Houston Christian School

Accessibility Plan

2023- 2026

EDUCATE, ENGAGE, AND EQUIP…TO THE GLORY OF GOD

"...a tree planted by streams of water, yields its fruit..." Psalm 1:3

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Section 1: Introduction

Territorial Acknowledgement

Houston Christian School is grateful to be on the shared, unceded territory of the Wet'suwet'en People. We respect and commit to a deep consideration of their history, culture, stewardship, and voice.

About our School Community

Houston Christian School is an independent school located in Houston, BC, serving approximately 147 students from Kindergarten through Grade 12. Our school community is committed to providing a nurturing and inclusive environment where students can grow academically, socially, and spiritually.

In addition to the standard school programs, we offer a range of unique opportunities designed to enrich learning and personal development. Some examples include Vantage Vision, which provides tailored educational support and enrichment, and our Outdoor Education program, which offers students hands-on experiences in nature, promoting teamwork, resilience, and a deeper connection to the environment. Through these programs, Houston Christian School fosters a well-rounded education that meets the diverse needs and interests of our students.

Our dedicated staff is led by Principal Ron Donkersloot and supported by Inclusive Education Coordinator Cheri Kobes, Head Elementary Teacher Jacky Hielema-King, and Head High School Teacher Patricia Shane. Together, they work closely to manage the school, support our students, and ensure that Houston Christian School remains a welcoming, inclusive, and engaging place for learning.

A message from the Administrator

At Houston Christian School, we are committed to providing a learning and working environment that supports all students and staff and provides equitable opportunities to support our diverse community. A key element in supporting our community is developing a Three-Year Accessibility Plan. This plan identifies system needs, priorities, and action plans. It draws on feedback from our school community and the work of the Accessibility Committee to enhance equity of access to programming and our facilities.

Our Accessibility Committee is a diverse, multidisciplinary team that meets regularly to affirm our commitment to identifying priorities and developing and monitoring action plans outlined in the Three-Year Accessibility Plan. The plan identifies measurable actions across the pillars of the Accessibility Act, supporting equal opportunity for persons with disabilities by identifying, removing, and preventing barriers of access.

We recognize the importance of accessibility not only for those with disabilities but also for the benefit of the entire community. We are committed to advancing the efforts of the Accessibility Committee to improve equity and ease of access to services, as well as access to our facilities. Through the actions in this Accessibility Plan, we commit to continuous improvements in developing an environment that supports all students, staff, and the larger school community.

Definitions

Accessibility: The state of having programs, services and environments that allow all individuals to participate fully in society without encountering barriers.

Accessibility Committee: An official group formed by one or more organizations in collaboration with people with disabilities, to create an accessibility plan and feedback mechanism.

Accessibility Plan: A plan developed by an accessibility committee that identifies challenges and solutions for addressing accessibility barriers.

Barrier: Anything that prevents a person with a disability from fully participating in all aspects of society because of their disability. This includes architectural, attitudinal, information, communications, policy or practice, and technological barriers.

Types of barriers:

1. **Architectural Barrier**: A barrier resulting from building design, the area adjacent to the building, the shape of rooms, the size of doorways, and so on.

2. **Attitudinal Barrier:** A barrier that arises from the attitudes of staff, students and the school community, including discriminatory behaviours and a lack of disability awareness.

3. **Communication Barrier:** A barrier that arises from difficulties receiving information in person, by telephone or online, interacting with teachers, peers, receptionists or other staff, and receiving training.

4. **Information Barrier:** A barrier that arises from inadequate or incomprehensible signage, difficulties reading brochures, forms, manuals, websites, fax transmissions, equipment labels, computer screens, and so on.

5. **Policy or Practice Barrier:** Rules, regulations and protocols that prevent a person from performing their job satisfactorily or participating in society. Policy, practice, and procedures that prevent a student from accessing the curriculum and fully participating in the school community.

6. **Technological Barrier:** Barriers resulting from computers, photocopiers, fax machines, telephones, and switches, including the lack of assistive technologies.

7. **Temporal Barrier:** Barriers that occur during a specific time, such as busy times of day or during special events.

8. **Disability:** The state of being unable to participate fully and equally in society as a result of the interaction between an impairment and a barrier. (For more information about disability and types of disability and support, refer to Appendix A: Disabilities.)

9. **Impairment:** A physical, sensory, mental, intellectual, or cognitive limitation, whether permanent, temporary, or episodic.

Section 2: Framework Guiding our Work

The HCS accessibility plan builds on global, national, provincial, and school-specific actions to promote and support accessibility.

