Joint Accessibility Plan

Nova Scotia's Regional Centres for Education & Conseil scolaire acadien provincial

Annapolis Valley Regional Centre for Education

Cape Breton Victoria Regional Centre for Education

Chignecto Central Regional Centre for Education

Conseil scolaire acadien provincial

Halifax Regional Centre for Education

South Shore Regional Centre for Education

Strait Regional Centre for Education

Tri-County Regional Centre for Education

Halifax Regional Centre for Education

Chignecto Central Regional Centre for Education

Annapolis Valley Regional Centre for Education

Cape Breton-Victoria Regional Centre for Education

Strait Regional Centre for Education

South Shore Regional Centre for Education

CSAP Conseil scolaire acadien provincial

Tri-County Regional Centre for Education

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Message from Regional Executive Directors and Superintendent

Nova Scotia's seven Regional Centres for Education (RCEs) and the Conseil scolaire acadien provincial (CSAP) are responsible for developing a multi-year plan to ensure accessibility in public education.

The Regional Executive Directors and Superintendent, along with invaluable contributions from our many partners and staff, created a Joint Accessibility Plan. This plan outlines our commitment **to provide accessible learning and teaching experiences for all, in every aspect of education.**

All students and staff should feel that they belong in an inclusive school – accepted, safe, and valued. This plan, in alignment with Nova Scotia's Inclusive Education Policy, will act as our guide as we deliver on our commitment to creating accessible education in Nova Scotia by 2030.

This plan is evidence of a joint commitment to providing accessible learning and teaching experiences. This collective work will continue as we move from drafting this plan to implementing change.

Nova Scotia Accessibility Act

Background

In 2017, Nova Scotia became the third province in Canada to pass accessibility legislation, committing to a more equitable and accessible province. The Accessibility Act recognizes accessibility as a human right, and sets a goal to make Nova Scotia an accessible province by 2030. The goal of the act is to prevent and remove barriers that restrict people with disabilities from fully participating in society. It enables government to develop standards for accessibility, and outlines responsibilities for prescribed public sector bodies.

In the Accessibility Act, a disability is defined as "a physical, mental, intellectual, learning or sensory impairment, including an episodic disability that, in interaction with a barrier, hinders an individual's full and effective participation in society."

A barrier is defined as "anything that hinders or challenges the full and effective participation in society of persons with disabilities, including a physical barrier, an architectural barrier, an information or communications barrier, an attitudinal barrier, a technological barrier, a policy, or a practice."

Government's strategy for achieving an accessible province by 2030 is described in Access By Design 2030. This strategy outlines how the government will work with its partners, including Regional Centres for Education and the Conseil scolaire acadien provincial to implement the Accessibility Act and improve accessibility for all Nova Scotians.

RCEs/CSAP as Public Sector Bodies

Under the Accessibility Act, Government prescribed some entities as public sector bodies. This means that within one year of being prescribed, these organizations must:

1. Establish an accessibility advisory committee (at least half of members must be persons with disabilities or representatives of disability organizations)
2. Develop and make publicly available an accessibility plan that is updated every three years.

Regional Centres for Education and the Conseil scolaire acadien provincial were prescribed effective April 1, 2022.

Planning Process

Background

The RCEs and CSAP agreed to develop a joint accessibility plan and establish a joint accessibility advisory committee. The Joint RCE/CSAP Accessibility Plan must be developed and made publicly available by April 1, 2023. It must be developed in consultation with persons with disabilities and updated at least every three years.

The Joint RCE/CSAP Accessibility Plan must identify progress made removing and preventing barriers; how barriers will be removed and prevented, and how impact on accessibility will be assessed.

Each RCE and CSAP will adopt the plan and develop an implementation plan to outline how the actions will be implemented.

RCEs/CSAP Accessibility Planning Working Group

An RCEs/CSAP Accessibility Planning Working Group was established in April 2021 and includes representatives from all seven Regional Centres for Education and the Conseil scolaire acadien provincial.

This Working Group led the development of the first Joint RCEs/CSAP Accessibility Plan and establishment of the Joint RCEs/CSAP Accessibility Advisory Committee.

Joint RCEs/CSAP Accessibility Advisory Committee

A Joint RCEs/CSAP Accessibility Advisory Committee was established in January 2022 with 18 members representing each RCE and the CSAP. The majority of committee members identify as having a disability. The committee's mandate is to advise the RCEs and CSAP on accessibility issues.

The Joint RCE/CSAP Accessibility Advisory Committee provided input on existing barriers and achievements in each of the five areas of accessibility included in the plan.

Accessibility Plan Development Process

The Joint RCE/CSAP Planning Working Group identified five areas to be included in the joint accessibility plan: Communications; Teaching and Learning; Employment; Built Environment; and Procurement. Under the leadership of an appointed Coordinator, the existing provincial directors' committees led the work to identify achievements, barriers, and actions for each area. This included Directors of Operations; Human Resources; Programs and Services; Communications; and Finance and Procurement staff.

Each committee identified the scope for review. They involved a broad range of key staff to conduct an accessibility review that identified areas of achievement and barriers to accessibility. The Directors and other staff used this information to identify actions to prevent and remove barriers, and measures of success for each Action.

Educational Partners

Partners impacted by the Joint RCE/CSAP Accessibility Plan include, but are not limited to, students with a disability; employees with a disability; outside agencies working with or interacting with an RCE/CSAP; families; staff; and community partners.

Provincial Accessibility Achievements

Accessibility Standards in Education

In September 2018, Government committed to developing an accessibility standard in education. Under the Accessibility Act, the Accessibility Advisory Board and an Education Standard Development Committee make recommendations to Government on standards in education. The board and committee are making recommendations for a standard to prevent and remove barriers to accessibility in public and private early childhood, elementary, secondary, and post-secondary education. The accessibility standard in education is expected to be enacted as a regulation beginning in 2024.

