

# Comox Valley Schools' Accessibility Plan

May 2025

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**Comox Valley Schools**

A Community of Learners

INNOVATIVE • INQUISITIVE • INCLUSIVE

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# Section 1: Introduction

## Territorial Acknowledgement

Gila'kasla ~ čεčɛ haθεč

The Board of Education acknowledges that we are on the traditional territories of the K'ómoks First Nation. We would like to thank them for the privilege of living on their land and the gift of working with their children.

## About our Organization

Comox Valley Schools (SD71) is a positive, progressive, and growing school district situated on the east coast of Vancouver Island on the traditional territory of the K'ómox First Nation. We honour and respect the Pentlatch, E'ikʷsən, Sahtloot, and Sisitla Peoples who have been, and continue to be connected to the land on which our school district operates. Located within the Valley are the municipalities we serve, City of Courtenay, the Town of Comox, Village of Cumberland, and the Comox Valley Regional District; each providing their own unique services and community cultures. We are a mix of rural, urban and island communities, with varied socio-economic neighbourhoods.

As a learning organization, we work closely with our educational partners to develop responsible, compassionate citizens and successful lifelong learners. Over 1900 employees work to provide a comprehensive educational program to approximately 11,000 students from kindergarten to grade 12 in our 15 elementary schools, one (1) middle school, three (3) secondary schools, one (1) alternative schools, Nala'atsi, an Indigenous-Focused school of choice, and an online learning school. Comox Valley Schools' annual operating budget is approximately \$130 million.

The Comox Valley School District is committed to the philosophy of inclusion - which is founded in the belief that all students, including students with diverse learning needs, are fully participating members of our community of learners. An important part of this work is to ensure that students, staff, and community members have a voice in identifying, removing, and preventing barriers in our district learning environments, workplaces, or school communities. We embrace and honour the diversity found within our classrooms and communities. Educators collaboratively plan meaningful learning for all, valuing each student as a contributing member of the community.

## We Value and Believe In

- A commitment to Truth and Reconciliation with Indigenous peoples
- Trusting relationships based on respect, integrity, and ethical behaviour
- Equity, inclusion, dignity, and acceptance for all
- Innovation, creativity, problem- solving, and critical thinking
- Open and engaging communication
- Global awareness and environmental stewardship
- Accountability and shared responsibility
- Celebration of learning

## Message from Leadership

The Comox Valley Schools Accessibility Committee is diligently reviewing our schools' infrastructure, policies, and procedures, identifying potential accessibility barriers that need to be addressed. This analysis will allow us to move forward with the development of comprehensive, equitable, and inclusive accessibility plans. Through open and engaging communication, we are ensuring these plans reflect the diverse needs of the communities whom we serve, thereby embodying our commitment to dignity and acceptance for all.

Our initiative is shaped by our commitment to Truth and Reconciliation with Indigenous Peoples. We are seeking their wisdom and guidance in our work, respecting their perspectives, and integrating their unique needs into our plans.

Comox Valley Schools is also weaving global awareness and environmental stewardship into the fabric of our accessibility strategies, examining how we can make our facilities more eco-friendly while increasing their accessibility. Innovation, creativity, problem-solving, and critical thinking are at the forefront of these efforts.

The Accessibility Committee's work is very important to our school community. The approach underscores the district's commitment to accountability and shared responsibility, as we all take part in the creation of a more accessible and inclusive educational environment.

In line with our value of celebrating learning, we look forward to sharing more detailed plans and outcomes of our efforts with you in due course. Our work with the SD 71 Accessibility Committee underscores our steadfast commitment to an inclusive, equitable, and accessible educational experience for all students.

Thank you for your ongoing support in this endeavour.

Dr. Jeremy Morrow  
Superintendent of Schools

## Definitions

The Accessibility Act includes a list of principles to be considered as an accessibility plan is developed. These same principles were used to develop the legislation itself. We have developed some starter definitions for consideration that have been adapted from the foundational document BC Framework for Accessibility Legislation.

**Accessibility:** Accessibility means that all people can take part in their communities through work, play and other daily activities. Accessibility is important for everyone, especially people with disabilities. Accessibility is about removing barriers and increasing inclusion and independence for everyone.