Global Context – United Nations

In recent years, there has been an emphasis on increasing diversity, equity, and inclusion within the workplace and within the larger community. The United Nations has been instrumental in raising awareness of the importance of disability as a global health issue. In 2006, the United Nations led efforts to adopt the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD). In 2010, Canada ratified the CRPD and described the CRPD as follows:

> The Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities is an international human rights treaty that aims to protect the rights and dignity of persons with disabilities, without discrimination, on an equal basis with others. Parties to the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities are required to promote and ensure the full enjoyment of human rights of persons with disabilities, including full equality under the law."

Canadian Context and Legislation – Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms

Canada-wide, around one in five people had some form of disability in 2017. Nationally, Canadian accessibility legislation began in 1985, when disability was included in the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms, and in 1986, Persons with Disabilities (PWDs) were included in the new federal Employment Equity Act. The Accessible Canada Act (ACA) came into force in 2019, with the overarching goal to realize a barrier-free Canada by 2040. This act applies to federally regulated entities. The ACA has seven focus areas and was developed based on the following guiding principles:

1. All persons must be treated with dignity regardless of their disabilities.

2. All persons must have the same opportunity to make for themselves the lives that they are able and wish to have, regardless of their disabilities.

3. All persons must have barrier-free access to full and equal participation in society, regardless of their disabilities.

4. All persons must have meaningful options and be free to make their own choices, with support if they desire, regardless of their disabilities.

5. Laws, policies, programs, services, and structures must take into account the disabilities of persons, the different ways that persons interact with their environments and the multiple and intersecting forms of marginalization and discrimination faced by persons.

6. PWDs must be involved in the development and design of laws, policies, programs, services, and structures.

7. The development and revision of accessibility standards and the making of regulations must be done to achieve the highest level of accessibility for PWDs.

B.C. Context and Legislation – Accessible B.C. Act

The Accessible British Columbia Act was enacted in June 2021, and initially, accessibility planning requirements applied only to provincial government organizations.

The Accessible British Columbia Regulation, under the Accessible British Columbia Act, came into force on September 1, 2022. These regulations designate schools as accessible organizations, and school districts and independent schools will be required to establish an Accessibility Committee, an Accessibility Plan, and a tool for receiving accessibility feedback by September 1, 2023.

The goal of the act is to improve opportunities for people with disabilities and involve them in identifying, removing, and preventing barriers to their full participation in the life of the province.

Principles in the Accessible B.C. Act:

The Accessible B.C. Act includes a list of principles that must be considered as organizations develop an accessibility plan. The Definitions are adapted from the foundational document BC Framework for Accessibility Legislation.

1. **Adaptability:** Accessibility plans should reflect that disability and accessibility are evolving concepts that change as services, technology, and attitudes change.

2. **Collaboration:** Promoting accessible communities is a shared responsibility, and everyone has a role to play. Accessibility plans should create opportunities for Organizations and communities to work together to promote access and inclusion.

3. **Diversity:** Every person is unique. People with disabilities are individuals with varied backgrounds. Individual characteristics, including race, gender, sexual orientation, religion, and lived experience, greatly inform the experiences of individuals. Accessibility plans should acknowledge the principle of intersectionality and the diversity within the disability community.

4. **Inclusion:** All British Columbians, including persons with disabilities, should be able to participate fully and equally in their communities.

5. **Self-Determination:** Accessibility plans should seek to empower people with disabilities to make their own choices and pursue the lives they wish to live.

6. **Universal Design:** The Centre for Excellence in Universal Design defines Universal Design as "the design and composition of an environment so that it can be accessed, understood, and used to the greatest extent possible by all people regardless of their age, size, ability or disability." An accessibility plan should be designed to meet the needs of all people who interact with the Organization.

Our Commitment to Accessibility

Accessibility refers to the degree of ease with which people with disabilities can use and enjoy something such as a device, service, or place. At HCS, we are committed to providing an environment that is accessible and practical for all members of our diverse community. We recognize the importance of conscious planning, design, and effort in ensuring that barriers are removed and accessibility is increased.

Our school is committed to working collaboratively with the community to provide equitable treatment to people with disabilities in a way that respects their dignity. To achieve this goal, we have outlined the following commitments:

- Engage with staff, community members and people with disabilities in the development and review of its accessibility plan.
- Ensure that our school policies and procedures align with the principles of accessibility.
- Improve access to facilities, policies, programs, practices, and services for students, staff, parents/guardians, volunteers, and community members.
- Continually improve accessibility for people with disabilities in our school community. Disabilities.

