



# Upper Grand District School Board

## Annual Accessibility Report

For the Period September 2020 to August 2021

**Accessibility Steering Committee**

This publication is available through the Upper Grand District School Board's website [www.ugdsb.ca/accessibility](http://www.ugdsb.ca/accessibility) or in other accessible formats upon request.

## **Introduction:**

The Upper Grand District School Board covers the ancestral and traditional territories of the Mississaugas of the Credit, the Six Nations of the Grand River, and Saugeen Ojibway Nation Territories in the City of Guelph, County of Wellington and County of Dufferin. The Board has 10 elected trustees, 2 student trustees and many valued community partners.

The Board remains committed to working to exemplify and advance the four principles of accessibility - dignity, independence, integration and equal opportunity. The UGDSB is advancing these principles by identifying, removing and preventing barriers for the 35,000+ students, 4,000+ staff and community members it serves in 65 elementary schools, 11 secondary schools and 2 remote schools.

The Multi-Year Accessibility Plan (September 2018 to August 2023) is in its third year of implementation. As a living document, it is updated regularly throughout the year to ensure that the goals of the plan are met, prioritized and compliant with the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act, 2005 (AODA). In June 2021, the bi-annual Accessibility Compliance Report was filed with the AODA.

The 2020-2021 Annual Accessibility Report highlights the work accomplished throughout the school year despite the restrictions imposed by COVID-19.

## **Training:**

During the 2020-2021 school year the following training was provided to staff in order to maintain the standards required by the AODA.

- New managers and administrators received accessibility training as part of the Cycle of Training program and at Board Orientation
- Office Coordinators were invited to schedule virtual appointments for accessibility training
- Ongoing training was offered to staff on how to create accessible documents
- Accessible templates for staff (e.g., memos, forms) were updated
- Student Senate participated in a virtual presentation to learn about anti-racism and accessibility
- All new staff were trained in Accessibility Integrated and Customer Standards procedures

Access to technology, the internet, re-formatting resources for students and creating accessible documents continued to be a focus for staff, students and the UGDSB community. The Integrated Technology and Program Departments offered multiple sessions for staff and parents on how to best use

the technology tools available to engage learners. Staff continued to offer online support on the use of accessible formats, fonts, and presentations for websites so that learning was accessible to all.

### **Education:**

The Multi-Year Accessibility Plan divides accessibility education into two streams, Accessible System Embedded Curriculum Programs and Resources and Building an Accessibility Culture and Leadership.

#### **Accessible System Embedded Curriculum Program:**

Curriculum, Special Education, Equity and Mental Health continued to partner with accessibility in order to meet the needs of students. This year work included:

- Development and maintenance of a Special Education website for parents to easily access school and community resources
- Providing a link to the Accessibility Plan on the yearly Special Education Plan
- Building accessibility into the Student Centered instructional tool process to guide classroom design and teaching strategies
- Reconfiguring the Student Safety Passport (SSP) in Brightspace to include accessible language, layout and integration with Google Read and Write
- Partnering with Mental Health to provide training for Child and Youth Workers and Social Workers
- Further educating staff (elementary and secondary) on Culturally Relevant and Responsive pedagogy in literacy and numeracy
- Purchasing and developing more culturally responsive and relevant resources specifically addressing Early Learning, French (including Indigenous authors and perspectives, Black and racialized authors and perspectives)
- Organizing and implementing destreaming initiatives
- Teaching and learning with both staff and students about the Use For All Washroom initiative. Why free products are now available for everyone. Some teachers included this in their health programs.

Due to the restrictions imposed by COVID-19 Wheelchair Basketball was only offered in two schools and Sledge hockey in one secondary school this year. A renewed focus on these programs is planned for the 2021-2022 school year. Empowerment Day was postponed again this year and is scheduled for the fall of 2021.

Throughout COVID-19, the Terry James Resource Centre (TJRC) continued to be the hub for accessible resources and support. Their work was multifaceted and covered many areas.

### **CELA Access**

UGDSB staff were able to request Wellington County Library accounts through the Terry James Resource Centre (TJRC), which allowed them to sign up for a Centre for Equitable Library Access (CELA) Educator Account. Sign up was ongoing throughout the school year and available through the TJRC website. This year 62 staff members signed up.