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

**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.

**Diversity:** Every person is unique. People with differing abilities 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 community.

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

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

**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 wish to interact with the organization.

BC Framework for Accessibility Legislation

**Belonging:** Comox Valley Schools aim to improve accessibility for students, parents, and community members to create a welcoming and inclusive environment in which there is a sense of belonging, acceptance, and support for all.

## Section 2: Framework Guiding our Work

### Accessible BC Legislation

The Accessible British Columbia Act was passed on June 17, 2021. This legislation is designed to support over 926,000 people living with some sort of disability in B.C. and ensure meaningful participation in their communities.

<https://www.bclaws.gov.bc.ca/civix/document/id/complete/statreg/21019>.

The Accessible BC Regulation came into effect on September 1, 2022. The Regulation required covered organizations met the requirements of the Accessible BC Act by September 2023. These requirements included the establishment of an accessibility committee, plan, and a mechanism to receive feedback on accessibility.

Comox Valley Schools welcomes the Accessible BC legislation and the opportunity to identify the significant work that is already being done in Comox Valley schools to support students and employees with diverse abilities, and to build on our commitment to diversity, equity, inclusion, and non-discrimination.

### Accessibility Standards

Accessibility standards outline the rules organizations must follow to remove barriers in different areas. As accessibility standards are implemented, they will be integrated into Comox Valley Schools' Accessibility Plan.

Standards and examples are:

- Employment (hiring, workplace standards, etc.)
- Service delivery (getting goods, services, or programs)
- Built environment (buildings, places, and spaces)
- Information and communications (human communication such as the way people interact and communicate in the way that works for them, and technical communication such as websites and documents)
- Transportation (buses, ferries, trains, etc.)
- Health (hospitals, clinics, services)
- Education (early childhood education, kindergarten to grade 12, post-secondary education, etc.)
- Procurement (buying services)

### Service Commitment

- The Accessibility Advisory Committee Chair can appoint four - six members of the Committee from staff who, in their role with Comox Valley School, are responsible for understanding and enhancing disability inclusion and/or supporting persons with disabilities within the school district.
- A seat will be reserved for K'ómoks First Nation leadership involvement
- A seat will either be reserved for student involvement, or the committee will solicit student input from Comox Valley Schools' Superintendent's Students Advisory Group

- The remaining members are selected by the chair from “expressions of interest” received through an open call to the school district and community.

## Term

All appointed members who are on the Accessibility Advisory Committee in positions serving persons with disabilities will hold a three-year term and may be renewed for additional terms.

## Comox Valley Schools Strategic Plan

2024-2025 [Strategic Plan](#)

## Existing Policies

Policy 17: Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity (pg. 84)

Policy 24: Equity and Non-discrimination (pg. 110)

## Administrative Procedures

AP 100 – [Strategic Plan](#)

AP 102 – [School Improvement Plans and Results Reports](#)

AP 140 – [Acceptable Use of Technology](#)

AP 150 – [District Communications Program](#)

AP 170 – [Equity and Non-Discrimination](#)

AP 172 – [Safe, Caring and Orderly Schools](#)

AP 213 – [Inclusive Education Services](#)

AP 251 – [Learning Resources](#)

AP 255A – [Assistance Dogs](#)

AP 340 – [Specialized Services for Students](#)

AP 362 – [School Completion Evergreen Certificate](#)

AP 543A - [Accessibility](#)

AP 561 – [Transportation of Diverse Needs Students](#)

## Section 3: About our Committee

In May 2023, Comox Valley Schools established its first Accessibility Advisory Committee. The committee is comprised of members of Comox Valley Schools staff, students, parents and community. Membership includes those with lived experience of disabilities and those who support persons with disabilities, and Indigenous representation.

### Focus of the Committee

The focus of the committee is to create a barrier-free environment so all people can live with dignity, independence and as equal and full participants in the learning community of Comox Valley Schools.