Our Approach

At HCS, we believe that all members of our community have the right to be treated with dignity, given an opportunity to participate, and provided with access to learning and community. Our approach is grounded in the core provincial principles of accessibility, including adaptability, collaboration, diversity, inclusion, self-determination, and universal design.

In May 2023, we began the process of establishing an accessibility committee and identifying barriers to accessibility in our school community. This process involved:

- Calling for applications for members of the Accessibility Committee
- Assessing the current physical and architectural accessibility of our school.
- Conducting surveys to understand the issues, challenges, and priorities of stakeholders within our school community
- Holding key discussions to identify barriers to accessibility."
- Developing a school feedback tool
- Prioritization of actions to be taken
- Establishing a monitoring and evaluation process

Our approach is designed to recognize the gaps and opportunities to improve accessibility in our school community. By engaging in thoughtful planning, meaningful engagement, training, and direct action, we aim to deliver lasting accessibility improvements for all members of our community.

Section 3: Accessibility Committee

Purpose of the Accessibility Committee

Under the Accessible B.C. Act, organizations must establish an Accessibility Committee to assist with identifying and preventing barriers to individuals in or interacting with the organization. The purpose of the accessibility committee is to work collaboratively to assess and improve community accessibility, focusing on the experiences of individuals with disabilities while encompassing the whole community. The Accessibility Committee also advises the school Administrator/Board on strategies to reduce social, physical, sensory and other barriers that prevent people from fully participating in all aspects of school community life.

Recruitment to the Accessibility Committee

Under the Accessible B.C. Act, the selection of accessibility committee members must, to the extent possible, align with the following goals:

- At least one of our members is a person with disabilities (PWD), or an individual who supports or is from an organization that supports PWDs.
- At least one member is an Indigenous person; and
- To the best of our ability, we try to have members that reflect the diversity of people in B.C.

A callout for applications to the Accessibility Committee was conducted in May 2023 to recruit a diverse representation as outlined above. The Accessibility Committee was formally constituted in June 2023. Current members of the Accessibility Coordinating Committee are listed on the next page.

Accessibility Committee Membership

Committee Member	Position/Representation
Darren Spyksma	• Director of Learning, Society of Christian Schools in BC (SCSBC)
Jenny Williams	• Director of Educational Support Services, Society of Christian Schools in BC (SCSBC)
Amanda Broadway	• Student Support Services Coordinator, Duncan Christian School • Parent of children with accessibility needs
Joyce Kwan	• Co-Founder, BC Association for Advancing Communication • Teacher, John Knox Christian School • Parent of a child with accessibility needs
Robert Friesen.	• Architectural Technologist • Parent of children with accessibility needs
Houston Christian School Accessibility Committee	
Cheri Kobes	• Inclusive Education Coordinator, Houston Christian School • Teacher, Houston Christian School • Parent of child with accessibility needs
Shay Jaarmsa	• Indigenous persons, Metis • Inclusive Education Assistant Training • Parent of students at HCS
Dawn Bishop	• Inclusive Education Assistant and Intervener, Houston Christian School • First Aid Attendant, Houston Christian School
• HCS is Currently Seeking a Replacement for the June Vacancy	

Section 4: Consultation Conducted

Barrier-Identification Methodologies

The Accessibility Committee uses the following barrier-identification methods:

Methodology	**Description**	**Status**
Audit of practices	Key staff members conducted a review of current practices that promote accessibility and inclusion.	June 2023
Survey to Staff	An accessibility survey was developed and distributed to staff.	June 2023
Survey to Parents/Guardians	**An accessibility survey was developed** and distributed to parents/guardians.	*Oct 2023*
School Physical Accessibility Audit	An Assessment of School Physical Accessibility was developed. An audit team was identified, and they conducted the School Physical Accessibility Audit.	June 2023
Accessibility Committee	The Accessible Committee reviewed the input and feedback from the survey, Physical Accessibility Audit, and the Universal Supports Checklist. The Committee collaborated to suggest priority areas to target in the Accessibility Plan. This was shared with administrators and the Board, who approved the final priority areas for the plan.	Oct/Nov 202

Section 5: Accessibility Feedback Tool

HCS developed an online feedback tool that included a series of questions about accessibility experiences that students, staff and members of the school community could complete. The tool was posted on the school website's main page, and an announcement about it was provided to students, staff, and parents/guardians. Feedback could be anonymous, or people could add their name and contact information if they wished to be contacted.

The following are the contents of the online Accessibility Feedback Tool.