Other Accessibility Standard Areas

Accessibility standards are also being developed in the following areas:

- **Employment:** making workplaces accessible and supporting people with disabilities in finding meaningful employment
- **Built Environment:** making buildings, sidewalks, parks and shared spaces accessible to all

Government will be developing accessibility standards in other areas:

- **Goods and services:** ensuring that people with disabilities have equitable access to goods and services
- **Information and communication:** ensuring all people can receive, understand and share the information they need
- **Transportation:** making it easier for everyone to get where they need to go

More information on Accessibility Standards can be found on the Nova Scotia Accessibility Directorate website.

Inclusive Education Policy

From Nova Scotia's Inclusive Education Policy

Nova Scotia's Inclusive Education Policy was approved in August 2019 and implemented in September 2020. The Inclusive Education Policy reflects the importance of the well-being of all students and the impact it has on their achievements.

Inclusive schools are equitable, and culturally, linguistically, and socially responsive. They have structures, processes, and practices that are student-centered, appropriate, and collaborative.

The Inclusive Education Policy objective is to ensure every student has access to an equitable and high-quality education that is culturally and linguistically responsive, accepting, and respectful in supporting and valuing their learning and diverse abilities. To meet this objective, the policy provides clear, consistent direction with respect to inclusive education and equitable practices in public schools. This policy will be supported by policies, guidelines, and procedures to assist in its implementation. The Inclusive Education Policy provides a framework which will apply to all other policies, procedures, strategies, and initiatives.

Student Assessment Policy

From Nova Scotia's Student Assessment Policy

Nova Scotia's Student Assessment Policy was released in September 2021 and effective September 2022.

Student assessment and evaluation are core components of Nova Scotia's public education system. Assessment and evaluation provide evidence of learning and achievement to students, families, and teachers. Teachers use assessment evidence to inform their decisions about instruction and student learning, monitor progress, and report on student achievement. Student assessment and evaluation also provide important data to the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development (EECD) and its partners in education, such as the RCEs and CSAP, to inform the development and delivery of programs, services, and supports.

The objective of this policy is to provide clear, consistent direction with respect to assessment, evaluation, and reporting practices, focusing on enhancing all students' learning and achievement. As part of enhancing the learning and achievement of all students, this policy also supports inclusive and equitable practices related to student assessment, evaluation, reporting, and well-being. This policy and any accompanying guidelines or procedures help inform effective practices respecting student assessment, evaluation, and reporting.

Joint RCEs/CSAP Accessibility Plan

The Joint RCEs/CSAP Accessibility Plan includes commitments in the following areas of accessibility: Communications; Teaching and Learning; Employment; Built Environment; and Procurement. Actions will be implemented by each RCE and CSAP, in alignment with existing policies, operations and processes, including the Inclusive Education Policy.

It is noted that any achievements, actions and measures of success apply to design and delivery in both official languages.

Communications

Communications Accessibility Commitment Statement

RCEs and CSAP will ensure effective and efficient access to information for all users across websites, social media and communication documents delivered to partners. RCEs and CSAP will align with standards and guidelines from Communications Nova Scotia, as they are developed.

Communications Achievements

Some RCE/CSAP school websites are fully accessible, use Google translate, and all school websites will soon provide accessibility features.
RCEs/CSAP offer a range of platforms to access information from RCEs/CSAP and schools (including Twitter, Facebook, Instagram, YouTube).

Many RCEs/CSAP are using ALT text to ensure images are accessible on social media.

Some RCE/CSAP/schools use a variety of accessible communication practices (for example, plain language, use of inclusive language/photos, accessibility checker in Acrobat pro, infographics, proper use of contrasting colours and fonts).

Communications Actions

1. **Communication Action:** Develop or access comprehensive training on website design in compliance with Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG) 2.1 for Communications staff responsible for web design, content, and site organization.

    Measure of Success: Staff responsible for web design and accessibility will successfully complete training.

2. **Communication Action:**

   a) Complete an audit of RCE/CSAP/school websites to determine which websites are not accessible.

   b) Research best practices and develop a process to ensure RCE/CSAP/School websites are designed to comply with the <u>WCAG 2.1 standards</u>.

   Measure of Success:

   - A random audit of RCE/CSAP will indicate accessibility of all sites.

   - All websites in RCEs/CSAP will be identified as accessible or not.

   - Inaccessible websites will be redesigned and published to meet WCAG 2.1 standards.

3. **Communication Action:** Determine what translation tool is best for websites.

   Measure of Success: Identification and use of an efficient translation tool will be recommended/offered on each website in RCEs/CSAP.

4. **Communication Action:** Ensure service providers for school notification system, school web design and school mobile apps meet WCAG 2.1 standards.

   Measure of Success: Confirmation that new service providers meet WCAG 2.1 standards for each component of communication system

5. **Communication Action:** Develop and/or access social media accessibility training for all RCEs/CSAP communications staff.

   Measure of Success: All communications staff are ensuring social media posts are accessible to all readers.

6. **Communication Action:** Develop a training protocol and consider developing a lead team, representing both official languages, to engage in and train others in each RCE/CSAP on designing, developing and distributing accessible social media posts.

   Measure of Success: Development of an RCE/CSAP Accessible Social Media Protocol and a corresponding Lead Team (representing both official languages) that will train communications (and possibly other employees) to ensure all social media posts are accessible.

7. **Communication Action:** Research and develop an Accessibility and Social Media Checklist to distribute to all RCEs/CSAP/schools utilizing social media.

   Refer to resources already available to begin best practices.

   Measure of Success: Develop and distribute an Accessible Social Media Checklist.

8. **Communication Action:** Identify and offer all Communications staff a training program on designing and developing Accessible Education Materials (AEM), including Adobe Creative Suite, word processing documents, PDFs, slide presentations, video with CC, audio with transcripts, video descriptions, contrast checkers, accessibility checkers etc.).

   Measure of Success:

   • Identification of a comprehensive AEM training program.

   • Completion of AEM training by all Communications staff members.

9. **Communication Action:** Identify resources and train Communications staff to implement accessible communications best practices.

   Measure of Success:

   • Implementation of accessibility best practices in communications activities including but not limited to: document development, emails, printed materials, events, virtual and in person meetings.