### Determining Committee Members

- a) A selection committee was established from members of senior leadership and Inclusive Education.
- b) An expression of Interest form to join the committee was sent to all SD71 teaching and CUPE members.
- c) An Expression of Interest form to join the committee was sent to all parents/guardians. Interested individuals could apply through a variety of options
  - Written submission
  - Pre-recorded video
  - Live phone call
  - Live video interview
- d) A rubric was developed to support selection that included the legislation requirements and additional information obtained from the expression of interest.  
Legislation Requirements:
  - At least half the members are
    - Persons with disabilities
    - Individuals who support, or are from organizations that support, persons with disabilities
  - Reflect the diversity of persons with disabilities in BC
  - At least one member is Indigenous
  - The committee reflects the diversity of persons in BC

### Advisory Committee Members

Tara Ryan (Chair)  
Lindsay Friis  
Jayden Hargreaves  
Jane Rondow

Heather Robertson  
Katelin Miller  
Karma Taiji

Vice Principal: Inclusive Education  
Comox Valley Development Association/Parent  
Student of North Island College/School District 71  
District Inclusion Teacher (Assistive/Inclusive  
Technology)/Parent  
Physiotherapist  
Teacher of the Deaf and Hard of Hearing  
District Principal of Diversity, Equity, and Non-  
Discrimination

## Section 4: Consultation Process

The consultation process was intended to be accessible and inclusive. School staff/students were provided an explanatory PowerPoint presentation that articulated the key points of the Accessible BC Act. The School District community was then offered several different ways to provide feedback on the questions below, including: email, in-person feedback and through phone or video. The initial consultation took place in September and December 2024.

- 1. What do you think SD71 does well to reduce barriers to accessibility?**
- 2. What could SD71 improve on to reduce barriers to accessibility?**
- 3. What are one or two specific priorities and/or solutions to improve accessibility in SD71?**

Additional feedback has also been incorporated into this plan. This includes comments regarding accessibility at School District board meetings, as well as feedback from the McCreary Report 2023 and Student Learning Surveys.

### Barriers to Accessibility and Development of a Framework

From September - December 2023, feedback was received from employees, students and the wider community from across the School District. This feedback revealed several themes which helped in the organization and prioritization of the responses. The information provided the foundation for the action plan.

Overall theme: Creating a culture of accessibility and inclusion.

1. Education
2. Policies and procedures
3. Design and Delivery of programs and services
4. Employee Services and Recruitment
5. Information and Communication
6. Technology
7. Facilities and the built environment

### School Accessibility Audit

- A committee was formed from members of Comox Valley Schools' Inclusive Education department, Social Planning and Research Council of British Columbia (SPARC BC), and Comox Valley Accessibility Committee (CVAC) to create a comprehensive School Accessibility Screening Tool
- Expressions of Interest were sent out to Comox Valley Schools principals and vice principals (PVP) for their schools to be part of a site accessibility audit. Seven schools expressed interest and were then audited in Spring 2024.
- All 7 schools, Inclusive Education, the Accessibility Committee, and the CVAC provided representation for auditors which included PVP, parents, staff, students with lived experience, peers, and community members.

- SPARC BC provided training to all auditors as well as an hourly stipend for student participation. Over 40 auditors participated in 1 of 2 – two-hour training sessions. Audits took between 2-4 hours and were completed by June 2024. Data will be collated by SPARC BC and distributed by the CVAC.

## Graphic Representation of Accessibility and Belonging Conversations

SPARC BC sponsored Melissa Kendzierski from “Drawing Change” to create graphic representation of the following conversations.

- 1) Students 9 years and older with lived experience of a disability (24 attended) were invited from all schools. Inclusive Education provided an interpreter and co-facilitators. Each student was invited to bring a support person if required. Questions guiding the conversation included:

A) What do the following words mean to you?

- Accessibility
- Inclusion
- Belonging

B) What are your experiences with...?

