# Evergreen Multi-Year Accessibility Plan

**Prepared by**

**Evergreen School Division's Accessibility Steering Committee**

**In accordance with The Accessibility for Manitobans Act (AMA), 2013**

**This publication is available through the Evergreen School Division website: www. esd.ca**

## Introduction

The Evergreen School Division is committed to providing services to our students, parents / guardians, staff and community at large that are free of barriers and biases.  This Accessibility Plan is developed in accordance with the Accessibility for Manitobans Act (AMA, 2013).  The legislation requires accessibility standards to be developed over the next several years.  The standards will address barriers and set out requirements in five key areas of daily living.

1. Customer service standard
2. Information and communication
3. Transportation
4. Employment
5. Built environment

## Educational Values and Beliefs

*Vision*: *Learning Today to Improve Tomorrow*

**Mission**: *Evergreen School Division will engage students in learning to become contributing citizens of a democratic society*

1. **Students Come First**

   a. success for every student every day is the goal of our work
   b. every student is capable of learning
   c. every student has individual strengths and learns in a unique way
   d. a strength based approach will be used to support student learning and socio-emotional development
   e. every student is respected and in turn respects others
   f. the diversity of our students will be acknowledged, recognized and celebrated
   g. student learning is the basis for all school system decision making and leadership
   h. resources will be used effectively and responsibly to meet students learning needs
   i. student voice informs decision making

2. **Learning is Our Core Purpose**

   a. learning empowers people to achieve their potential
   b. learning requires relevance and engagement
   c. learning requires a safe, caring and respectful environment
   d. positive relationships are critical to the learning process
   e. every person has responsibility for his/her own learning
   f. learning requires a balance between social, institutional and intellectual engagement
   g. learning requires clean, well maintained and aesthetically pleasing physical environments
   h. learning and engagement is enhanced through the infusion of information and communication technologies in conjunction with effective pedagogy

**3. Public Education Serves the Common Good**

    a.    public education is essential for a vibrant democracy and a sustainable future

    b.    public education develops citizens who work toward the betterment of their family, community and the world

    c.    public education is a shared responsibility of the home, school, and community

    d.    public education requires a balance between academic, personal/social and physical development

    e.    public education provides a foundation for life-long learning and responsible citizenship

    f.    public education must be responsive to the changing needs of society

## About our School Division

**Total Enrollment**     1460

**Annual Budget (2016-2017)**  $20,858,988

**Division Area (sq. km.)**   2,424

**Number of Schools**    8

**Facilities**       5
 Education Support Centre
 Technological Entrepreneurship Centre (TEC)
 Bus Garages - Gimli/Arborg
 Maintenance Facility

**Number of Bus Routes**   24

**Pupils Transported**    1115

**Distance Driven per day (km)**  3, 892

**Employees**      262

**Trustees**       9

**Employees**

| | |
|---|---|
| Teachers, Principals, Clinicians | 124 |
| Teacher Assistants | 57 |
| Secretaries/Librarians | 18 |
| Custodial, Maintenance | 24 |
| Bus Drivers, Mechanics | 24 |
| Senior Administration | 4 |
| Education Support Centre | 11 |
| Total | <u>262</u> |

**Enrollment** (as of September 30, 2016)

| | |
|---|---|
| Kindergarten | 108 |
| Early Years (Gr. 1-4) | 405 |
| Middle Years (Gr. 5-8) | 424 |
| Senior Years (Gr. 9-12) | 523 |
| Total | <u>1460</u> |

## Objectives:

This Plan: The Accessibility Plan will be established, reviewed and updated in consultation with the Accessibility Planning Committee and consult with persons with disabilities.

Describes the processes by which Evergreen School Division will **identify** barriers to Accessibility.

Describes the measures Evergreen School Division will take to **remove** barriers to Accessibility. Makes a commitment to **prevent** barriers to Accessibility

Makes a commitment to **report on, review and update** this multi-year plan annually.

