

ACCESSIBILITY PLAN 2022-2025

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Adult and child in classroom



Two young children sitting outside with adult



Child in swing with blue hat



Group of adults and children around table in classroom

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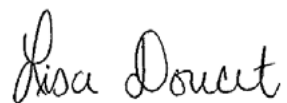
APSEA Accessibility Plan

Message from Superintendent

Atlantic Provinces Special Education Authority's (APSEA) mission in collaboration with our partners, is to provide culturally and linguistically responsive, inclusive, equitable, and accessible educational services and supports to children and youth who are blind or visually impaired and/or Deaf or hard of hearing and their families.

Accessibility is integral to all that APSEA does to support learners and team members. Actioning accessibility is at the core of our operations, and we strive to provide optimal learning and employment solutions that build an accessible culture. APSEA's specialized supports aim to ensure learners have the tools they need to be successful. By providing equitable access we empower individuals to achieve their full potential.

APSEA has developed a three-year Accessibility Plan to enhance the work of the province of Nova Scotia's Accessibility Act initiative Access by Design 2030, which is a framework for how the province will achieve its goal of an accessible Nova Scotia by 2030. I look forward to APSEA's role in helping Nova Scotia achieve this, as it will have a direct benefit in the lives of individuals we support. Our Accessibility Plan will evolve and grow over the next few years, and our mission will guide us on this journey.



Lisa Doucet
Superintendent

GLOSSARY

- **Accessibility-** the prevention and removal of barriers (physical, attitudinal, technological, or systemic) to allow equitable participation for persons with disabilities or others who experience barriers to accessibility (as written in NS Post Secondary Accessibility framework).
- **APSEA-** Atlantic Provinces Special Education Authority.
- **APSEA Centre-** the buildings located at 5940 South Street, Halifax, Nova Scotia.
- **Access Technology-** an item, piece of equipment, software program, or product system that is used to increase, maintain, or improve the functional capabilities of persons with disabilities.
- **ASL-** American Sign Language.
- **Autism-** having autism (formally called autism spectrum disorder) means that a person's brain processes information, including information about their environment, in another way. The autistic person's brain has physically developed differently than a neurotypical brain. Autism can give a person both strengths and challenges. Autism is considered an example of neurodiversity (Autism Nova Scotia).
- **BVI-** Blind or visually impaired.
- **Convention for the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD)-** International human rights treaty signed March 2007 at the United Nations General Assembly.
- **Deaf-** 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 (Canadian Association of the Deaf).
- **deaf-** a medical/audiological term for people who have little or no functional hearing and that may be used as a collective noun to refer to people who are medically deaf but who do not identify with the Deaf community.
- **DHH-** Deaf and or hard of hearing.
- **Educational partners-** Nova Scotia Department of Education and Early Childhood Development, New Brunswick Department of Education and Early Childhood Development, Newfoundland and Labrador Department of Education and Prince Edward Island Department of Education and Early Years and the school districts they are accountable for.

GLOSSARY

- **Lived experience-** perspectives generally referring to the knowledge generated by persons with disabilities and others who experience barriers to accessibility that emerges from lived experience, community connections, knowledge traditions, and scholarly activities that are typically under-valued and under-represented (as written in NS Post Secondary Accessibility framework).
- **Functional Vision Learning Media Assessment (FVLMA)-** an assessment of a student's functional vision in the classroom as well as the student's preferred learning medium (auditory/visual/tactile).
- **Hard of hearing (HoH)-** people with hearing loss ranging from mild to severe.
- **Humanware-** manufacturer of blindness and low vision products.
- **Education support teacher-** an APSEA employee who is a teacher that provides specialized supports.
- **Langue des signes du Québec (LSQ)-** form of sign language used primarily in francophone communities in Canada.
- **Learners-** students and youth receiving supports from APSEA.
- **Rick Hansen Foundation Accessibility Certification (RHFAC)-** a program that rates, certifies, and showcases accessible public buildings.
- **Rick Hansen Foundation Accessibility Standard-** to achieve the RHC Accessibility Certified Gold standard, an existing site must "have a public entrance and all its key functional spaces and amenities...be physically accessible for everyone" (Rick Hansen Certification, 2018).
- **SET³ Assessment-** an acronym that stands for Student, Environment, Tasks, Tools, and Training. This Access Technology (AT) assessment is used to determine if/how technology could support a student's independence/efficiency in completing specific tasks.