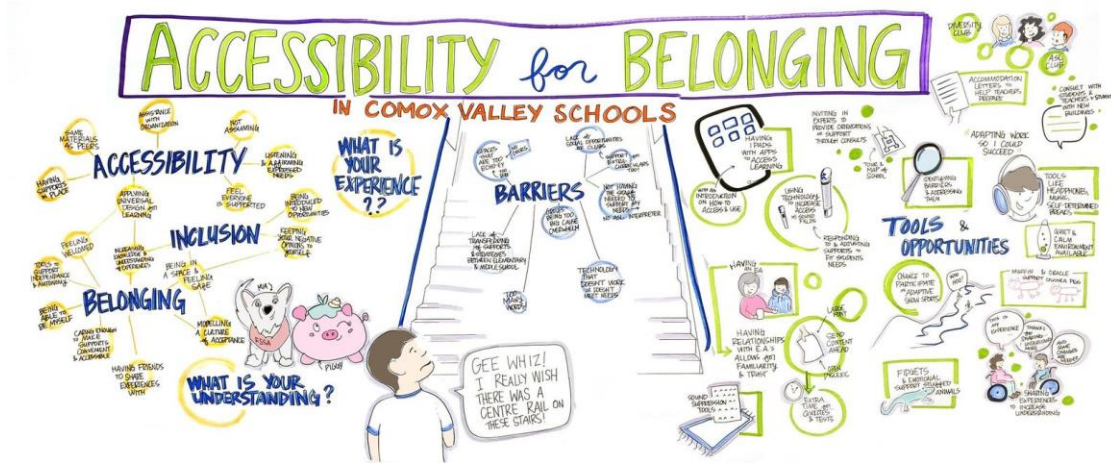
- Accessibility
- Inclusion
- Belonging

C) What environments/supports/tools help you to be successful in school?

D) What barriers have you experienced at school that hinder you:

- Academically
- Socially
- Physically
- Emotionally

Took place  
Jan 20/2025



Accessibility for Belonging in Comox Valley Schools | January 20, 2025

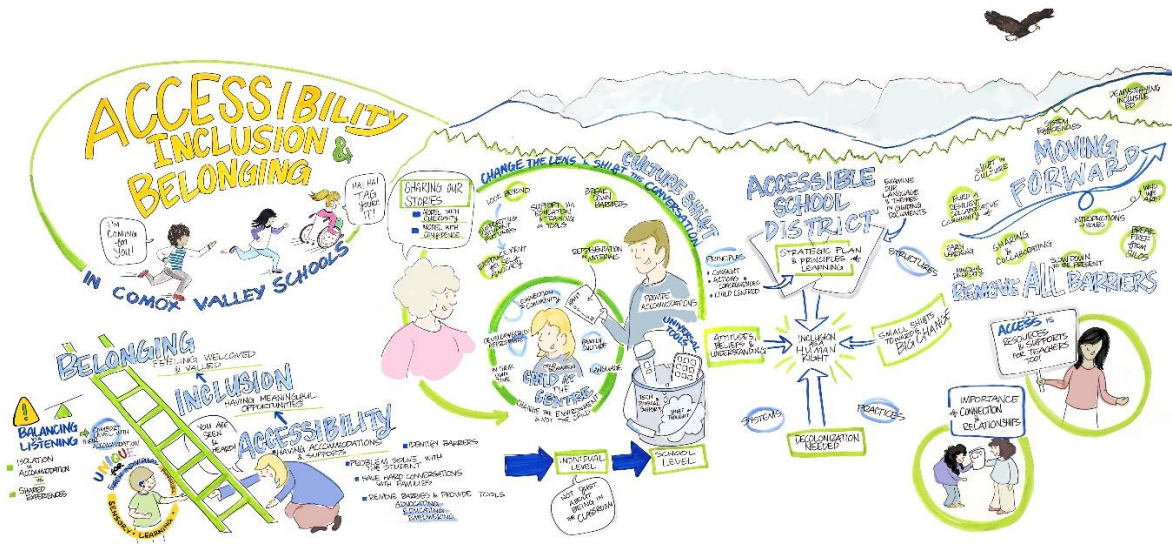
LIVE GRAPHIC RECORDING | Drawing Change  
Melissa Kendzierski



3) Members of the Inclusive Education department gathered for our third conversation. Questions guiding this conversation included:

- A) What do the following words mean to you?
  - Accessibility
  - Inclusion
  - Belonging
- B) What is your role in contributing to students' inclusion and belonging in schools? What tools do you incorporate in your plan work to enhance accessibility and inclusion? How do these tools contribute to a student's sense of belonging?
- C) Please reflect on SD71's Strategic Plan and the Principles of Learning, in particular the key words highlighted throughout.
  - i. What connections can we make between our Strategic Plan and Accessibility/Inclusion in our district?
  - ii. What connections can we make between the Principles of Learning and Accessibility/Inclusion in our district?
- D) What do you see as desired action steps/priorities for SD71?