### **3D Printing**

Since the beginning of September 2020, TJRC completed 3D printing projects for various departments to support accessibility and learning. Projects included:

- 20 wearable microphone holders
- 4 custom iPad keyguards
- 1 set of 35 tactile symbols for Universal Core Vocabulary
- 290 document cameras for various departments

### **Online Resources**

The high demand for online resources and eBooks continued throughout the year. The Terry James Resource Centre added approximately 2,500 eBooks and digital audiobooks to Sora, their main eBook platform in 2020-2021. Fifty of these titles (25 French, 25 English) allowed for unlimited, simultaneous use, so that multiple users could simultaneously access the same title. Seventy of these titles were selected to support a variety of reading levels at intermediate and secondary interest levels. Many educators used print/eBook and digital audiobook copies of the same title together with students for increased accessibility, which required multiple copies of titles in various formats.

Additional streaming videos with closed captioning were also added to the Learn360 platform based on educator requests and gaps identified by the TJRC staff. The TJRC added or extended licenses for 40 videos this year. The demand for resources to support English language learners continued to be identified as a need across the board and the TJRC staff will be investigating available options in this area in the coming school year.

### **Kits and Print Resources**

Print resources and novel sets continued to be circulated following COVID-19 quarantine protocols of 72 hours for physical resources. As some students required print rather than digital copies for accessibility purposes, some teachers chose to distribute print novels to students during remote learning. The TJRC continued to circulate Adaptive Device Kits and Sensory Bins that could be used on a one-to-one basis with students (in compliance with COVID-19 health and safety protocols).

### **Building an Accessibility Culture and Leadership:**

Building a collaborative culture in which all students, staff, parents and community partners understand and value accessibility and take an active role in supporting best practices is part of the Accessibility Multi-Year plan. In order to assess these practices the Special Education department conducted an Accessibility survey with the parents and students they serve.

The survey generated a 28% response rate with 32 families responding. While the survey illustrated the importance of well-maintained equipment, it also spoke to the value of the people working in the Upper Grand District School Board. One parent wrote that it was not so much the equipment that made a difference to their child, but in fact, it was the people.

The survey further indicated that the majority of students identifying as blind or low vision felt the equipment provided (e.g. computers) helped them complete their school work and feel included in the classroom. This feeling of inclusion did not however transfer to the school yard.

Students identifying as deaf or hard of hearing stated that they were not really sure how much the equipment (FM systems) helped them be included in the classroom or around the school, although they did note that the FM systems helped them with their learning.

Responses received from families with students with mobility needs indicated that the equipment helped them feel included both in their classroom and around the school, and also helped them with learning. It was however referenced that for some of the equipment the support of an Educational Assistant was required, which impacted the independence of the student.

Gaps in service including time required to repair broken equipment, and the functionality of mobility equipment during winter weather needs to be addressed in order to create accessible environments and cultures for all students. Removing and preventing these barriers remains a goal of the Multi-Year Accessibility Plan.

### **Procurement:**

The Purchasing Department worked collaboratively with other departments within the Board to ensure that accessibility design, criteria and features were considered when procuring or otherwise acquiring goods or services. To assist in meeting the accessibility goals across the system, the following work was completed in 2020-21:

- Ongoing procurement of product with height adjustable legs to be placed on furniture ordered for Learning Commons, Media Labs, Classrooms, and other related rooms
- Working with Operations to convert the surface material in many playgrounds this year from peastone to more accessible surface material
- Working with Operations to purchase additional door operators, push buttons, magnetic hold opens, etc. to assist with accessibility and the reduction of touch points
- Period Equity dispensers/product purchased for 91 washrooms
- Voice amplifiers (mic/speaker sets) continue to be sourced and purchased
- Communication devices including Tobii I-13 (eye gaze enabled speech generating device) and GridPad Pro w/ Eye gaze were purchased
- Ongoing procurement of Otterbox ipad cases for Special Education students

The Purchasing Department continues to provide an essential service to all departments within the UGDSB, and is an advocate of the four accessibility principles.

### **Information and Communication:**

The Communications Department provided accessible information to all families throughout the year. Their long-term objective was to make information and communications accessible for everyone. The Communications Department continued to dedicate a section on the board website to highlight accessibility work being done throughout the board. During National Accessibility week in the spring, the Communications Department did a feature story about Accessibility in the UGDSB and highlighted some of the virtual accessibility speakers available to classrooms. Throughout the week, students and staff were invited to share what they were doing during National Accessibility week to highlight accessibility in the board and to continue the conversations about accessibility needs.

A review of all accessibility features for all updates and purchases related to board and school websites in anticipation of WCAG 2.1 Level AA standards was also completed this year. The AODA scanning tool and manual testing will continue to be used on board and school websites to ensure compliance with content and materials and to identify any areas for improvement.