## Commitment Statement

The Evergreen School Division School Board is committed to providing services to our students, parents/guardians, the public and our staff that are free of barriers and biases.  Evergreen School Division strives to ensure that key principles of independence, dignity, integration and quality of opportunity are reflected and valued in our learning and working environments.  The commitment is to:

- Maintain an Accessibility Planning Committee

- Ensure, wherever practicable, that Board policies, regulations and procedures are consistent with the principles of accessibility.  The Accessibility Planning Committee will provide input re: accessibility issues, where appropriate, with regard to new policies, regulations and procedures and to those under review.

- Improve practices and services for students, staff, parents/guardians, volunteers, and members of the community.  Consideration of barriers to accessibility and how to provide services by removing barriers that may exist.  Barriers may include attitudinal barriers, informational and communication barriers, technological barriers, systemic barriers and physical and architectural barriers.

## Baseline: Accessibility/Achievements

**Policy Statement:**

Evergreen School Division is committed to inclusion and has already developed practices and procedures to ensure equal access to students who have accessibility challenges. Evergreen will further develop and put into place measures, policies and regulations and procedures and practices that will help ensure barrier-free accessibility for people with disabilities, seniors, and others with challenges to mobility, communication, understanding or health concerns.

**Accessibility achievements:**

The Evergreen School Division senior management team, superintendents and school trustees, show strong leadership and place a strong emphasis on meeting the needs of all students. Because relationships matter, senior management is concerned about the safety and well-being of all persons (students, families, and employees) and the important work of schools. The leadership team references the division's vision, priorities, and deeper learning plan in all aspects of educational, operational and fiscal decision making. Additional members of the senior management leadership team committed to accessibility for inclusive learning community are:

- Evergreen School Division has in place hiring policies and practices to ensure potential employees have access to employment opportunities and are representative of a diverse population.

- The Transportation and Maintenance Department is diligent in addressing accessibility in all buildings and facilities. Maintenance staff respond promptly to broken or failing equipment, when notified. Custodial staff are well supervised and attend promptly to barriers, such as clear pathways on all divisional properties. Procedures in place for reporting faulty or broken equipment, and maintenance repairs and improvements.

- The Information Technologies Department manages divisional and school websites, public notices, news releases and divisional publications for student, community, and employee access. The IT Manager is attentive to new technologies that impact the learning needs of students and the professional development/training needs of employees: optimizing digital technologies to improve accessibility and independence. Procedures in place for requesting technology improvements and reporting services disruptions.

- The Student Services Department ensures that appropriate education programming regulations are strictly adhered to and promotes a philosophy of inclusion, advocates and seek to ensure implementation of assistive technologies and accessibility for students, staff and community wherever needed.

- As a public sector organization, Evergreen currently adheres to the Education Administration Act (EAA), Public School Act (PSA), Appropriate Educational Programming Regulations (AEP regs.); and related amendments to legislation. Educational staff strive to promote inclusive school communities by differentiating instruction, adapting teaching methodology and curricula and accommodating the needs of persons with disabilities in the classroom and larger school community.

**Barrier Prevention and Removal:**

Beginning in November 2016, there will be a lens on the identification, removal and prevention of barriers for Accessibility specific to the Customer Service Standard.  Evergreen School Division will ensure continuous improvement in accessibility.  This process will continue through and beyond the establishment of an initial one-year plan which places particular emphasis on the provisions of the regulation made under the AMA with regard to Customer Service

**Customer Service: Barriers to be addressed by September 2017 under this Multi-Year Accessibility Plan:**

The Customer Service Standard under the Accessibility for Manitobans Act, 2013 identified specific requirements to achieve accessibility in the area of Customer Service.  Evergreen School Division intends, through this next year, under the multi-year Accessibility Plan, to take action to address barriers to accessibility related to the Standards for Customer Service.  This plan will continue to evolve, as framed below, once the Planning Committee has identified the barriers that exist and reviewed existing practices and regulations and procedures. This process will aim to be solution focused.  The Plan, over this one-year period, is to map and carry out a detailed plan to comply with the Accessibility Standard of Customer Service by September 2017.

Evergreen 's initial steps, to be compliant with the Customer Service Standard by September 2017 will be to identify barriers that exist and address barriers that are identified. Evergreen will identify barriers, review existing practices and regulations and procedures and where necessary introduce measures, regulation and procedures and practices to:

- Meet the communication needs of clients.
- Allow assistive devices.
- Welcome support persons.
- Allow people with service animals.
- Review physical barriers to access.
- Let customers know when accessible services aren't available.
- Invite customers to provide feedback.
- Train staff on accessible customer service.