   • A random audit of communications activities will indicate application of accessibility best practice implementation

Teaching and Learning

Teaching and Learning Accessibility Statement

RCEs and CSAP will ensure accessibility for all students and staff in every aspect of education, and barriers to learning will be addressed in a prioritized and timely manner.

Underlying these actions is a recognition that Universal Design for Learning (UDL) considers all students in the learning process and intentionally and proactively removes barriers to learning. UDL is considerate of all students and is intent on the development of expert learners.

Accessibility Achievements

Learning Resources Achievements:

Teachers and staff are increasingly providing flexible means of representing information to students and offering content to students in accessible formats.

All RCEs/CSAP have access to some accessibility tools. For example, Chromebooks, iPads, Tablets, Read & Write for Google, OrbitNote are available for most staff and students.

Hiring and contracting for the development of new resources at the provincial level considers accessibility skills and tools.

Virtual platforms utilized for virtual meetings and learning (i.e. Zoom and/Google Meet) have built-in accessibility features.

Nova Scotia's Assistive Technology/Universal Design for Learning Lead Team are represented on resource evaluation committees.

Assistive Technology funding is available in all RCEs/CSAP.

Bias evaluations on materials are being implemented on classroom materials at different levels in education (EECD, RCEs/CSAP)

A comprehensive Learning Management System is available in all RCEs/CSAP (Google classroom) to enhance access to accessible class materials, organization and distribution of course content, work completion interface and document submission.

Access to NS Homework Hub, providing a 24/7 virtual learning support program for all students.

Mathematics interventions and numeracy and literacy support are available to any student in RCEs/CSAP.

Access to some electronic textbooks and manipulatives are available on the Student Learning Commons P-12 on some RCEs/CSAP websites.

A wide range of access to bilingual resources are available from the Canadian Francophonie (Curio, ONF, Digital Library of the Center de la francophonie des Amériques, etc.) and from the Acadian Francophone community of Nova Scotia (Acadian Cultural Federation of Nova Scotia). Some bilingual resources are in accessible formats.

CSAP has purchased Assessment of Basic Language and Learning Skills kits to assess and work on functional (life) skills for students with complex needs.

Instruction Achievements:

Many teachers are offering more voice and choice when designing lessons across subject areas and grade levels and are developing their content in a variety of accessible formats. Many teachers are utilizing accessible and assistive technology and a variety of instructional strategies to include all students across grade levels.

Staff are beginning to understand accessibility terms, such as "alt text", "style/navigation", "closed caption" and "visual layout".

Multiple means of interaction are encouraged by some teachers.

In some RCEs/CSAP, sound field systems are in 90% of classrooms.

The use of UDL is increasing in classrooms and is integrated into curricula.

Mentors and coaches are available for teachers to offer guidance, support and modeling of best practices in literacy skill development for all students.

Training in Culturally Responsive Pedagogy (CRP) for staff is available, in both official languages.

Professional Learning Achievements:

RCEs/CSAP staff are offered a wide range of professional learning opportunities related to including all students.

Some RCEs/CSAP have Collaborative Learning Teams.

Administrators are beginning to recognize the importance of training for accessibility through the UDL lens, ensuring barriers to learning are identified and removed.

There is an increase in asynchronous professional learning options, including session recordings from local and provincial virtual training.

Learning Assessment Achievements:

Universal Design for Learning is considered in the assessment policy which defines fair assessment as "all students are provided with equitable opportunities to demonstrate the extent of their learning. Fair assessment must consider access, equity, inclusion, and diversity" offering students multiple ways to demonstrate their knowledge removing many barriers to learning.

There is increasing use of accessible assessments across most subjects, including employing UDL principles in assessment design with varied means of demonstrating knowledge. Students in many courses have voice and choice in showing what they know.

Students can use Assistive Technology on provincial assessments.

Wide use of NearPod and other technology to access assessments and provide a variety of feedback formats.

Students have access to accessible and assistive technology for most assessments.

Transition Planning Achievements:

RCEs/CSAP have a transition planning process at every level.

A Student Success Liaison is available to students and schools to help transition students to distributed learning programs, as needed.

Accessibility Services and Supports Achievements:

Every region has access to specialists and other supports to ensure student engagement and well-being (i.e assistive technology specialists, autism spectrum disorder consultants, psychologists, and speech language pathologists etc.).

Literacy mentors, math mentors and instructional coaches are available to provide support in class.

A vision of Multi-Tiered System of Supports (MTSS - Tier 1, 2 and 3) has been introduced. How MTSS impacts the classroom while considering all students is being developed.

Each RCE/CSAP has Assistive Technology Support Workers to support effective implementation of Accessible and Assistive Technology recommended by Assistive Technology Staff, Speech Language Pathologists etc.

Accessibility services and supports are available in every RCE and CSAP.

CSAP is developing a framework document that defines the nature of the services at the three levels of SMSM (Système de mesures de soutien multi-niveaux [Multi-Tiered System of Supports]): 1. speech therapist, psychologists; 2. SCIP-TSA (Spécialiste en communication et intervention précoce [Communication and Early Intervention Specialist]); and 3.TSA (Trouble du spectre autistique [Autism Spectrum Disorder], resources and learning center).

There is an increase in SchoolsPlus services, acting as liaisons between the school and community and to advocate, coordinate, navigate and expand services for students and families. SchoolsPlus serves all children, youth, and families, and especially those who need additional supports and services.

Alternate Education Programs are available for students in Grades 8 through 12, who for a variety of reasons, are unable to achieve success in a traditional school environment.

Program Partnership Connections with various agencies and communities exist across the province including APSEA (Atlantic Provinces Special Education Authority) and YREACH (an expanded YMCA program [Recognizing Enhancing Aligning Community Horizons] that provides information, orientation, and settlement support to immigrants and temporary foreign workers and their families) working with local partners to create welcoming communities, with staff in smaller centres across the province.

Accessible transportation is provided for students.

Homebound support is available when, on occasion, it is impossible for some students to attend school for an extended period of time.

Assistive Technology (AT) Achievements:

Every teacher and student have access to accessibility tools, and built-in accessibility options to access information in multiple ways and encourage teachers to represent information with flexible formats, express knowledge, and enhance and/or maintain engagement and motivation for learning.