Report an Accessibility Barrier or Support

We value the input of our school community in identifying both the successes and barriers that impact the participation of individuals in the life of our school. Your feedback will greatly assist us in the development of our Accessibility Plan. Please take a few minutes to complete the following survey.

1) **Which group(s) do you most identify with? (Check all that apply. If you choose 'Other,' please specify).**
   - ☐ An individual with an accessibility need
   - ☐ Student with an accessibility need
   - ☐ Caregiver for an individual with an accessibility need
   - ☐ Service Provider outside of school
   - ☐ Staff Member
   - ☐ Other _____

2) **What gets in the way at school? (Check all that apply. If you choose 'Other,' please specify.**
   - ☐ Physical access (e.g. stairs, doorways, etc.)
   - ☐ Vision (e.g. dark stairwells, doorways, etc.)
   - ☐ Hearing (e.g. difficulty hearing the teacher or announcements)
   - ☐ Sensory (e.g. sensitivities to noises, movement, touch, lighting, etc.)
   - ☐ Overall environment (e.g. busy hallways, etc.)
   - ☐ Mental health (e.g. anxiety, depression, test taking, public speaking, etc.)
   - ☐ Other _____

3) **Explain why the factors mentioned above pose obstacles.**

4) **What measures do you believe would improve the situation?**

5) **What are some supports that you find helpful at school?**

6) **Is there anything else you would like the adults at school to be aware of?**

7) **If you would like to be contacted, please provide your name and contact information.**

   Name: _____Phone: _____

   Email: _____

Section 6: Accessibility Accomplishments and Barriers

Key Discussion Themes – Accessibility Accomplishments Identified

The guiding principles of inclusive practice inform school programs, policies, practices, and services to reduce and minimize barriers to accessibility for people with disabilities. We strive to create an environment that is accessible and to ensure continuous improvement in accessibility.

Key Discussion Themes We Will Explore

Learning

1. We will identify the universal supports that are working well in classrooms and consider additional supports that may enhance student success.
2. We will look more closely at how our school fosters inclusion and accessibility in learning and gather further input to guide future improvements.

Physical and Architectural Environment

1. We will review the findings from our Physical and Architectural Environment Audit to determine priority areas for increasing accessibility throughout the school.
2. We will continue planning facility upgrades that align with accessibility standards, which may include improvements to washrooms, ramps, door operators, elevators, fire alarm systems, and parking or curb access.

Resources

1. We will examine the accessibility resources available through our library and explore opportunities to expand materials such as audiobooks, high-interest/low-vocabulary books, and closed-captioned videos.
2. We will review the technological supports currently in place—such as FM systems, Chromebooks, and iPads—to ensure they effectively meet student needs and to identify opportunities for further enhancement.

School Policy and Practice

1. Adaptations for Students:
    - We will review how student accommodation needs are assessed to ensure our approach remains clear, individualized, and responsive.
    - We will examine the procedures for providing adaptations to ensure they are consistent and accessible.
2. Mental Health and Well-being Supports:
    - We will continue exploring ways to strengthen mental health and well-being supports for students and staff.
    - We will consider additional training opportunities that promote student mental health, support staff well-being, and reduce stigma.
3. Universal Design for Learning Training:
    - We will continue expanding training opportunities that support staff in implementing Universal Design for Learning and improving accessibility for all students.

Key Discussion Themes – Accessibility Barriers Identified

Learning Barriers

1. We will explore opportunities for additional staff training to support interactions with students who have specific disabilities.
2. We will look into concerns around hearing and noise levels, including difficulty hearing announcements and the impact of noisy classrooms and hallways. We will consider options such as noise-cancelling headphones, clearer announcement systems, noise-regulation strategies, and quiet learning spaces.
3. We will review how students are taught study skills and test-preparation strategies to ensure they feel confident and well-supported.
4. We will assess universal classroom supports to determine where further development or refinement may be helpful.
5. We will explore ways to increase student comfort and engagement with universal supports, especially for those who may be hesitant to use them due to concerns about standing out.
6. We will examine how students are supported in initiating assignments and tasks to ensure they have the tools and guidance they need to get started successfully.

Physical and Architectural Environment Barriers

1. We will look into noise concerns in classrooms and other learning spaces to identify helpful noise-reduction solutions.
2. We will explore options for creating additional quiet or alternative workspaces for students who need them.
3. We will consider increasing the number of automatic door openers and accessible door-activation buttons to enhance mobility and accessibility.
4. We will review lighting concerns, including overly bright lights, buzzing fixtures, and low-light areas such as stairways, to determine where improvements can be made.