**Barrier Identification Methodology:**

The accessibility working group will use the following barrier identification methodology:

- Ongoing reference to the Accessibility for Manitoban's Act, 2013.
- Brainstorm with the Planning Committee a list of known and suspected barriers to determine the extent of known and suspected barriers within the Division.
- Discussions with principals for information sharing and feedback around known and suspected barriers within the Division.
- Solicit suggestions from employees, volunteers, students and others outside the organization to improve accessibility. This will be done through the Division website, Twitter, Facebook and consultations.
- Provide an opportunity, through a survey, focus groups, phone calls and interviews, for employees, volunteers, students and others outside the organization to provide input on the accessibility of the organization.
- Communication to stakeholders through newsletters, the Division website, Twitter and Facebook.
- Provide a copy of the Accessibility plan that is developed with questions to invite feedback and a response mechanism.

**Review and Monitoring Process:**

The Accessibility Planning Committee will meet regularly during the year to first identify the barriers and gaps in policies, regulation and procedures and practices and to develop a solution focused strategy as a priority in our Accessibility Plan.  Following its development, the Committee will review progress and evaluate the effectiveness of implementation of barrier removal and prevention strategies and to plan for increased accessibility throughout the Division.  On an annual basis the Committee will challenge themselves to continue to plan for improved accessibility in all five standards.

**Communication of the Accessibility Plan:**

The plan will be available on our School Division website at [www.esd.ca](www.esd.ca).  Upon request, the plan will be made available in alternative formats.  Questions, Comments or feedback regarding Evergreen's multi-year Accessibility Plan are welcome.  Please direct any questions or comments to Elaine Kowalchuk, Accessibility Plan Coordinator at [Elaine.Kowalchuk@esd.ca](Elaine.Kowalchuk@esd.ca), or 204-642-6260.

**APPENDIX A:** THE ACCESSIBILITY FOR MANITOBANS ACT (AMA)

(Assented to December 5, 2013)

WHEREAS achieving accessibility will improve the health, independence and well-being of persons disabled by barriers;

AND WHEREAS most Manitobans will confront barriers to accessibility at some point in their lives;

AND WHEREAS persons disabled by barriers face a wide range of obstacles that prevent them from achieving equal opportunities, independence and full economic and social integration;

AND WHEREAS barriers create considerable costs to persons disabled by those barriers, their families and friends, and to communities and the economy;

AND WHEREAS in developing our built environment, barriers have been perpetuated;

AND WHEREAS a systemic and proactive approach for identifying, preventing and removing barriers complements *The Human Rights Code* in ensuring accessibility for Manitobans;

AND WHEREAS under the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, which Canada ratified in 2010, member states are expected to take appropriate measures to ensure accessibility and independent living;

AND WHEREAS the equality rights of all Canadians, including persons disabled by barriers, are enshrined in the *Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms*.

**Purpose**

2(1) The purpose of this Act is to achieve accessibility by preventing and removing barriers that disable people with respect to:

(a) employment;

(b) accommodation;

(c) the built environment, including

(i) facilities, buildings, structures and premises, and

(ii) public transportation and transportation infrastructure;

(d) the delivery and receipt of goods, services and information; and

(e) a prescribed activity or undertaking.

**Principles**

2(2) In achieving accessibility, regard must be had for the following principles:

**Access:** Persons should have barrier-free access to places, events and other functions that are generally available in the community;

**Equality:** Persons should have barrier-free access to those things that will give them equality of opportunity and outcome;

**Universal design:** Access should be provided in a manner that does not establish or perpetuate differences based on a person's disability;

**Systemic responsibility:** The responsibility to prevent and remove barriers rests with the person or organization that is responsible for establishing or perpetuating the barrier.

**Recognition of existing legal obligations**

2(3) Nothing in this Act or the regulations diminishes the obligations of a person or organization with respect to persons with disabilities under any other enactment, and, in particular, under *The Human Rights Code*.

**What is a barrier?**

3(1) For a person who has a physical, mental, intellectual or sensory disability, a barrier is anything that interacts with that disability in a way that may hinder the person's full and effective participation in society on an equal basis.