Since 2019, the board has seen a tremendous shift in school communications. All UGDSB schools are now using School Messenger, an accessible communication tool that shares information with families. Monthly school newsletters have been replaced by daily and/or weekly updates, providing content which is accessible to all groups in the UGDSB community.

### **Employment:**

During the 2020-2021 school year, the Wellness and Employee Health Department engaged in a number of actions to continue to support accessibility for all employees of the Upper Grand District School Board.

An Equity Diversity and Inclusion Manager and Co-ordinator were hired to support the anti-racism and anti-oppression work in the board. An updated equity statement was also placed on all hiring advertisements and access to Black, Indigenous, People of Colour (BIPOC) Wellness support through our Employee and Family Assistance Program was communicated.

During COVID-19 the Wellness and Employee Health Department continued to provide staff access to many online, live and pre-recorded instructor-led programs. Specific support and information were provided around COVID-19 related subjects and general health and wellness topics including coping with stress and anxiety, Employee and Family Assistance Plan information, important ergonomic tips to support staff working from home, as well as information around work/life balance and community-based supports.

Candidates seeking accommodations during the interview process accessed support through the Wellness and Employee Health Department. This process provided candidates with the opportunity to participate fully in the recruitment process while removing barriers.

Ongoing efforts to support work that makes all school board sites accessible to employees was coordinated through the Wellness Department when employee functional limitations were communicated, including the provision of appropriate assistive devices. In addition, referrals to Registered Kinesiologists were utilized to support staff with the provision and proper use of appropriate assistive devices related to equipment along with assistance both when returning to work following an absence and successfully remaining actively at work when functional limitations are identified.

### **Transportation:**

The electronic online transportation planner continued to be used to create transportation plans for students with special education needs and/or accessibility requirements. These plans are updated yearly or on an as-needed basis. The goal of these plans is to remain responsive to the individualized transportation needs of students across the large geographic region of the Upper Grand District School Board.

### **Built Environment, Outside Play Spaces:**

The Accessibility Steering Committee and Plant Operations continued to use the Accessibility audit which was completed in 2015 to prioritize renovations and upgrades that improve accessibility in three main

areas. These areas, as prioritized by the Accessibility Steering Committee are barrier-free front access (including parking spaces, level access and automatic door openers), accessible washrooms for students and staff, accessible universal washrooms for public use and corridor navigation throughout schools.

Despite some delays and accommodations to work hours, student needs remained a priority for the Plant Operations and Maintenance Departments and the following accessibility projects were completed in 2020-2021:

- Building of four universal washrooms at elementary schools
- Installation of barrier-free ramps on four portable classrooms
- Replacement of stair tread/risers for visual accommodations
- Installation of door operators (corridor and priority rooms) and push buttons and door openers at various elementary and secondary schools

A major project for Plant Operations in 2020-2021 included the installation of free accessible period product dispensers in a designated "For Use By All" washroom in all schools in the UGDSB. The UGDSB recognizes the inequity placed on people who menstruate and the additional challenges presented to the same people who may be living with limited access to funds and/or transportation, both of which are required to purchase menstrual products. This initiative provided all people who menstruate access to period products free of charge and with dignity.

Regular meetings with Capital, Maintenance and Special Education continue to be held in order to align capital building projects with the accessibility needs of schools.

### **Review and Monitoring Process:**

The Accessibility Committee met three times throughout the year and subcommittees met informally between meetings. Progress on initiatives were tracked, feedback forms (available online and at all board sites) were reviewed and new areas of need were prioritized. In every situation, the Upper Grand District School Board remained committed to supporting and meeting the objectives and requirements of the AODA 2005. The UGDSB continues to maintain environments in all its facilities that build independence, dignity, integration and equality of opportunity for students, parents/guardians, staff and the public.

The Upper Grand District School Board continues to work to meet the diverse needs of the students, staff and community through the provision of equitable and accessible resources. This commitment is grounded in compassionate respect and an understanding that inequities and additional challenges exist



for some people. The board will continue to raise awareness, remain accountable and support accessibility, inclusion and acceptance. Challenges will continue to be identified and more importantly solutions centered on dignity, independence, integration and equal opportunity will be the priority.

Questions, comments or feedback regarding this Annual Accessibility Report may be directed to:

**Carlo Zen, Superintendent of Operations**  
Chair of the Accessibility Steering Committee  
500 Victoria Road North  
Guelph, Ontario N1E 6K2  
[Carlo.Zen@ugdsb.on.ca](mailto:Carlo.Zen@ugdsb.on.ca)