in the life of the province.

One of the requirements under the ODA is that Ontario government ministries, municipalities, hospitals, school boards, colleges, universities and public transportation organizations develop annual accessibility plans to make policies, practices, programs, services and buildings more accessible to people with disabilities. The plans must be made available to the public.

This document is the second annual accessibility plan developed by the Ministry of Education. It highlights achievements of the 2003-04 plan and outlines commitments for 2004-05 so that no new barriers are created and existing ones are removed over time.

Ministries across government are increasing awareness of accessibility and integrating accessibility into daily business practices in a number of areas, including staff training, public information, facilities, and program and service delivery processes.

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



As you know, the McGuinty government is strongly committed to building communities that offer a high quality of living for Ontarians of all abilities. That is why, this fall, it is our plan to introduce measures that would make the Ontarians with Disabilities Act, 2001 (ODA) more effective and responsive to the needs of people with disabilities than ever before. As Minister of Education, I am deeply committed to working with the Hon. Dr. Marie Bountrogianni, Minister of Citizenship and Immigration, to ensure that all our citizens are able to fully participate in building a stronger Ontario.

The ministry's 2004-2005 Accessibility Plan reports on achievements over the past year in areas of direct services to the public, such as accessibility of ministry field offices, frontline staff, public inquiry services, electronic information and communications.

As a service provider, the Ministry of Education, through its provincial and demonstration schools, serves more than 800 students who are deaf, blind and deaf-blind, or have severe learning disabilities. These schools use exceptionally high standards of accessibility in the provision of their services.

Although we have taken many steps toward ensuring a completely accessible ministry, we still have work to do. In 2004-2005, we will continue to break down barriers to information, resources, programs and services to more effectively meet the needs of people with disabilities.

As the main providers of education to Ontario students, school boards are also required under the act to develop annual accessibility plans to identify, remove and prevent barriers to access for people with disabilities. Our support of more responsive and effective legislation in the future will also help fulfill the McGuinty government's commitment of attaining a good outcome for every student in public education.

Sincerely,

The Honourable Gerard Kennedy
Minister of Education

Report on Achievements of 2003-2004

Planning Commitments

The Ministry of Education has a long history of providing appropriate accommodation to the general public, employees and others with a range of disabilities and ensuring equitable access to employment opportunities.

Policies and procedures have long been in place to ensure that ministry staff, job applicants and others with a range of disabilities receive the accommodation required. Ergonomic assessments are provided to staff, upon request, as are electronic and alternate format versions of human resources and learning materials. Members of the public have multiple ways to access ministry information, products and services through the ministry website, Teletypewriter (TTY) and web phone. Ministry publications are provided in accessible formats, such as Braille, upon request.

As a service provider, the Ministry of Education, through its provincial and demonstration schools, serves more than 800 students who are deaf, blind and deaf-blind, or have severe learning disabilities. These schools use high standards of accessibility in the provision of their services in both day and residential settings.

Over the past year, the ministry has continued to build on measures already taken to improve accessibility and opportunities in other areas of direct services to the public, such as accessibility of ministry field offices, frontline staff, public inquiry services, electronic information and communications.

The ministry's commitments and achievements for 2003-04 include:

Commitment:

Review various regulations that have previously been identified as including out-of-date and inappropriate language, such as 'trainable retarded', and replace such terms with current and acceptable language. The following regulations will be reviewed:

- Education Act, Revised Regulations of Ontario, 1990, Regulations 285, 298, 306
- Ontario College of Teachers Act, 1996, Ontario Regulation 184/97

Status:

Completed

Commitment: Establish an accessibility planning team to assess progress made on the annual accessibility plan.

Status: Completed

Commitment: Build on the ministry's current practices to ensure that the impact on accessibility is considered in all new and ongoing policy and program development. Tools, questions and checklists on disability considerations will be developed to aid policy and program staff in their work.

Status: Completed

Commitment: Review ministry orientation program for employees to ensure information on staff rights to accommodation, the managers' responsibility to accommodate and any associated mandatory training is developed and included in all new packages. This will also involve a review of the ministry's internal intranet site to ensure that information on employee accommodation is clear and current.

Status: Completed

Commitment: Review the youth marketing initiative for the recruitment of young people into the Ontario Public Service to identify any barriers to the access of materials, presentations and locations.

Status: Deferred

Rationale: The ministry will revisit its approach to attract young people into the Ontario Public Service as new external hiring opportunities are identified.

Commitment: Review all ministry field offices to identify barriers to the public in order to develop plan, with implementation to begin in 2004-05, to remove any barriers identified.

Status: Ongoing

Action/Timeframe: Specific plans for 2004-05 will be developed.

Commitment: Review information technology advisory services to ensure that accessibility is considered in the procurement of software and applications for ministry branches and review the information technology help desk for services to staff with disabilities.

Status: Completed

Commitment: Ensure accessibility is considered when developing the new ministry e-mail guide.

Status: In progress

Action/Timeframe: The ministry working group will complete and release the guide by December 2004.

Commitment: Build on current services to the public by ensuring that all front-line and telecommunications staff have the necessary knowledge and skills to provide good customer service to people with a broad range of disabilities.