Attitudinal Barriers

1. We will look into ways to strengthen understanding among staff about the diverse needs of students, particularly those managing mental health challenges or disabilities that affect learning, communication, and motivation.

Resource Barriers

1. We will explore opportunities to improve staff and student familiarity with accessibility features on school technology, such as voice-to-text, text-to-speech, and web-reader tools.

School Policy and Practice Barriers

1. We will continue reviewing staff training needs to better support diverse learning profiles and ensure inclusive practice.
2. We will examine transition-planning processes to support greater consistency and clarity for students with disabilities.
3. We will review emergency evacuation procedures, individual plans, and needed equipment to ensure safe and accessible evacuation options for students with physical disabilities.

Section 7: Our Three-Year Plan (2023 – 2026)

Overview:

This Accessibility Plan outlines the measures Houston Christian School will take to remove or prevent barriers to learning and participation and to promote the inclusion of individuals with disabilities in our school community. The Plan is based on the Accessibility Principles of Adaptability, Collaboration, Diversity, Inclusion, Self-Determination, and Universal Design, as set out in the Accessible B.C. Act and defined in Section 1.

Accessibility Priorities:

Information about accessibility was gathered from staff, parents/guardians, and students, as well as from the Physical and Architectural Environment Audit. Based on this feedback, the Accessibility Committee has identified the following areas as the top priority for improving accessibility in the school community.

Priority #1: Learning

HCS will enhance access to learning for all individuals, including those with disabilities, through the following actions:

Objectives	**Actions**
Plan priority universal supports to implement in the classroom and normalize accessing supports	• Identify key universal supports being implemented in the classroom (refer to the Universal Supports document in Appendix C) • Prioritize 3-5 priority universal supports to implement school-wide • Provide professional development on effectively implementing the priority universal supports identified above • Normalize supports within the classroom and inform students how they can be helpful for all
Develop effective classroom processes for modulating noise levels in the classroom and hallways	• Explicitly teach and reinforce expected behaviours around noise levels (e.g., especially during announcements, when giving instructions, etc.) • Remind students ahead of time (pre-correction) about noise levels before students move into the hallway • Consistently monitor noise levels in the hallway
Develop a plan for teaching study skills in middle and high school classes.	• Provide direct instruction in developing mnemonic techniques for summarizing key ideas • Assist in utilizing the 'splashdown' technique by encouraging students to write down their diagrams and memorized information before taking tests • Facilitate anxiety reduction activities before test writing

Priority #2: Attitudinal

Houston Christian School will seek to understand ableism and how it exists in society and in school. The school will reduce attitudinal barriers through the following actions:

Objectives	**Actions**
Increase the understanding of ableism and disability.	• Have class discussions about ableism and disability using literature in literacy instructions found in SCSBC Disability Literature Resources. • Invite adults to speak with students. • Provide professional development on Ableism.

Priority #3: Physical and Architectural Environment

Houston Christian School will improve the accessibility of the physical and architectural environment for all individuals, including those with disabilities. Grants for building and accessibility projects may be available (Refer to Appendix B for potential grant sources). The physical and architectural environment will be improved through the following actions:

Objectives	**Actions**
Ensure students and staff are able to adequately hear announcements, teachers, and others who are speaking	• Assess areas of the school where noise interferes with hearing receptivity • Provide sound fields in all classrooms to support students with hearing impairments and attention issues.
Ensure soundproofing of surfaces where possible to reduce noise for students and staff	• Options for noise reduction devices (headphones) • Explore soundproofing solutions for the classroom and other areas of the school.
Increase opportunities for student access to alternative learning and calming spaces when needed	• Determine the current needs of students who may require alternate learning spaces from time to time • Conduct an audit of current alternate learning spaces that can meet the identified need • Create a plan and budget for the provision of additional alternative learning spaces or accommodations to address the need identified.
Ensure that lighting levels are appropriate for student and staff needs (i.e., not too bright, too dim, buzzing lights, alternatives to fluorescent lighting).	• Determine the current needs of students and staff who may have specific lighting needs. • Conduct an audit of current lighting challenges • Create a plan and budget for adjusting lighting to meet the needs of staff and students.
Ensure paths of travel are not partially blocked, so that	• Build awareness that paths of travel that are used by staff and students should remain clear.

people who use a mobility device, such as a walker or a wheelchair, can navigate paths of travel unhindered	• Develop a system for checking and clearing paths of travel needed.
Ensure front entrance doors are accessible to all by having automatic door openers with a delayed closing	• Regularly check and maintain the automatic door openers on the front doors of the school. • Consider what inside doors or other outside doors may need the installation of automatic door openers.
Ensure playground equipment and surfaces provide meaningful access for inclusion	• Assess if some students are not able to access the playground (e.g., replace mulch and gravel with rubberized mats) • Identify potential ways to increase student inclusion and participation in playground activities (e.g., accessible swings and picnic tables, a communication board in the playground to encourage communication between students with communication challenges and other students) • Develop a plan and budget for implementing playground adjustments to be more inclusive
Ensure that emergency evacuation equipment is installed in the school	• Install evacuation equipment at the top of each stairway.