PROCESS

In 2017, Nova Scotia enacted an [Accessibility Act](#) to ensure that all persons with disabilities have equitable access to what they need to participate fully in society. As part of the process of removing and preventing barriers, APSEA, as a public sector body, developed an Accessibility Plan.

An Accessibility Advisory Committee was established during the Spring of 2020 and was comprised of community members, partners and APSEA employees. The APSEA Accessibility Advisory Committee, with guidance from the Nova Scotia Accessibility Directorate, focused on identifying barriers within the APSEA organization and developed a plan to concentrate on removing and preventing these barriers.

Once areas of focus and deliverables were identified the Accessibility Advisory Committee hosted community focus groups allowing APSEA staff, families and stakeholders to review the plan details and to garner feedback. Once feedback was captured, Committee Chairs presented the draft scope to APSEA leadership team for review and additional feedback. This plan encompasses the committee's work and consultation with our key stakeholders.



Child speaking into plastic tube at adult's ear

AREAS OF FOCUS

The APSEA accessibility plan is supported by four key focus areas:

- Education
- Built Environment
- Information and Communication
- Employment

Each area of this focus summary includes:

- Existing policies that steer our work
- Achievements toward greater accessibility
- Barriers to accessibility
- Proposed actions to remove barriers
- Proposed indicators of success

Goal/Our Commitment

APSEA aims to provide culturally and linguistically responsive, inclusive, equitable, and accessible educational services and supports to learners who are blind or visually impaired and/or Deaf or hard of hearing and their families.

Across the organization, educational support exists in a variety of forms and environments including in the learner's school, community, and/or virtually.

APSEA is committed to building capacity amongst its staff by providing regular opportunities for professional learning.

Our commitment to Educational Accessibility is to be a leader in developing and designing lived experience lead inclusive education and accessible responsive teaching and learning for all learners.

Policies

Government and APSEA's policies and plans steer our work, these documents will be used to inform accessibility decision making across APSEA.

- [APSEA Strategic Plan 2021-2024](#)
- [Nova Scotia - Students First Document - March 2018](#)
- [New Brunswick - Policy 322 - September 2013](#)
- [Newfoundland and Labrador - Inclusive Education Initiative - June 2017](#)



Achievements

APSEA aims to make accessibility a priority and is continually working towards greater accessibility across the organization. Examples include:

- Creation of lived experience positions that directly support learners including American Sign Language Specialists, Deaf and BVI Mentors, Educational Deaf Interpreters.
- Virtual Learning Opportunities offering online support to learners in all four Atlantic Provinces.
- APSEA Connect offers virtual professional learning opportunities for families/school teams/service providers.
- Professional collaborations with outside agencies
- For learners who are blind or visually impaired, results of the Functional Vision Learning Media Assessment (FVLMA) are used to support classroom visual access.
- Alternate format material is available for learners who are blind or visually impaired.
- Access Technology is available for learners who are blind or visually impaired (following SET3 assessment).
- Remote mic systems are provided as recommended by their audiologist to learners who qualify to receive services from APSEA.
- Interpreting services are provided to learners who use ASL and qualify to receive services from APSEA.

Barriers

Identified limitations for accessibility in the organization:

- Limited opportunities for individuals with lived experience to share their expertise across the organization and in learner's schools.
- The role of APSEA employees in supporting the tiered system of support in schools requires more support, especially at a Tier 1 level.
- Data from access assessment (i.e., FVLMA) is not documented for all learners.
- No consistent collaboration with outside agencies and potential partnerships.
- No formal process for researching, evaluating, and acquiring information about new accessible technologies.