A wide range of Assistive Technology devices providing Tier 2 and Tier 3 supports for students with more specific needs are available in all RCEs/CSAP.

Targeted funding to purchase appropriate Assistive Technology and flexibility to provide follow up team training is available through grants from EECD for each RCE and CSAP.

Most regions have an established process for referring to AT Services from schools, communication with teachers/staff, identifying appropriate AT, purchasing, setting up, delivering and training on AT recommended.

In each RCE and CSAP there is provision of appropriate Augmentative and Alternative Communication devices for students with severe expressive language delays.

In each RCE and CSAP there is provision of AT for physical education for students with physical and/or complex needs.

A working relationship exists with IWK Augmentative and Alternative Communication Specialist and Occupational Therapists for students with complex needs on common caseloads.

Students Services and Assistive Technology staff work collaboratively to identify appropriate AT, placement, team training, implementation and follow up in classrooms.

RCEs and CSAP provide tiered support to students from P-12.

Transportation Achievements:

Handbook for the Transportation of Students with Special Needs EECD Policies exists and is referred to in all RCEs/CSAP.

Staff training is provided for accessible and safe conveyance.

A strong commitment and collaboration process is practiced between Student Services and Transportation (Operations) staff to meet students' needs.

Medical support plans are shared with transportation staff.

Attitudinal

Perspectives are changing on using and applying technology and assistive technology in classrooms to include all learners, resulting in more effective and accessible teaching practices.

Most staff have some understanding of accessibility, and equity versus equality.

There is more open-mindedness to changes in practice to meet the needs, strengths and interests of students.

Teaching and Learning Actions

1. **Teaching and Learning Action:** Develop or enhance a Universal Design for Learning (UDL) Lead Team within each RCE/CSAP, in alignment with the Inclusive Education Policy, MTSS and CRP. The UDL Lead Team will focus on removing barriers to learning and assessment for all students and will be leaders in the implementation of the Teaching and Learning commitments in the Joint RCEs/CSAP Accessibility Plan.

    Measure of Success: Development of a collaborative UDL Lead Team in each RCE/CSAP.

2. **Teaching and Learning Action:** Develop a UDL Implementation Plan with the objective of developing UDL capacity and the UDL mindset in all RCEs/CSAP.

    Examples of implementation ideas include:
    - Develop in-class PD.
    - Work with Universities to offer UDL cohorts for teachers interested in expanding their knowledge and credentials in this area.
    - Develop or enhance Collaborative Learning Teams (CLTs), or comparable learning process, with every CLT building their learning from a foundation of UDL principles.
    - Develop indicators of success for UDL implementation to inform measures of success in enhancing accessibility and inclusion in RCEs/CSAP.
    - Work with operations and procurement staff in each RCE/CSAP to support the implementation of accessible learning spaces for all students in any environment.

    Measure of Success: Development of UDL Implementation Plans with a focus on building capacity in UDL among all staff in RCEs and CSAP.

3. **Teaching and Learning Action:** In collaboration with EECD, develop and deliver a comprehensive training program and implementation protocol for training teachers, instructional designers, administrators, and paraprofessionals on design, development and delivery of Accessible Education Materials (AEM) and ensuring learning materials comply with <u>WCAG 2.1 standards</u>.

   Identify steps towards systematically implementing translation of accessible documents, programs, and materials into French or alternate language documents.

   Measure of Success:

   - Design and delivery of a comprehensive training program on AEM.
   - Complete a random audit of resources staff are utilizing in classrooms to indicate application of AEM training.
   - Gather and share impact statements from staff and students on use and application of AEMs.

4. **Teaching and Learning Action:** Enhance existing and develop new training opportunities in accessibility and assistive technology to address Tier 1, 2 and 3 supports including virtual, synchronous, asynchronous, live, PD days, in-service days, and micro-credentials).

   Measure of Success: Increased number of accessible and assistive technology training opportunities throughout RCEs/CSAP.

5. **Teaching and Learning Action:** Enhance collaboration between Programs and Student Services staff across RCEs/CSAP.

   This includes:

   - Collaboration on staff training.
   - Collaboration to improve ability to provide supports and services in classrooms and model UDL practices.
   - Enhanced collaboration with EECD on various projects. requiring accessibility reviews (for example, the NS Homework Hub).
   - Collaboration with the Distributed Learning Course Development Team (DLCDT) to embed UDL and AEM in accessible course design and delivery. Provide UDL and AEM training to the DLCDT, as needed.
   - Collaboration with EECD to review and update the 2011 Handbook for the Transportation of Students with Special Needs.

Measure of Success:

- Demonstrated collaboration between RCEs/CSAP and EECD on projects requiring accessibility reviews.
- Demonstrated collaboration between Programs and Student Services staff across RCEs/CSAP.
- Completed review of the 2011 Handbook for the Transportation of Students with Special Needs, with identification and plans to address any required accessibility updates/gaps.

6. **Teaching and Learning Action:** Design, develop and distribute accessibility charts or checklists for distribution to ALL staff. For example, how to design accessible presentations; developing accessible documents; delivering accessible presentations. Make resources available on the GNSPES launch page.

   Measure of Success: Accessibility charts or checklists are designed and published (in accessible formats) for staff and distributed to staff across RCEs/CSAP.

7. **Teaching and Learning Action:** In collaboration with EECD, develop province-wide repository for accessible digital textbooks, novels etc. Ensure French and English accessible resources are available.

   Measure of Success: Development of a province-wide repository for accessible education materials.

8. **Teaching and Learning Action:** Continue and enhance communication and collaboration between RCEs/CSAP Student Services and IWK Augmentative and Alternative Communication Services and Occupational Therapy Services.

   Measure of Success: Enhanced communication between RCEs/CSAP and IWK AAC and OT services.

9. **Teaching and Learning Action:** In collaboration with EECD, consider development of a technology refreshment policy and funding, including consideration of technology that is interoperable with Assistive Technology.

   Measure of Success: Technology refreshment plan is in place provincewide.