Priority # 4: School Policy and Practice

Houston Christian School will review and revise policies and practices to ensure they align with the principles of accessibility and to address any identified gaps in staff training or knowledge on accessibility issues. School policy and practice will be addressed through the following actions:

Objectives	**Actions**
Identify and respond to areas needed for further staff training on universal design for learning (UDL) to increase student success through a) increased engagement, b) access to information, and c) various ways to express their learning	• Develop priorities for staff accessibility training and develop or identify training modules for staff • Develop an implementation plan to provide the accessibility training needed for current staff and new staff induction
Ensure that emergency plans are in place for each student with mobility or sensory needs. Provide staff training on transfers/lifts if part of the	• Identify the students and staff who may require assistance with emergency procedures. • Develop emergency procedures for the evacuation of students/staff with disabilities and diverse needs. • Provide staff training on the individualized evacuation

emergency plan.	procedures for students with disabilities and diverse needs. • Develop evacuation procedures for students with other considerations (e.g., temporary injury, sensory needs, etc.) • Practice implementing individualized evacuation plans during emergency drills. Inform and prepare (frontload) students with sensory challenges in advance, so they anticipate and are ready for drills.
Develop a plan for teaching self-regulation across grade levels and introduce tools for all classes.	• Identify students requiring individualized regulation needs. • Provide information about self-regulation needs during year-to-year transition planning. • Obtain developmentally appropriate self-regulation toolkits for each from SCSBC. • Provide professional development on self-regulation and self-regulation tools.

Priority # 5: Resources

Houston Christian School will increase awareness and training on assistive technology and other resources that promote accessibility through the following actions:

Objectives	**Actions**
Increase awareness of specific assistive technology needs for students with disabilities	• Conduct class reviews of technology needs for students. • Provide training for staff on the various technology needs for students.
Provide access to and training for the implementation of speech-to-text and text-to-speech technology.	• Professional development for staff • Technology implementation plan for training and supporting students in technology use.

Section 8: Monitoring and Evaluation

The Accessibility Planning Committee meets three times a year to review progress, evaluate the effectiveness of the plan's implementation, and plan for increased accessibility throughout the school. The committee will ensure the following steps are taken regarding the Three-Year Accessibility Plan:

1. Prepare an annual status report on the progress of the measures taken to implement the plan.

2. Review and update the Three-Year Accessibility Plan every three years in consultation with persons with disabilities and other relevant community members.

Section 9: How to Give us Feedback about the Plan

In addition to the plan's public availability, HCS will post an annual status report on the school's website and a link to it in the school newsletter. Accessible formats of the plan will be made available upon request.

Questions, comments, or feedback regarding the Accessibility Plan may be directed to Ron Donkersloot via email to r.donkersloot@houstonchristianschool.ca. If necessary, the principal will share the communication with the entire HCS Accessibility Committee.

Section 10: Appendices

Appendix A: About Disability

The Disability Continuum

Although there is no universally accepted meaning for the word "disability". However, the Ontario Human Rights Code provides definitions of disability that form our guiding principles. Definitions of disability can be placed on a continuum. At one end, disability is explained in terms of medical conditions (medical model). At the opposite end, disability is explained in terms of the social and physical contexts in which it occurs (environmental model).

The medical model focuses on deficiencies, symptoms and treatments. The World Health Organization's (WHO) 1976 definition for disability, for example, is "any restriction or lack (resulting from an impairment) of ability to perform an activity in the manner or within the range considered normal for a human being." Medical model definitions promote the idea that disability is a deviation from the norm.

Many people with disabilities are troubled by definitions that regard disability as abnormal, preferring instead to portray disability as commonplace, natural, and in fact, inevitable. As people age, they experience gradual declines in visual acuity, auditory sensitivity, range of motion, bodily strength and mental powers. Significant functional limitations affect almost half of people between the ages of 55 and 79, and over 70% of people over 80 (World Health Organization (WHO) report titled "Ageing and health", 2015). Beyond middle age, disability is the norm.

