



The Saanich Equitable Access Team (SEAT)



2024-27

ACCESSIBILITY PLAN

CONTENTS

US	An Introduction to Saanich Schools	3
	Internal Values and Service Commitment	3
	Historical Experiences of those with Diverse Disabilities	4
	Message from the Saanich Equitable Access Team (SEAT)	4
	Territorial Acknowledgement	5
	Intersectionality	5
	Definitions	6
ACCESS	Framework Guiding our Work	7
	<i>Accessible BC Act</i> Principles	7
	Provincial Guiding Resources	7
ADAPT	Accountability	8
	Our Approach	8
	About the Saanich Equitable Access Team	8
	Recruitment	8
	Members	8
ACHIEVE	Accessibility Plan	9
	Priority #1 – Consultation Process	9
	Priority #2 – Barrier Identification	10 - 11
	Priority #3 – Strategic Priorities (2024-2027)	11 - 12 - 13 - 14
LEARN	Ongoing – Monitoring and Evaluation	14
	How to Give us Feedback	14



An Introduction to Saanich Schools

The Saanich School District enrolls close to 8,000 students in a number of neighbourhood and special program schools. Our neighbourhood schools include eight elementary schools, three middle schools, and three secondary schools. We provide educational programming at the Children's Development Centre, two Individual Learning Centres, and a Kindergarten to Grade 12 provincial online learning school called SIDES (South Island Distance Education School). Saanich Schools also boasts one of the most successful international student programs in the province at SISP (Saanich International Student Program).

Internal Values and Service Commitment

Saanich Schools holds the responsibility, as a public education institution and through the Accessible BC Act, to embrace diversity and inclusion and foster a learning environment that prepares youth to be active, participatory members of our diverse local community.

Saanich Schools commits to supporting culturally responsive and barrier-free learning environments that promote diversity, equity, inclusion, and accessibility which reflect and respond to the lived experiences of students, partners, Rights Holders, parents/guardians, staff members and the broader community with diverse disabilities.

Historical Experiences of those with Diverse Disabilities

The experience of those with diverse disabilities in British Columbia has been of profound impact to their lives as individuals have historically faced numerous barriers to accessing quality education including a lack of accommodations, discrimination, and segregation.

In the past, many students with disabilities were placed in separate special education programs or schools, often isolated from their peers. However, in recent decades, there has been a paradigm shift towards inclusive education in BC, aiming to provide all students with equitable access to education within regular classrooms.

Evolving attitudes, policies and practices have increasingly emphasized the importance of accommodating diverse learning needs and fostering a supportive learning environment for students with disabilities.

Overall, while there have been significant strides towards inclusive education in BC, there is still work to be done to address systemic barriers and ensure that all students, regardless of ability, have what they need to learn and thrive in the public education system.

Message from the Saanich Equitable Access Team (SEAT)

The members of the Saanich Equitable Access Team are deeply committed to fostering an inclusive environment where everyone, regardless of ability, feels valued and respected to fully participate and thrive. As advocates for accessibility, we recognize the importance of removing barriers and have what they need to learn and work within the Saanich Schools community.

The work of SEAT and the commitment of the members within reflects the core values of diversity, equity and inclusion and overall social responsibility.



We commit to using our 'seat at the table' to leverage the voice of those with lived experiences, identify barriers existing within Saanich Schools, and strategize to limit and remove the barriers identified.

Territorial Acknowledgement

The Saanich School District resides on the traditional territory of the WŚÁNEĆ people encompassing the four local communities: BO, KE, ĆEN (Pauquachin), WJOŁEŁP (Tsartlip), W,SIKEM (Tseycum), and S,TAUTW (Tsawout).

We acknowledge and thank the WŚÁNEĆ people on whose traditional territory we live, learn, and teach. The WŚÁNEĆ people have lived and worked on this land since time immemorial.



The Saanich School District is committed to providing an education for WŚÁNEĆ and other Indigenous students in ways that enable them to retain their identity and pride in their heritage and, at the same time, gain respect for the diverse cultures presented in schools today. We recognize SENĆOŦEN as the principal First Nations language of the Saanich territory and continue to support programs and curricula that build deeper understandings of the WŚÁNEĆ culture, values, and history.