10. **Teaching and Learning Action:** Regional Board Technology Team (RBTS) and AT/UDL Lead Team will establish a process for personal devices provided by APSEA specifically for AT to access school wifi (not restricted public wifi) so they can be used in schools by students with disabilities.

    Measure of Success: A process is developed and tested to allow specialized assistive devices provided by APSEA or RCE/CSAP AT, AAC, other specialists to access school wifi and not a less robust guest network.

11. **Teaching and Learning Action:** Build connections regarding transitioning between RCE/CSAP high school (school counsellors, LST teachers) and post-secondary accessibility facilitators to ensure students are connected with appropriate post-secondary supports including:

    • Ensuring awareness of teachers/students/families of Content Management System and other software packages (i.e. Office 365) platforms used in post-secondary schools, and how training for students might be implemented.

    • Developing a system to ensure school counsellors are familiar with all scholarships and grants available for students with disabilities.

    Measure of Success: An improved, established communication system between RCE/CSAP team members of students with disabilities and post secondary accessibility facilitators that enhances transitioning practices.

12. **Teaching and Learning Action:** Develop a process to ensure NS Virtual School teachers can access TIENET/PowerSchool to support NSVS students from all RCEs.

    Measure of Success: Ability of NSVS teachers to access TIENET /PowerSchool.

13. **Teaching and Learning Action:** Identify the issues involved that are impacting substandard internet/wifi access at some schools presenting barriers to learning for students.

    Programs and Services staff will work with Operations departments to identify and remove barriers to adequate internet/wifi impacting learning. (i.e. identify areas in buildings consistently dropping, provide training to staff/students on effective use, etc.

    Measure of Success: Work towards robust and reliable wifi within each RCE/CSAP school/ learning facility.

Potential Future Actions

1. **Potential Future Action:** Continued collaboration between RBTS and Assistive Technology/ Universal Design for Learning Lead team to ensure interoperability between AT and IT.

    Measure of Success: TBD

2. **Potential Future Action:** An established and consistent management system for tablets (iPads etc) for all RCEs/CSAP, impacting timely delivery of AT to students.

    Measure of Success: TBD

3. **Potential Future Action:** A process for vetting online materials, (i.e. purchased digital materials and print materials) through an accessibility lens to ensure learning materials are accessible, free of bias and representative and considerate of various cultures. Ensure French and English accessible resources are available.

   Measure of Success: TBD

Employment

Employment Accessibility Commitment Statement

RCEs and CSAP will ensure that persons with disabilities can access and fully engage as employees in all aspects of the organization.

Human Resource Policies Achievements

Provincial Inclusive Education Policy provides a framework for inclusion. Each region has policies and some procedures posted on their website related to Accessibility and Human Resources (HR).

Some Employment Equity policies have language that refers to persons with unique needs or persons with disabilities.

Human Resource Document Achievements

Some HR employees throughout the RCEs and CSAP know the procedures for creating accessible content.

Some recruitment forms, websites, documents utilized in RCEs/CSAP are currently accessible to read aloud and other accessibility options.

Recruitment Achievements

All RCEs/CSAP consider the recruitment process supporting the concept of universal design for learning.

There is an inclusion statement on all Splash Pages of RCEs/CSAP employment recruitment systems.

RCEs are using SuccessFactor as a recruitment tool for most of their vacancies, which has built in accessibility-features.

Each RCE/CSAP has a general website compatible with technology and assistive technology for all applicants.

In all RCEs/CSAP, employment screening question sections can be "read aloud".

Interviews Achievements

In some RCEs/CSAP, laptops with built in accessibility options are provided to prospective employees during an interview.

Questions are provided in hard copy and/or accessible format to interviewees just prior to the interview.

Option to participate in a virtual interview with accessibility options is available.

If translation is identified as a need during an interview, translation is available.

Onboarding Achievements

In all RCEs/CSAP, offer letters are in basic accessible electronic formats.

Most documents in New Hire Package are in a basic electronic PDF format that is accessible by some assistive technology.

In RCEs/CSAP, information provided to new hires include access to "read aloud".

Awareness and Training Achievements

All HR leadership in RCEs/CSAP are aware of the Accessibility Act and the Act's requirements.

Vector Solution, the training site used by RCEs/CSAP, has "read aloud" ability on the main page and certificates.

Other Achievements

All RCEs/CSAP provide access to programs through Return to Work Program, EAP, OHS and NSTU EIP.

Supports and services for injury at work are available through WCB and IOD.

Employment Actions

1.   **Employment Action:**
    a)   Use Provincial Inclusive Education Policy as a foundation document to develop HR Accessibility Guidelines. Incorporate HR Accessibility Guidelines into the development of an HR Accessibility Policy.
    b)   Complete a full review of HR policies to ensure that they reflect the Accessibility Act.
    Measure of Success:
    •   Development of Human Resources Accessibility Guidelines and Policy.
    •   A completed review of HR policies through the lens of accessibility and recommendations to the Provincial Policy Committee.

2. **Employment Action:**
   a) Through the development and delivery of training programs, ensure all HR employees understand the Accessibility Act and their responsibilities related to the Joint RCEs/CSAP Accessibility Plan and accessibility standards, when enacted.
   b) Staff completes professional learning on accessible employment, accessible HR, disability rights, barriers for staff with disabilities etc.

   Measure of Success: Each HR staff person shall complete at least one regionally recognized training program on accessibility annually.

3. **Employment Action:** Through the development and delivery of training programs, ensure that HR employees have the training, software and appropriate technology to develop accessible documents, forms, presentations, etc.

   Measure of Success: Random audit results of various documents utilized in HR indicate design for accessibility.

4. **Employment Action:** Identify and ensure all documents that interface with recruitment systems, and the recruitment systems themselves, are accessible and interoperable with assistive technologies, with provision of annual monitoring to ensure ongoing compatibility.

   Measure of Success: Completion of recruitment process audits for accessibility.

5. **Employment Action:** Complete a jurisdictional scan of hiring systems utilized by RCEs/ CSAP through an accessibility lens to identify and address accessibility barriers.