The environmental model explains disability in relation to social and physical contexts. In this view, the environment, not an individual's medical condition, causes disability. For example, during an electrical blackout, a person who is completely blind can effortlessly navigate around the home, hammer nails, and, if a Braille user, read a novel. A sighted person would be unable to perform these tasks easily, if at all. In this example, the environment disables the sighted person. The environmental model emphasizes that people with disabilities are capable individuals, and it is the barriers in the built and human environments, not their medical conditions, that create disability. Disability occurs when the world is designed only for a certain way of living, without considering the natural variation among human beings.

Barriers are created by humans, and modifying how we live, the tools we use, and our understanding of the proper way to do things can eliminate or minimize design problems that cause barriers. Systematic barriers can be eliminated by modifying policies, plans, and processes. Attitudes that cause barriers can be addressed through disability awareness, respect, and positive interactions with people with disabilities.

Types of Disability and Functional Limitations

A person's disability may make it physically or cognitively challenging to perform everyday tasks such as operating a keyboard, reading a sign, differentiating colours, distinguishing sounds, climbing stairs, grasping small items, remembering words, or doing arithmetic.
There are many kinds of disabilities, including physical, sensory, hearing, mental health, developmental and learning. Disabilities can be visible or invisible.

Visual Disabilities

Visual disabilities reduce one's ability to see clearly. Very few people are totally blind. Some have limited vision, such as tunnel vision, where a person has a loss of peripheral or side vision, or a lack of central vision, which means they cannot see straight ahead. Some can see the outline of objects while others can see the direction of light. Impaired vision can restrict a person's ability to read signs, locate landmarks or see hazards. In some cases, it may be difficult to tell if a person has a visual disability. Others may use a guide dog or a white cane.

Here are some suggestions to help you interact with people with visual disabilities:

- Identify yourself when you approach the person and speak directly to them.
- Speak normally and clearly.
- Avoid referring to the disability or using phrases like "handicapped".
- Unless it is an emergency, only touch the person if you have been given permission.
- If you offer assistance, wait until you receive permission.
- Offer your arm (the elbow) to guide the person and walk slowly.
- Service animals are working and have to pay attention at all times. Refrain from engaging with the animal.
- If you're giving directions or verbal information, be precise and clear. For example, if you're approaching a door or an obstacle, say so. Don't just assume the individual can't see you.
- When entering a room, show the individual to a chair or guide them to a comfortable location.
- Identify landmarks or other details to orient the person to the environment around them.
- Ensure you say goodbye prior to leaving the individual.
- Be patient. Things may take a little longer.

Hard of Hearing and Deafness

People who have hearing loss may be deaf or hard of hearing. Like other disabilities, hearing loss has a wide variety of degrees. People who are hard of hearing may require assistive devices when communicating. While some people may use sign language, notes or hearing aids when communicating, others may also use email, pagers, TTY telephone service or Bell Canada Relay Service.

Here are some suggestions to help you interact with people who are deaf or hard of hearing:

- Always ask how you can help. Don't shout.
- Avoid referring to the disability or using phrases like "handicapped".
- Attract the person's attention before speaking. The best way is a gentle touch on the shoulder or gently waving your hand.
- Make sure you are in a well-lighted area where the person can see your face.
- Look at and speak directly to the person. Address the person, not their interpreter. " If necessary, ask if another method of communicating would be easier, for example, a pen and paper.
- Keep your face clearly visible when speaking.
- Be clear and precise when giving directions and repeat or rephrase if necessary. Make sure you have been understood.
- Service animals are working and have to pay attention at all times. Refrain from engaging with the animal.
- Any personal (e.g., financial) matters should be discussed in a private room to avoid other people overhearing
- Be patient. Communication for people who are deaf is different because their first language may not be English. It may be American Sign Language (ASL).

- If the person uses a hearing aid, try to speak in an area with few competing sounds.

Physical Disabilities

There are many types and degrees of physical disabilities, and not all require a wheelchair. For example, people who have arthritis, heart or lung conditions, or amputations may also have difficulty moving, standing or sitting. It may be difficult to identify a person with a physical disability.
Here are some suggestions to help you interact with people with physical disabilities:

- Speak normally and directly to the person rather than to someone who is with them.
- People with physical disabilities often have their own ways of doing things. Ask before you help.
- Avoid referring to the disability or using phrases like "handicapped".
- Be patient and be sure you understand their needs.
- Unless it is an emergency, refrain from touching any assistive devices, including wheelchairs.
- Provide the person with information about accessible features of the immediate environment (automatic doors, accessible washrooms, etc.).