Took place  
Mar 4/2025



## Section 5: Feedback Mechanism

Comox Valley Schools established numerous ways to provide feedback to the Accessibility Committee in September 2023.

- a. **Accessibility Email** please contact [accessibility@sd71.bc.ca](mailto:accessibility@sd71.bc.ca)
- b. **Fillable form** on the district website
- c. **Phone:** at 250 334-5500
- d. **In Person:** by appointment
- e. **Teams or Zoom:** by appointment
- f. **District survey:** submitted to Inclusive education and schools

### District Link

<https://www.comoxvalleyschools.ca/accessibility-in-comox-valley-schools/>

The screenshot shows the website for Comox Valley Schools. At the top left is the logo for Comox Valley Schools, which includes a stylized mountain and trees, with the text "Comox Valley Schools" and "A Community of Learners" below it. To the right of the logo is a search bar with the word "Search" and a magnifying glass icon. Below the logo and search bar is a navigation menu with the following items: "Our District", "Board of Education", "Schools", "Parent Info", "Programs & Services", "Employment", and "News". Below the navigation menu is a dark grey banner with the text "Accessibility in Comox Valley Schools" on the left and "You are here: Home / Accessibility in Comox Valley Schools" on the right. The main content area is divided into two columns. The left column features a graphic with the text "AccessibleBC: B.C.'s Accessibility Plan" and "2022/23-2024/25". Below this text is an illustration of a diverse group of people, including a person in a wheelchair, a person with a cane, and a person with a hearing aid, walking together. The right column has the heading "ACCESSIBILITY IN COMOX VALLEY SCHOOLS" and contains the following text: "The Government of British Columbia is working towards being an inclusive province. There are over 926,000 people with disabilities in B.C. In June 2021, the Accessible B.C. Act became law. It provides a framework to identify, remove, and prevent barriers to accessibility. The new law is important in making B.C. a more accessible province." Below this text is another paragraph: "The Act requires prescribed organizations, including school districts to establish an accessibility committee to assist in identifying barriers to individuals in or interacting with the organization and advise the organization on how to remove and prevent those barriers. Accessibility committees must be representative and diverse." Below this paragraph is a third paragraph: "Under the law, Public Services, including the Education sector, must have all three requirements in place by September 1, 2023:" followed by a numbered list: "1. Establish an accessibility committee", "2. Develop an accessibility plan; and", "3. Establish a process for receiving public feedback".

The following questions were used as a guide to ascertain feedback.

We are looking for input and feedback on the following questions:

- What do you think SD71 does well in reducing barriers\* to accessibility?
- What could SD71 improve on to reduce barriers\* to accessibility?
- What are one or two specific priorities and/or solutions to improve accessibility in SD71?

In Spring 2025, the CVAC streamlined the online feedback tool based on community feedback given in 2024.

1. Please select the school/ location where the barrier is located. 🏫

2. From the options listed below please choose those that best describe the barrier(s) you have identified.

- Physical 🦿
- Vision 👁️
- Hearing 🗣️
- Inside Environment 🏠
- Outside Environment 🌳
- Mental Health 💬
- Social 👥
- Emotional 😊
- Technology 💻

3. How would you like to provide the specific details about the barrier you have identified?

- Type to submit my feedback 📝
- I would like to share an audio, video or image file  
(please email [accessibility@sd71.bc.ca](mailto:accessibility@sd71.bc.ca)) ▶
- I would like someone to call me back (when submitting the feedback please indicate your name and phone number) 📞
- I will send my feedback via Canada Post  
(Attn: Accessibility Committee, 607 Cumberland Road, Courtenay, BC, V9N 7G5) ✉

4. Please tell us about the barrier you have identified 🗨️

5. Please select if you would like to remain anonymous or if you would like to leave contact information.

- I would like to remain anonymous 🚫
- I am including my contact information in case the committee wants to follow up 📧
- I would like someone to call me back 📞

## Section 6: Barriers Identified

Pending

## Section 8: Monitoring and Evaluation

The committee will continue to monitor the email address and website to ensure fulfillment of the commitment to accessibility and belonging. The committee will meet on a regular basis to review Accessibility barriers and work to address these barriers in our schools.