   Measure of Success: Jurisdictional scan of hiring systems through an accessibility plan informs further actions to enhance accessibility of hiring systems in RCEs/CSAP.

6. **Employment Action:** Engage a user of assistive technology to test accessibility of RCEs/ CSAP employment websites, documents, procedures. Note: this could be a student who is a user of AT.

   Measure of Success: User with First Voice experience to "test drive" Splash Pages, Success Factor, recruitment documents, forms, websites that will inform next steps for ensuring accessibility for all.

7. **Employment Action:** Collaborate with RCEs/CSAP Communication Depts to ensure employment websites meet the WCAG 2.1 standards.

   Measure of Success: A random accessibility audit of employment websites indicate compliance with WCAG 2.1 standards.

8. **Employment Action:** Ensure that inclusion statements on employment homepages and job postings include disability statements and to advise applicants that accessibility accommodations are available.

   Measure of Success: All job postings shared with potential employees include disability and accessibility statements and are provided in accessible formats.

9. **Employment Action:** Review RCEs/CSAP job descriptions with an accessibility lens to identify and address accessibility barriers.

   Measure of Success: All job descriptions are reviewed and considerate of accessibility.

10. **Employment Action:** Develop a regional accessibility employment distribution checklist to ensure job opportunities are shared with various stakeholder groups.

    Measure of Success: Audit the use of an RCE/CSAP accessible employment distribution checklist.

11. **Employment Action:** Complete a review of screening questions and procedures to ensure unintentional exclusions and biases do not exist.

    Measure of Success: All employment screening questions and procedures are clear of unintentional biases or discrimination.

12. **Employment Action:** Develop an Interview Accessibility Checklist. Ensure it is distributed and used by all RCEs/CSAP HR departments.

    Measure of Success: Development and use of an Interview Accessibility Checklist for RCEs/CSAP.

13. **Employment Action:** Complete a review of Offer Letter formats to include accommodation statements and ensure the format of offer letters, and any relevant employment forms, are accessible (i.e. accessible pdfs).

    Measure of Success: A random audit where offer letters and employment forms are in accessible formats and include an accommodation statement.

14. **Employment Action:** Complete a review of onboarding information to ensure it is accessible.

    Measure of Success: All onboarding information and activities are accessible to all new hires.

15. **Employment Action:** Complete an accessibility audit of Hire Package Documents to ensure they are accessible.

    Measure of Success: All Hire Packages are available and distributed in accessible formats.

16. **Employment Action:** Review and identify all methods of training used by RCEs/CSAP to ensure they are accessible and provided in alternate formats.

    Measure of Success: All training is designed and delivered with accessibility in mind.

17. **Employment Action:** Ensure accommodations are provided for those who identify accessibility requirements during training.

    Measure of Success: Accommodations are provided during training sessions.

Potential Future Actions

1. **Potential Future Action:** Review all processes related to accommodation policies and procedures to ensure all accessibility barriers are removed.

    Measure of Success: TBD

Built Environment

Built Environment Commitment to Accessibility Statement

RCEs and CSAP will work collaboratively to identify, prevent and remove accessibility barriers in buildings and outdoor learning spaces aiming to provide meaningful access for partners including students, staff, families, and community members.

Operations Accessibility Achievements

Some operations staff throughout some RCEs/CSAP have acquired Rick Hansen Foundation Accessibility Certification™ Training.

A standard Accessibility Review template has been developed to assess the accessibility of playgrounds, exterior approaches, parking, ramps, interior design, emergency systems, signage and wayfinding, and washrooms for our facilities. These reviews determine accessibility for various disabilities, well beyond mobility.

Enough schools have undergone accessibility reviews for regions to develop short term goals and determine barriers that exist within each category.

Significant work has been undertaken in recent projects and most regions are adding accessibility lenses to future projects to ensure accessibility requirements are incorporated. Some operations staff throughout the province have been trained in Built Environment and Accessibility.

Access is available in most schools for students (accessible walkways, ramps, accessible entry buttons for all, accessible elevators).

Outdoor classrooms being built consider accessibility.

Some outdoor trails accessed by students are accessible.

Accessible learning commons are available in many schools.

Sensory rooms are available in some schools.

Some playgrounds have accessibility features.

Inter-building walkways exist in some schools.

New school construction includes accessibility features (visual fire alarms, elevators, navigable spaces, braille labels…).

Built Environment Actions

1. **Built Environment Action:** Accessibility reviews will be completed by each RCE/CSAP to develop implementation plans for each action within the Joint RCEs/CSAP Accessibility Plan.

   Measure of Success: Completed Accessibility Reviews that will inform each RCE/CSAP Accessibility Implementation Plan.

2. **Built Environment Action:** Create deficiency lists to categorize and assign accessibility work required to assist with planning.

   Measure of Success: Accessibility deficiency lists detailing targeted areas of work in each RCE/CSAP that enhances accessibility.

3. **Built Environment Action:** Undertake short term work to remove barriers that are within the financial and human resources envelope for the current budget year. This may include, but is not limited to, enhancing accessible parking, moving equipment and fixtures to accessible heights, creating colour contrasts, and improving signage.

   Measure of Success: A number of short-term projects that directly impact and enhance accessibility in RCEs/CSAP, including but not limited to:
   - Enhancing accessible parking
   - Adjusting fixtures to accessible height
   - Enhancing colour contrasts in certain buildings/areas
   - Improving accessible signage

4. **Built Environment Action:** Develop a long-term plan, along with costs, barriers, and resources required to meet Built Environment Accessibility Standards when enacted within each RCE/CSAP.

    Measure of Success: The development of a long-term plan to meet the Built Environment Accessibility Standards in each RCE and CSAP.

5. **Built Environment Action:** Create internal training programs to increase awareness for all staff and stakeholder groups on barrier free environments and accessibility.

    Measure of Success: Design and delivery of a number of internal training programs increasing awareness on barrier free environments and accessibility.

6. **Built Environment Action:** Ensure accessibility for all is the primary consideration in any future capital projects, new school requests, and major alteration projects.