Intellectual Disabilities

People with intellectual or developmental disabilities may have difficulty doing many things most of us take for granted. These disabilities can mildly or profoundly limit one's ability to learn. You may not be able to know that someone has one of these disabilities unless you are told, or you notice the way people act, ask questions or use body language.
Here are some suggestions to help you interact with people with intellectual disabilities:

- As much as possible, treat the person with an intellectual disability like anyone else. They may understand more than you think, and they will appreciate you treating them with respect.
- Don't assume what a person can or cannot do.
- Avoid referring to the disability or using phrases like "handicapped".
- Use simple words and short sentences.
- Make sure the person understands what you've said.
- If you can't understand what's being said, ask again.
- Give one piece of information at a time.
- Be polite and patient.
- Speak directly to the person, not to someone who is with the person.

Learning or Cognitive Disabilities

Learning or cognitive disabilities can result in a host of different communication difficulties for people. They can be subtle, as in having difficulty reading, or more pronounced, but they can interfere with the person's ability to receive, express or process information. You may not be able to know that someone has one of these disabilities unless you are told, or you notice the way people act, ask questions or use body language.
Here are some suggestions to help you interact with people with learning disabilities or disabilities:

- Patience and a willingness to find a way to communicate are your best tools.
- Recognize that some people with communication difficulties use augmentative communication systems such as Signed English and Picture Exchange System.
- When you know that someone with a learning disability needs help, ask how you can best help.
- Speak normally and clearly, and directly to the person
- Take some time -people with some kinds of disabilities may take a little longer to understand and respond.

- Try to find ways to provide information in a way that works best for them. For example, have a paper and pen handy.
- If you're dealing with a child, be patient, encouraging and supportive.
- Avoid referring to the disability or using phrases like "handicapped".
- Be courteous and patient, and the person will let you know how to best provide service in a way that works for them.

Mental Health Disabilities

People with mental health disabilities look like anyone else. You won't know that the person has a mental health disability unless you're informed of it. But if someone is experiencing difficulty in controlling their symptoms or is in a crisis, you may need to help out. Be calm and professional and let the person tell you how you can best help.

Here are some suggestions to help you interact with people with mental health disabilities:

- Treat people with a mental health disability with the same respect and consideration you have for everyone else.
- Be confident and reassuring and listen to persons with a mental health disability and their needs.
- If someone appears to be in a crisis, ask him or her to tell you the best way to help
- Take the person with a mental health disability seriously, and work with them to meet their needs.

Speech and Language Disabilities

Some people have communication challenges. It could be the result of cerebral palsy, hearing loss, or another condition that makes it difficult to pronounce words, causes slurring or stuttering, or prevents one from being able to express oneself or understand written or spoken language. Some people who have severe difficulties may use communication boards, sign language or other assistive devices.

Here are some suggestions to help you interact with people with speech and language disabilities:

- Just because a person has one disability doesn't mean they have another. For example, if a person has difficulty speaking, make no assumption that they have an intellectual disability as well.
- If you don't understand, ask the person to repeat the information.
- Avoid referring to the disability or using phrases like "handicapped".
- If you are able, ask questions that can be answered 'yes' or 'no'.
- Take some time. Be patient and polite, and give the person whatever time they need to get their point across.
- Allow the individual to finish their sentences themselves without interruption.
- Patience, respect and a willingness to find a way to communicate are your best tools.

Deaf-Blind Disabilities

A person who is deafblind cannot see or hear to some extent. This results in greater difficulties in accessing information and managing daily activities. Most people who are deafblind will be accompanied by an intervener, a professional who helps with communication. Interveners are trained in special sign language that involves touching the hands of the client in a two-hand, manual alphabet or finger spelling, and may guide and interpret for their client.

Here are some suggestions to help you interact with people who are deafblind:

- Make no assumptions about what a person can or cannot do. Some deaf-blind people have some sight or hearing, while others have neither.
- Avoid referring to the disability or using phrases like "handicapped".
- A deaf-blind person is likely to explain to you how to communicate with them or give you an assistance card or a note explaining how to communicate with them.
- Speak directly to the person, as you normally would, not to the intervener.
- Identify yourself to the intervener when you approach the person who is deaf-blind.
- Don't touch service animals - they are working and have to pay attention at all times.
- Unless it's an emergency, refrain from touching a deaf-blind person without permission.