Actions

Recommended actions to improve accessibility across the organization:

- Develop training modules for disability, accessibility, and inclusion and share with educational partners.
- Continue and enhance collaboration and sharing of resources with school boards, school districts and Regional Centres for Education.
- Continue and enhance collaboration and partnerships with outside agencies and other companies from all four of the Atlantic Provinces
- Continue and enhance online and in-person opportunities for learners to access appropriate areas of APSEA programs and services.
- Establish timelines for learners to receive assessments for access and ensure it is kept current, such as the functional vision learning media and functional listening evaluations supported by APSEA teachers.
- Develop and implement a process for research, evaluation and acquiring new evidenced-informed accessible technologies for populations who are BVI and DHH.

Indicators

Indicators are a measure of accessibility performance that can be tracked over time. These indicators will be gathered and monitored as actions are implemented. Targets can be set once APSEA is aware of an indicator's current status.

- Learner support is informed by current access assessments.
- Learner support is offered in a variety of methods.
- Training modules are developed regarding accessibility, lived experience, inclusion, disability, and is shared widely within the organization and to external partners.
- Presenters with lived experience are sought out for Professional Learning/Training opportunities.
- A formalized process is used for researching, evaluating and acquiring new evidence-informed accessible technologies for learners who are BVI and DHH.

BUILT ENVIRONMENT



Adult and child in a classroom

Goal/Our Commitment

In accordance with NS Bill 59, APSEA commits to uphold, maintain, and improve the current built environment within the office, residence and learning spaces at the APSEA Centre in Halifax, Nova Scotia.

APSEA will ensure the built environment is accessible for the student and staff population that are Deaf/Hard of Hearing and Blind/Visually Impaired.

Policies

Links to current building codes/standards that steer our work.

- [Clear Print Guidelines](#)
- [Clearing Our Path](#)
- [DeafSpace](#)
- [Nova Scotia Building Code Regulations](#)
- [Rick Hansen Certification](#)

Achievements

In the built environment we are always working towards greater accessibility. Examples include:

- The APSEA Centre buildings were designed with BVI learners and staff in mind. As a result, our recommendations are more specific in nature, as the current infrastructure often exceeds current recommendations.
- The maintenance team is responsive and committed to accessibility standards.
- Stairs and railings are well marked and maintained.
- External pathways between buildings are well-lit, flat, and well maintained.
- The main conference room has been renovated and is spacious, maneuverable, fully integrated with technology and flexibility with the lighting.
- Hallways and entryways are spacious and wide.
- Doorways are standard or larger than standard width.
- Heating, ventilation and air conditioning is current and tested to a high air quality standard.
- Emergency Notification System is accessible and supports diverse needs.
- Window covering/films in place to reduce glare and eye strain.
- Current signage includes symbols, braille, and tactile features.

BUILT ENVIRONMENT

Barriers

Identified limitations in the built environment for accessibility in the organization:

- Accessibility features are not present consistently in both buildings.
- Most recent accessibility audit is outdated as renovations and upgrades have since occurred in both buildings and in exterior spaces.
- Exterior signage is lacking and needs updating.
- Temporary flooring solutions are in place at entrances, which could be a tripping and visibility hazard.
- Reception area is not accessible and as building use evolves will need to be upgraded.
- Public washroom facilities are not fully accessible.

Actions

Recommended actions to improve accessibility in the built environment at APSEA:

- Hire dedicated resources to ensure accessibility is embedded across the organization. A Supervisor of Accessibility Services and their team would be responsible for identifying accessibility challenges, providing potential solutions and helping implement best practices in accessibility across the organization. This will allow people with disabilities to navigate APSEA more easily, positively impact the work environment and foster a culture of inclusivity.

- Continue to use Rick Hansen Certification standards as a guide in built environment accessibility, which will help ensure our spaces are able to accommodate diverse physical needs (example: ensuring a variety of chair types are available).
- Work with an accessibility consultant who is Rick Hansen certified to ensure APSEA buildings are reaching their full potential in terms of accessibility.
- Ensure signage in APSEA buildings is accessible to all users of the facility. Following best practice, it is acknowledged that the most accessible signs contain braille and raised print and where appropriate raised pictograms. Aim for signage to be clear, with short concise text.

Indicators

- Supervisor of Accessibility Services is in place, leading this function across the organization.
- An accessibility audit is completed in year one and a timeframe for updating is determined
- Update and improve exterior signage.
- Flooring solutions meet safety and accessibility requirements.
- Reception area meets accessibility requirements.
- Public washroom facilities are fully accessible.

INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION



Adults and young children playing with toys on the floor in a room

Goal/Our Commitment

APSEA is committed to removing barriers from accessing information across the organization including APSEA's website and social media as well as organizational documents, videos, and presentations.

The information and communication provided by APSEA will be accessible to every learner, family member, employee and stakeholder as required.

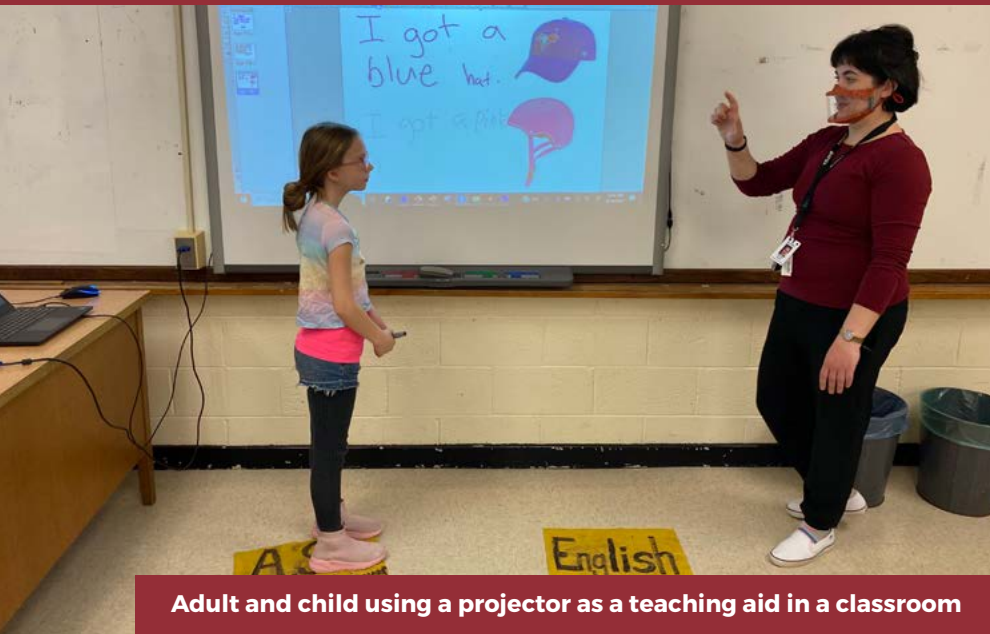
Policies

Government and APSEA Policies steer the work. These policy statements will be used to inform accessibility decision making across APSEA.

[APSEA Social Media Policy](#)

[APSEA - Acceptable Use of Computers, Emails, and Internet Policy](#)

INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION



Adult and child using a projector as a teaching aid in a classroom



Laptop screen with adult on a video call

Achievements

Positive moves now being made towards greater accessibility in information and communication:

- [Document Accessibility Guidelines](#) are available on the APSEA website.
- [Video Conferencing - Interpreting Services Guidelines](#) are available on the APSEA website.
- Video conferencing platform chosen for organization-wide use was selected for its commitment to accessibility.
- Accessibility guidelines for video conferencing are being developed for organizational use.
- Accessible materials including braille, electronic formats, and electronic ASL translations are created on site.

Barriers

Identified limitations in information and communication for accessibility in the organization.