Intersectionality

The Saanich School District and the members of SEAT recognize and acknowledge that barriers experienced by individuals within the District to equitable learning and employment opportunities may be a result of multiple forms of discrimination which can combine, overlap, or intersect in the experiences of marginalized individuals or groups.



Definitions

Barrier Essentially, anything that stops those with disabilities from being included. Specifically, anything that hinders the full and equal participation of a person with an impairment. Examples can be physical, environmental, attitudinal, communication, policy or practice, and technology based.

Belonging The feeling of safety and inclusion by all individuals within a welcoming and nurturing environment. Individuals are more likely to be engaged and successful when they feel valued, respected, and included.

Disability An inability to participate fully and equally in society as a result of the interaction of an impairment and a barrier.

Full Participation The ability for all individuals within the system to thrive and succeed to their individual needs through increased organizational commitment to education, complex problem solving and capacity building to tackle system barriers.

Impairment A physical, sensory, mental, intellectual, or cognitive impairment, which is permanent, temporary, or episodic.

Inclusion The ability for all members of the Saanich School District community to access and gain equitable opportunities to education and all associated resources.

Justice The ethical and impartial treatment of all members of the Saanich School District community leading to the promotion of equitable and fair outcomes.

Wellness A recognition that there is a direct correlation between the health and well-being of individuals and the experiences they have within their work and learning environments.

ACCESS



Framework Guiding our Work

Accessible BC Act Principles

The Accessible BC Act is legislation that intends to help public sector institutions with identifying and addressing barriers to the full and equal participation of people with disabilities in the province. The accessibility principles considered in the development of this legislation and the associated government plan embrace: inclusion, adaptability, diversity, collaboration, self-determination, and universal design.

Provincial Guiding Resources

SEAT has referenced, as a foundation to the work continually underway, the resources provided by the [BC Accessibility HUB](#) which has been developed by the Disability Alliance of BC and is funded through the Government of British Columbia. BC Accessibility Hub intends to support organizations, disability groups and individuals with disabilities working together to make BC more accessible and inclusive.

The resources and guidance available through the B.C. Council of Administrators of Inclusive Support in Education ([BC CAISE](#)) will also serve as a foundational resource for SEAT.

Accountability

The Saanich School District is responsible for adhering to all legislation and regulation associated with public education including, but not limited to, [the School Act](#), [the B.C. Human Rights Code](#), [the Workers' Compensation Act](#), [the Employment Standards Act](#), [the Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act](#), [the Accessible B.C. Act](#), and the collective agreements held between the District and the [Saanich Teachers' Association](#) and [CUPE Local 441](#).

Our Approach

We commit to working collaboratively and learning through active consultation with affected parties the ways in which we can continually improve access to educational programming and sustainable employment.

About the Saanich Equitable Access Team

Recruitment

The Saanich Equitable Access Team (SEAT) provides the District with advice in relation to how best we can continue to remove and prevent barriers for equitable access to educational services and employment.

An expression of interest was sent out to all partner groups and applications from support staff, teachers, management, parent/guardians, and partner groups were welcomed. The Associations were consulted on appointments where collective agreement language required their involvement with member selection.

In order to enhance representation within SEAT a decision was made early to increase the size of the initial group to include all those who had submitted applications by the requested deadline.

Members

SEAT will continue to be comprised of (at least) half of the members being persons with disabilities and/or individuals representing disability-serving organization(s) and we will continually strive to reflect the diversity of British Columbians including Indigenous peoples. SEAT is Co-Chaired by the Director of Instruction, Diversity & Inclusion and the Director of Human Resources.

The partner groups include representatives of CUPE Local 441, the Saanich Teachers' Association, individuals with Indigenous Ancestry, parents/guardians, and members of the Confederation of Parents' Advisory Councils of Saanich (COPACS), Island Health and excluded management.



Accessibility Plan

Priority #1 – Consultation Process

SEAT members recognize the significant value associated with direct consultation and commentary from students, parents/guardians and staff members who may be experiencing barriers in access to educational services and supports and/or employment while engaging with the District.