**Examples of barriers**

3(2) The following are examples of barriers:

>    (a) a physical barrier;

>    (b) an architectural barrier;

>    (c) an information or communications barrier;

>    (d) an attitudinal barrier;

>    (e) a technological barrier;

>    (f) a barrier established or perpetuated by an enactment, a policy or a practice.

For specific information about the Act please refer to the legislation available at www.AccessibilityMB.ca

**APPENDIX B**:        BARRIERS AND SOLUTIONS

Disabilities are not the barriers to full inclusive, independent or interdependent, participation in school communities. Barriers exist because the range of accessibility needs have not been considered. Understanding the accessibility barriers helps identify barriers more easily in school communities. There are many different types of barriers, both visible and invisible. These include:

**Attitudinal barriers**. School staff think and act based on false assumptions; making assumptions about limited ability or potential; e.g., school secretary speaks to student's educational assistant (support person) because she or he assumes the individual with a disability will not understand.

**Informational and communication barriers**. Information is offered in a form that suits some, but not all, of the population; e.g., print that is too small for some people to read and public address systems that alert only people who can hear.

**Technological barriers**. Technological delivery of information is not accessible; e.g., report cards, community reports, or school newsletters disseminated by technology (email, websites) are not accessible to people who are blind/visually impaired and use screen reader software.

**Systemic barriers**. Policies, practices or procedures that result in some people receiving unequal access or being excluded; e.g., eligibility criteria for courses, classes, or school events that effectively exclude persons based on a disability or an assumption of a person's capabilities; or a systemic resistance to reorganize a class, course, or event or make accommodations to allow participation.

| Attitudinal Barriers | Possible Solutions |
| --- | --- |
| **Thinking persons with disabilities are not able to make decisions.** | Ask the person with the disability, not their support worker. Allow for self-determination. |
| **Assuming persons with speech or hearing impairment cannot understand you.** | Disability awareness and communication disorders training for all staff. |
| **Believing a person with a mental health disability/illness or a person who uses a wheelchair cannot participate in school events or activities.** | Disability awareness training on accommodations for students, community members, parents and employees with disabilities. |
| **Assuming a person with a vision loss cannot enjoy visual media: movies, theatre, concerts.** | Disability awareness training on different technologies that enhance communication, hearing, vision. |
| **Avoiding interactions with persons with a disability for fear of offending or erring.** | Disability and diversity awareness training. |
| **Thinking a person with a disability will require costly accommodations** | Think universal design (for all). Most accommodations are easy to implement or low cost, e.g., changing location to a more accessible venue |

| Information/Communication Barriers | Possible Solutions |
|---|---|
| **Print is too small for person with vision impairment** | Offer to print newsletters, memos, report cards in larger font |
| **PowerPoint presentations and videos are not accessible to persons with low vision or hearing loss.** | Develop templates using large fonts, high contrast colours, clean (less busy) layouts. Provide a visual description of the slide when presenting.<br>Include audio captions for visuals, or provide a text transcript of the video. |
| **Brochures, guides, handouts are not clear or easily understood** | Use plain language in written materials. Use symbols and pictures to relay message. Use sans serif fonts and avoid italics. |
| **Signage is complicated, busy, or confusing.** | Keep signs clean and clear. Use universal symbols, pictograms. |
| **Seating arrangements make it difficult for personnel with hearing impairments to hear and participate.** | Arrange seating at a round table to facilitate lip reading. Use assistive listening and amplification devices, as appropriate. Strategically place Visual Language Interpreters (ASL)<br>Use sound amplification systems in all schools for presentations. |
| **Publications and communications materials are not inclusive, representative of a diverse population, including persons with visible disabilities.** | Ensure public announcements and communication efforts reflect a diverse population. Include persons with disabilities of all generations and populations in photos, flyers, brochures, podcasts, videos, web sites. |
| **Technology Barriers** | **Possible Solutions** |
| **Emails and other electronic communications are not accessible to persons who use screen readers.** | Ensure emails can be read using a screen reader and offer alternative methods of communication. |
| **Website graphics and charts do not have text descriptions for persons with visual impairments.** | Provide descriptions using alt tags for graphics, charts. |
| **Only one method of communication with parents and community members, e.g., can only reach schools by phone** | Allow all persons to contact you through a variety of ways: email, phone, interpreter. |
| **Accepting only on-line applications for employment.** | HR allows applications in a number of formats. |
| **Registration for courses, classes, programs, and community use of schools only allowed through online forms or electronically.** | Allow alternative methods of registering, e.g., phone, in person. |