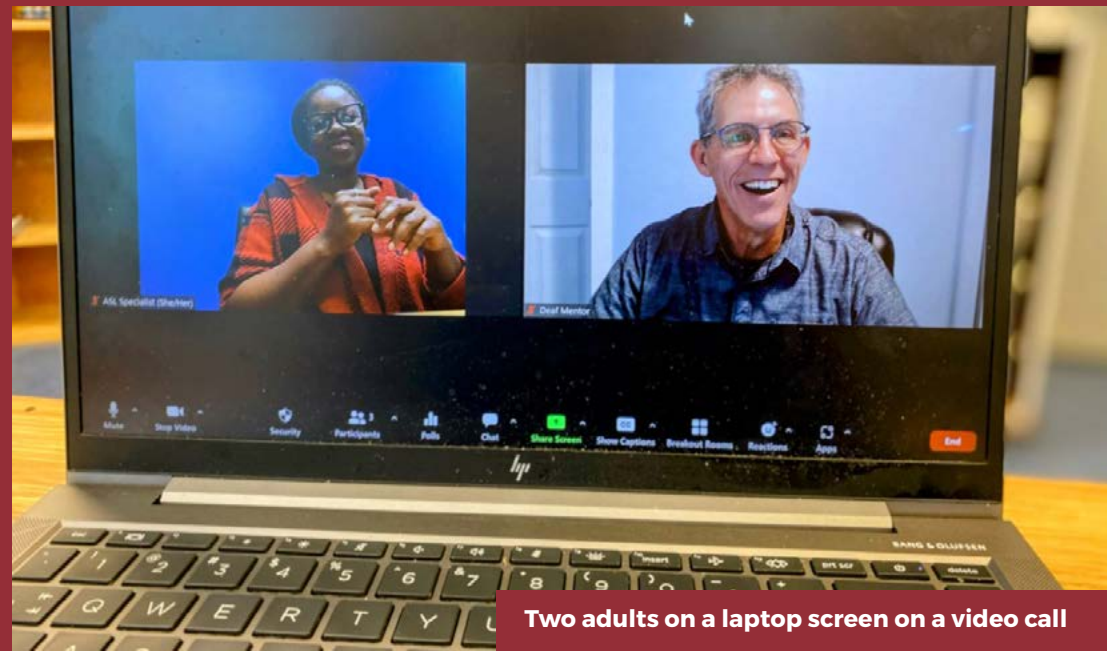
- No existing organizational policies require materials to be accessible (guidelines only).
- Limited human resources to create ASL materials.
- Described video/integrated described video are not widely used practices across the organization.
- Limited lived experience supports for access to technology.

INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION

Actions

Recommended actions to improve accessibility in information and communications across the organization:

- Make training available to all APSEA employees so that they are equipped to create accessible materials as appropriate for the intended audience and/or they have access to supports needed to do so.
- Provide clear guidelines to APSEA employees on how to create accessible materials, detailing the necessary steps and checkpoints to ensure accessibility requirements are met before distribution and that all audience needs are understood.
- APSEA employees will ensure current accessibility standards for videoconferencing, website and accessible electronic materials are met and maintained.
- APSEA website will continue to adhere to accessibility standards and ensure it is kept up to date. The website will incorporate a strong understanding of the digital behaviour and accessibility needs of our audience.
- Incorporate integrated described video into APSEA created content.
- Review internal storage systems (such as databases, financial systems, human resource systems) to ensure APSEA is using the most accessible technology solution available.



Two adults on a laptop screen on a video call

Indicators

Indicators are a measure of accessibility performance that can be tracked over time. These indicators will be gathered and monitored as actions are implemented. Targets can be set once APSEA is aware of an indicator's current status.

- APSEA formalizes accessibility guidelines into policy.
- Software and other programs used by or shared by APSEA are accessible.
- APSEA employees create and expect materials and programs to be created accessibly.

EMPLOYMENT

Goal/Our Commitment

APSEA is committed to removing barriers to the hiring of individuals with lived experience. Additionally, we are committed to improving our current employment processes at all stages.

Policies

Government and APSEA Policies steer the work. These policy statements will be used to inform accessibility decision making across APSEA.

- [APSEA Fair Hiring Policy](#)
- [APSEA Respectful Workplace Policy](#)
- Provincial Human Rights Acts

Achievements

APSEA continues to seek opportunities to improve accessibility in employment.

- Creation of lived experience positions at APSEA.
- Creation of a Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Consultant and Supervisor of Accessibility positions.
- Fair Hiring and Respectful Workplace Policies are in effect.
- Required accommodations are provided as a part of the employee's onboarding process.