    Measure of Success: Funding requests will include repairs and renovations required to increase built environment accessibility, where applicable.

7. **Built Environment Action:** Develop comprehensive plans with resource requirements to seek funding opportunities to complete accessibility upgrades.

    Measure of Success: Long term accessibility requirements will be documented and costed, where possible, to utilize when funding opportunities become available.

8. **Built Environment Action:** Work with partners and provincial authorities to address accessibility of playgrounds.

    Measure of Success: Create checklists, guidelines and/or consultation processes for accessible playground development.

9. **Built Environment Action:** Establish guidelines that ensure an accessibility lens for projects related to the built environment.

    Measure of Success: A provincial guideline on accessibility for Operations in RCEs/CSAP.

Procurement

Procurement Accessibility Commitment Statement

RCEs and CSAP will ensure that accessibility is incorporated into procurement policies, procedures and practices. Vendors will be made aware of accessibility expectations and required to prevent and remove barriers to persons with disabilities when providing services to any RCE and CSAP.

Procurement Achievements

When goods and services are purchased in each RCE/CSAP, accessibility is considered based on specific needs (i.e. ergonomic desks are purchased if required for the individual employee.).

The tendering process has some accessibility considerations, including some tenders received by hard copy and some in digital format.

Tenders include current accessibility requirements for goods and construction, as detailed by Operations and associated consultants and architects.

AVRCE has a tender website platform which allows posting of all requirements and acceptance of bids electronically. If a requirement for physical drop-off or alternate electronic submissions (email/fax) is required for accessibility reasons, it is accommodated. The website has practically eliminated requests for alternate means of submission of bids.

AVRCE uses the Procurement NS website as well as its own AVRCE website, where documents and bids are posted and tracked. Accessibility is a consideration in website design.

Request For Proposal (RFP) documents are edited for accessibility requirements on a case by case basis.

RFPs are created and shared on the Procurement NS website which is accessible to most potential vendors.

SAP Accounting Software is used to record the transactions in the procurement process making it mostly electronic.

Finance department works with any new Budget Managers (i.e. Education Team staff, Operations department or school administration) to train them on the procurement process. Some accessibility is considered in the process.

Procurement Actions

1. **Procurement Action:**

   a) In collaboration with Programs and Student Services and Operations, develop a document to guide consideration of accessibility for the most prevalent goods/services purchased.

   b) Use the guide to ensure accessibility considerations when purchasing goods and services.

   Measure of Success: Development of a collaborative accessibility guide for the most prevalent goods/services purchased in RCEs/CSAP.

2. **Procurement Action:**

   a) Collaborate with vendors to develop a listing of potential features on commonly purchased goods that can be used when purchasing those goods.

   b) Use the listing to ensure accessibility is considered when purchasing commonly purchased goods.

   Measure of Success: Development of a vendor guide of accessible features on commonly purchased goods to inform purchasing, and use of that feature list to inform accessible purchases.

3. **Procurement Action:** Review and develop accessible options for tendering, including an online portal for vendors to submit tenders electronically and be provided a date stamp.

   Measure of Success: Documentation of review of the tendering process and development of an alternate mode of tender submission in accessible formats.

4. **Procurement Action:**

   a) Review process of acceptance of tenders via email to assess for and remove accessibility barriers.

   b) Ensure the acceptance response is in an accessible format and includes a clause specifying the proposal is not accepted until receipt of acknowledgement from the Procurement office.

   Measure of Success: Review the tender process for acceptance via email (a more accessible format).

5. **Procurement Action:**
   a) Develop and embed accessibility language in all RFP documents across all RCEs/CSAP and edit regionally depending on the RFP.
   b) Embed accessibility criteria into RFPs and evaluate bids based on accessibility.

   Measure of Success:
   - Random audit of RFPs to gauge appropriate language for accessibility.
   - Random reviews of evaluating bids based on accessibility.

6. **Procurement Action:** Work with government to complete a scan of Procurement NS website to ensure compliance with <u>WCAG 2.1 standards</u> and remove all barriers to procurement websites.

   Measure of Success: All Procurement NS websites meet WCAG 2.1 standards.

7. **Procurement Action:**
   a) Collaborate with Procurement NS to determine if procurement documents are fully accessible.
   b) Work with government to ensure all documents posted on the Procurement NS website are in an accessible format.

   Measure of Success: All Procurement NS documents are accessible.

8. **Procurement Action:** Interview a diversity of vendors to determine if there is a more accessible way to communicate the RFPs issued (both location and format). Implement those changes as suggested, wherever possible.

   Measure of Success: Completion of a randomized document scan to gauge level of accessibility in Procurement procedures.

9. **Procurement Action:** Complete a comprehensive review of the ways RCEs/CSAP are designing, writing and creating accessible documents related to procurement to identify and remove accessibility barriers.

   Measure of Success: Collaborative meetings with vendors identifying optimal and most accessible means of communicating.

10. **Procurement Action:** Provide staff training to procurement staff on how develop accessible materials according to WCAG 2.1 standards.

    Measure of Success: Documentation of training programs on designing, creating and distributing information based on WCAG 2.1 standards.

11. **Procurement Action:** Review the SAP Modernization Project underway to ensure the new system framework includes accessibility options. This review should include the vendor portal (Ariba).

    Measure of Success: Report from the review of the SAP Modernization Project from an accessibility lens.

12. **Procurement Action:**

    a) Review vendor onboarding materials at each regional office to ensure they are accessible to all and meet the <u>WCAG 2.1 standards</u>.

    b) Ensure all documents within the onboarding process are provided in accessible formats.

    Measure of Success:

    - Report on levels of accessibility of onboarding materials across RCEs/CSAP.
    - All onboarding materials are provided in accessible formats.

13. **Procurement Action:** Collaborate provincially to identify how the procurement team can be more accessible and implement those changes (for example, tools to be able to receive POs and queries in more accessible formats).

    Measure of Success: Provincial scope brainstorming session held to determine what and how to implement changes to enhance accessibility in the procurement process.

14. **Procurement Action:** Review the best practice process of obtaining "best price" for goods vs accessible features which might cost more.