| Systemic Barriers | Possible solutions |
| --- | --- |
| **Persons with disabilities are excluded from community events because their needs are not considered during the planning stage.** | Consider accessibility and universal design interventions at all stages of planning a community or school event. Invite participants to tell you of specific accessibility needs. Use accessibility checklists for events, e.g., large print bulletins, interpreters, reserved seating. |
| **Not being aware or planning accommodations for a person who may be returning to school or work after an absence due to a disability.** | Prepare, plan and learn about environmental accommodations. Ask students, parent, employees about specific needs to enhance participation in the school/work environment. |
| **Hiring policies and practices do not encourage persons with disabilities to apply.** | Review current hiring practices with HR and identify and remove barriers to employment. |
| **Practices that provoke allergic reactions in some persons** | Review cleaning supplies and procedures. Implement fragrance free policy. |
| **Physical/Architectural Barriers** | **Possible Solutions** |
| **Aisles are crowded, blocked by displays, or too narrow for a person with a wheelchair or walker.** | Consider mobility of all persons when arranging furniture, creating displays and organizing the learning space. Plan for independent movement for all. |
| **Inaccessible events or meeting spaces.** | Think about potential barriers when selecting a venue. Consider washrooms, parking, lighting, signage, not only the entrance ramp. |
| **Accessibility features are not attended to promptly, e.g., automatic doors are broken, grooming rooms used for storage, entrances crowded and not kept clear.** | Develop a maintenance plan. Incorporate regularly scheduled environmental scans in operational routines. Be diligent in maintenance of facilities/buildings. |
| **Poor snow clearance, creating temporary barriers to entrance and parking lots** | Prioritize accessibility. Maintain clear entrances, pathways, and parking lots. |

**APPENDIX C:    Disability Accommodations, Communications checklist**

| Considerations | Yes | Budget Impact | Comments |
|---|---|---|---|
| Communications/publications are written in plain language, which is easier for readers to understand. | | | |
| Documents are retained in a text template e.g., WORD documents, not a PDF, to allow enlarging print. | | | |
| "Active offer" on all publications. E.g., "available in alternate formats on request" | | | |
| Website adheres to accessibility standards: Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG, 2017) | | | |
| Electronic communications can be read using screen reader software. | | | |
| Staff training in communication with persons with communication disorders, hearing impairments, speech language disabilities | | | |
| Meeting/Event Checklist | | | |
| Considerations | Yes | Budget Impact | Comments |
| Facility entrance equipped with automatic door | | | |
| Accessible pathway to meeting room | | | |
| Lift accessibility where needed | | | |
| Water fountains at accessible height | | | |
| Accessible eating facilities, includes dietary considerations (diabetes, allergies), if providing meals or refreshments. | | | |
| Beverages served with bendable straws, lightweight cups | | | |

**APPENDIX D:     FEEDBACK FORM**

The Evergreen School Division (ESD) is committed to removing barriers that impede participation in the learning environment, and improving accessibility to promote inclusive school communities for all persons.  ESD is committed to ensuring equal access and participation for all persons with disabilities in our school division communities.  We believe in inclusion and the maintenance of dignity and independence for all.  The ESD Accessibility Plan will implement protocols to assist in identifying, removing and preventing barriers to meet the requirements of the Accessibility for Manitobans Act.

# EVERGREEN SCHOOL DIVISION FEEDBACK FORM

| Name: | | Date: | |
|---|---|---|---|

Contact Information:

| Phone: | | Email: | |
|---|---|---|---|

| Please describe the barrier and suggestions for improved accessibility |
|---|
| |

Accessibility Coordinator:                                Phone:     204-642-6260

| Actions (Include estimated time line) |
|---|
| |

*Please forward to ESD Accessibility Coordinator*