- Accessibility and accommodation statements are included from the point of application.
- Lived experience is included as an asset in job postings.
- Job advertisements are translated into ASL.
- ASL users have access to an interpreter throughout employment.
- Interview questions are translated into ASL.
- ASL classes are offered to APSEA staff.
- ASL translation is provided for APSEA emails.
- Human Resources staff are being trained in creating accessible electronic materials.
- Partnered with Safety Services NS to make Occupational Health and Safety video accessible.

Barriers

Identified limitations for accessibility in the organization:

- Online program used by organization for Human Resources purposes is not fully accessible.
- Limited number of staff have been hired representing those with lived experience.
- Not all employees have information and education on respectful considerations and best practice when interacting with individuals who are BVI and/or DHH.

EMPLOYMENT

Actions

Recommended actions to improve accessibility in employment at APSEA:

- Develop a plan to increase recruitment of employees with lived experience.
- Ensure language does not create barriers (ex. interview questions).
- Provide all new employees with information and education on respectful considerations and best practice when interacting with individuals who are BVI and DHH as part of onboarding process.
- Ensure APSEA professional learning opportunities are accessible (Example: ASL interpreter and CART services available/ Alternate Format available).
- When working with external service providers, make every effort to ensure accessible options are provided and selected.
- Ensure there are employment resources within the organization responsible for upholding accessibility commitments and standards.



EMPLOYMENT

Indicators

Indicators are a measure of accessibility performance that can be tracked over time. These indicators will be gathered and monitored as actions are implemented. Targets can be set once APSEA is aware of an indicator's current status.

- All organizational documents/policies are created to be accessible.
- Onboarding procedures include training in creating accessible materials.
- All current staff are trained in creating accessible materials.
- Increase number of staff with lived experience by implementing a more inclusive recruitment process.
- An Accessibility Supervisor position is hired at APSEA.

Implementation

The areas of focus and the work associated with each commitment will be carried out over the next three years. APSEA leadership will work with employees across the organization to create work plans and an accountability framework to track progress.

The Superintendent will report to the Board of Directors quarterly with an Accessibility Plan update which will include progress tracking.

Once in place, the Accessibility Supervisor will be responsible for managing the timeline in the individual workplans, liaising with Departmental Supervisors charged with ensuring indicators of success are being met.

APPENDICES

Accessibility Advisory Committee Members

Co-Chair: Shelley Adams, Manager of Community Engagement Nova Scotia and Prince Edward Island, CNIB

Pam Gow-Boyd, Executive Director Atlantic Canada, Vision Loss Rehabilitation Canada

Co-Chair: Glenda Parsons, Director of Programs for Students who are Blind and/ or Visually Impaired, APSEA

Renée Phair Healey, Psychologist, Newfoundland Association of the Deaf

Aaron Bouma, Self-described Military Specialist for Carleton County (NB), Autism Advocate

Peter Parsons, Orientation and Mobility Specialist, APSEA

Jax Warner, ASL Specialist Nova Scotia and New Brunswick, APSEA

Myles Murphy, Executive Director, Newfoundland and Labrador Association of the Deaf

Karen Staples, Supervisor of Educational Interpreting Services, APSEA

Lynn Seymour Lalonde, Supervisor of Assistive Technology, APSEA

Kelly McKeage, Access Technology Resource Teacher for students who are Blind or Visually Impaired in NS, APSEA

Tarah Sawler, University Student

Community Engagement

A key component of developing this plan was to engage with families, key stakeholders, community partners, employees and individuals who are Deaf, hard of hearing, blind or visually impaired. To gather these perspectives, we did direct outreach via email and promotion on APSEA's social media channels inviting people to participate in online focus groups enabling the Accessibility Committee to share the plan and gather their input and feedback.

Registered participants received a document in advance (ASL version was provided) which contained a full overview of our work to date in draft form. They were asked to review the document prior to the session and come prepared to share feedback. The focus groups examined actions under each area of focus, discussed each component and captured input from those in attendance. The final document was updated to include information gathered in these sessions.

The online focus groups took place on:

February 16, 2023 3:00 pm- 4:30 pm (ASL led, English interpretation provided)

February 16, 2023 6:00 pm- 7:30 pm (English led, ASL interpretation provided)

February 21, 2023 6:00 pm- 7:30 pm (English led, ASL interpretation provided)

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