    Measure of Success: Report on the best practice from the perspective of cost vs accessibility (which in the long run might cost less).

15. **Procurement Action:** Develop an attestation for the purchaser to sign off on stating they have considered/ procured based on what they believe is accessible.

    Measure of Success: Development of an attestation that the purchaser can state they have considered accessibility in the tender process.

Monitoring and Evaluation

Measures of Success are embedded in the Joint RCE/CSAP Accessibility Plan. Each RCE and CSAP will adopt the Joint RCE/CSAP Accessibility Plan and develop individual implementation plans. Progress will be monitored and reported on when the plan is updated by 2026, as required under the Accessibility Act.

Next Steps

This plan will be shared with our partners including RCEs/CSAP staff, EECD and the Accessibility Advisory Committee. The plan will then be submitted to the Government of Nova Scotia's Accessibility Directorate.

The RCEs and CSAP will develop a communication plan to promote the accessibility plan. All materials will be in an accessible format.

Next, each RCE and CSAP will develop implementation plans.

Glossary

Accessible – Free of barriers that hinder the full and effective participation of persons with disabilities, Deaf and neurodivergent persons.

Accessible formats – Current, quality print, electronic, audio, or visual material that is formatted so that people with disabilities, Deaf and neurodivergent people can equitably access the information presented. This may include (but is not limited to) ensuring compatibility with appropriate assistive technology, closed captioning, described video, large print, plain language, easy read, and video transcripts.

Accessibility services – Programs, services, processes, and policies related to assistive technology, accessibility accommodations, assessment processes, communication and interpretation services, transition planning, and others that ensure access to learning and learning communities.

Appropriate assistive technology – Any device, software, service or product system, including service animals, that reduces individual barriers to accessing and engaging in all aspects of a learning community including social, emotional, academic, and daily living activities and experiences. Assistive technology matches the specific functional skill needs, strengths and challenges of the individual with a disability, and is, as much as possible, current and up to date technology.

Barrier – Anything that hinders or challenges the full and effective participation in society of persons with disabilities, Deaf and neurodivergent persons. Barriers may be systemic, structural and individual, and can take the form of physical barriers, architecture, information, communications, attitudes, technology, policies, or practices.

Curricula – Expectations of learning through objectives and outcomes that are aligned to principles, competencies, skills, and concepts. Curricula is relevant for all learners across curricular areas, and grounded in effective, evidence-based instruction and assessment practices. It is inclusive, culturally responsive, and developed using principles of universal design for learning. Curricula takes into consideration and caters to the diverse needs, previous experiences, interests and personal characteristics of all learners. It attempts to ensure that all students are part of the shared learning experiences of the classroom and that equal opportunities are provided regardless of learner differences.

Deaf[1] – A sociological term referring to those individuals who are medically deaf or hard of hearing who identify with and participate in the culture, society, and language of Deaf people, which is based on Sign language.

Disability[2] – A physical, mental, intellectual, learning or sensory impairment, including an episodic disability, that, in interaction with a barrier, hinders an individual's full and effective participation in society.

Equity/Equitable – Equity means ensuring everyone has the opportunity to access and participate in all aspects of society. This means expecting and welcoming diversity, understanding and addressing unfair systems, practices, and policies, and removing specific and diverse barriers to access and participation.

First Voice – First voice perspectives refer to the knowledge generated by persons with disabilities, Deaf, and neurodivergent persons that emerges from lived experience, community connections, knowledge traditions, and scholarly activities that are typically undervalued and underrepresented.

Learning Assessment – A process or activity used to determine whether, and to what extent, a learner is making progress. This can take different forms and approaches including, but not limited to, diagnostic, formative, summative, authentic, and standardized assessments, including provincial assessments and exams.

Learning Resources – Resources and tools used to support learning, such as syllabi, articles, videos, online resources, teacher guides, textbooks, and all materials and resources distributed to students and staff for virtual learning and those uploaded to and used on virtual learning spaces.

Neurodivergent – Neurodivergent means having a brain that functions in ways that diverge significantly from the dominant societal standards of "normal". It recognizes diverse neurologies and ways of being, as variation of human experience, rather than deficiency in need of remediation or cure. It includes those who identify with autism spectrum disorder, ADHD, Tourette's syndrome, and dyslexia, to name a few[3].

Learning Spaces – Physical and digital spaces, where teaching and learning occurs. This includes both indoor and outdoor spaces, and spaces utilized during class trips, extra-curricular activities, breaks between classes, and while at conferences, in meetings, and on practicums and work and community placements.

Transition Planning – The collaborative, learner-centered process to develop and implement plans to guide the transition from one stage of learning to another. This includes transitioning between courses, learning spaces, grade levels, education levels, and from education to employment or community living.

[1] Canadian Association of the Deaf
[2] Nova Scotia Accessibility Act
[3] Scorgie, K. & Forlin, C. (2019). Promoting Social Inclusion: Co-Creating Environments that Foster Equity and Belonging.

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RCEs/CSAP Staff

We would also like to thank all RCEs/CSAP staff including Directors, Facilitators, and Coordinators staff for their contributions to the plan.

Appendix A – Future Considerations

All RCEs and CSAP launched a public consultation in February 2023 to get feedback on the draft plan from students, families, community and staff from across the province.

- ThoughtExchange summary report
- ThoughtExchange full list of submitted thoughts

This feedback was reviewed and discussed by the Accessibility Advisory Committee. From those discussions, several themes emerged that may not be reflected directly in the plan but should be documented for future consideration.

These themes included:

Compliance

What does compliance look like? How is the plan going to be assessed, how often, and by who? Definitive measures need to be put in place for accountability.

Education

Education for all staff and students, including the development of any necessary training. This includes setting clear expectations for all members of the school community. Examples could include creating accessibility checklists and inventories for schools.

Feedback

Ensuring feedback continues, including ongoing access to First Voice and the Accessibility Advisory Committee. Continue to collect feedback and information regarding the impact of the plan as it's being enacted.

Timelines

Ensure realistic timelines to set clear expectations for all.