Status: Completed

Commitment: Conduct focus groups with reception, frontline, public inquiry and hotline staff to assess their level of knowledge about accessibility issues, the use of various alternate communication tools and the skills needed to provide good customer service to people with disabilities. A plan will be developed by the ministry to respond to any identified training needs.

Status: In progress

Action/Timeframe: The ministry will continue to raise awareness of disability issues as part of its ongoing commitment to build on its employment practices and processes to ensure accessibility for people with disabilities.

Commitment:

Develop, over the next two years, a staff awareness and education campaign to raise awareness of disability issues and how to remove barriers for the public and staff. The campaign will involve:

- developing an accessibility awareness Intranet site;
- holding Lunch 'N' Learn sessions on disability issues; and
- having discussions about disability issues and providing services to people with disabilities in all staff meetings and the ministry's internal newsletter.

Status:

In progress

Action/Timeframe:

The ministry continues to raise awareness of disability issues. A module on leadership and disability, for example, was included in our leadership training program.

Commitment:

Build on existing procedures to improve evacuation procedures for people with disabilities.

Status:

Completed

Commitment:

Develop communication protocols to ensure that all public invitations and promotions of ministry meetings and events include a statement offering accommodation upon request.

Status:

Completed

Commitment:

Purchase new software to create accessible web pages and develop a new, accessible template for the ministry's intranet site. The following steps will also be taken:

- provide support and advice to branches to help them implement the new accessible Intranet template;
- provide updates and information on accessibility issues to staff involved in intranet development;
- update the ministry Guide to Web Publishing to include information on accessibility for intranet developers;
- review new web pages for accessibility before posting; and
- develop an accessibility checklist for general software and applications to ensure that all new information technology that is bought is accessible.

Status:

Completed

Commitments and Strategies for 2004-2005

Over the next year, the ministry will continue to build on efforts already underway to improve opportunities and accessibility to people with disabilities and to prevent future barriers. Impact on accessibility will continue to be considered in key ministry processes, including policy and program development, planning, communications and event planning. The ministry will also build on measures to ensure that staff is increasingly aware of disability issues and has the knowledge and skills required to provide good customer service to people with disabilities.

Making sure that the ministry's website is fully accessible to people with a range of disabilities will continue to be a central part of the ministry's work. The ministry will also continue to broaden the many different ways that its information, products and services can be accessed through a variety of tools, such as web phone, TTY, braille and other alternate formats that often provide primary access to government for people with disabilities.

The ministry continues to provide an important service to the disabled through its provincial and demonstration schools, which serve more than 800 students who are deaf, blind and deaf-blind, or have severe learning disabilities. These schools use high standards of accessibility in the provision of their services in both day and residential settings.

Legislative Requirements

Procurement of Goods and Services

<i>Commitment:</i>	Implement the Guidelines for Procurement of Accessible Goods and Services.
<i>Action:</i>	Incorporate the guidelines into training sessions for staff responsible for the procurement of goods and services.
<i>Timeframe:</i>	Fall 2004

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

Action: Work with ministries across the public service and the vendor community to develop the checklist.

Timeframe: March 2005

Ministry Offices and Facilities

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

Action: Review design proposals to ensure that barrier free requirements in all acts and regulations are met.

Implement new procedures to ensure that all staff with disabilities are provided with a cell phone/walkie talkie and assistance in the event of an emergency evacuation.

Timeframe: Ongoing

Publications

Commitment: Ensure that publications are available in alternate formats.

Status: Ongoing

Timeframe: Provide publications in alternate formats on a regular and ongoing basis for members of the public.

Commitment: Provincial schools will provide publications in alternate formats to school boards and families of students.

Status: Ongoing

Internet Sites

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 act;
- 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; and
- ensure that the Guide to Web Publishing contains current accessibility guidelines.

Timeframe: Ongoing

Policies

Commitment:

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

Action: Identify and address barriers

Timeframe: Ongoing

Acts and Regulations

Commitment:

Continue to monitor Ontario College of Teachers Act, 1996, Ontario Regulation 184/97 to ensure that terminology used in the regulation reflects current and acceptable language related to people with disabilities.

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

Timeframe: September 2006

Programs and Services

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.

Action: Identify barriers and develop plan to remove barriers

Timeframe: March 2005

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

Action: This commitment will be accomplished by:

- incorporating an accessibility awareness component in orientation packages for all new staff and in performance agreements;
- considering the accessibility needs of people with disabilities in recruitment practices;
- providing training and support to managers and supervisors on how to meet the accessibility needs of employees and the accessibility requirements of job applicants;
- ensuring that the human resources intranet site provides clear and current information;
- Completing the re-formatting of internal human resources branch website in compliance with the act's accessibility format; and
- developing outreach materials in alternate formats to facilitate accessibility and identify accessibility needs for any outreach activities.

Timeframe: March 2005

Practices

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

Action: Review new ministry e-mail guide for accessibility considerations.

Timeframe: December 2004

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

Action: Develop an action plan.

Timeframe: March 2005

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 Citizenship's Accessibility Ontario web portal at: www.gov.on.ca/citizenship/accessibility. The site promotes accessibility and provides information and resources on how to make Ontario a barrier-free province.

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