Commencing at a meeting in the fall of 2023, SEAT members worked collaboratively to develop a consultation strategy with the intention of maximizing engagement with the various stakeholder groups including COPACS, the STA, CUPE local 441 and the WSÁNEĆ community to ensure our work was being informed and guided by the very voices we are attempting to support. Methods to collect this evidence included; surveys, student voice meetings, and virtual and in-person drop-in meetings facilitated by members of SEAT. Presentations to enhance district-wide awareness associated with the work of SEAT were also shared at school-based PAC meetings and in Staff Meetings.

We engaged with various stakeholder groups to ensure our work was being informed and guided by the very voices we are attempting to support.



Accessibility Plan

Priority #2 – Barrier Identification

Following conclusion of the initial consultation process with all stakeholder groups SEAT utilized the feedback provided to identify the themes and categories associated with existing barriers raised in relation to educational services and employment.

This work may include barriers identified that hold a physical element such as those associated with our schools and facilities but may also include attitudes (school culture), practices, policies, communication, and or technology.

Initial themes that have emerged through discussion and from the web-based feedback mechanism. These are examples of some barriers noted through conversations with members of SEAT, students, staff, the community at large, and will be the ongoing focus for SEAT.

Physical Environment	Notable barriers may be facility design, parking requirements, signage, and access to buildings.
Educational Barrier	<p>Some students may experience learning barriers in the school day when inclusive practices or flexible learning needs are not supported.</p> <p>Notable barriers to learning emerge when there are barriers associated with timely access to assessments (i.e. psycho educational assessment, Occupational Therapy/ Physical Therapy and Speech Therapy).</p>
School Culture	Notable barriers that arise from the attitudes of staff, students, and school community, include discriminatory behaviours and a lack of awareness and/or understanding of diverse disabilities. These barriers can arise within all aspects of the learning environment including the classroom, organized sports, and other extra curricular activities.
Mental Health and Well-being Supports	Notable barriers arise when students and families who may be struggling don't have awareness or access to existing internal and external support systems.

Accessibility Plan

Priority #2 – Barrier Identification

Employment Barriers can arise when there are not enough professional development opportunities available that lead to an increase in staff knowledge and skills associated with diverse learning and employment needs.

Underrepresentation of those with diverse disabilities holding positions within the district can reduce the opportunities and perspectives that might otherwise be available in identifying and shaping organizational change.

Information and Communication Barriers Notable barriers arise from inadequate signage and difficulty reading district messaging (e.g. newsletters, forms, manuals, and brochures)

Notable barriers arise from difficulties giving and receiving information such as by telephone or in virtual meetings, the district website, email messages from schools/district and or in-person interactions with others.

Notable barriers arise when there isn't sufficient access to technology identified in support of learning needs.

Priority #3 – Strategic Priorities (2024-2027)

Saanich School's Strategic Plan 2022-2027 is our roadmap for how we focus our energies and available resources to make Saanich Schools better. The regular monitoring of our District Strategic Plan and our collective focus on its goals will include the evaluation of the implementation of our accessibility plan commitments over the next three years.

Our goal is to build a greater acceptance and understanding of "inclusion, diversity, equity, and accessibility" and the visible or invisible barriers encountered when access to learning, programs, facilities, or engagement is impacted. We will continue to listen to our learning community while reviewing policy and revising administrative procedures, where necessary. We will also continue to build capacity for staff to ensure there is alignment with the principles of accessibility and address gaps in staff awareness or knowledge on accessibility issues.

Accessibility Plan

Priority #3 Strategic Priorities (2024-2027) - Initial Strategies to Increase Access

Awareness Provide information to students, parents/guardians, and staff members in relation to the ongoing work undertaken by SEAT including the Accessibility plan, successes achieved, challenges identified, strategies implemented and the continual pathway for stakeholders to submit feedback for review and consideration.

Students and Parents will be provided with information associated with the work of SEAT and the ways in which feedback can be submitted and heard, at the beginning of each school year. Information related to SEAT and the existing feedback mechanism will also be shared in PAC meetings, IEP meetings and in staff meetings.

Educational Services Saanich Schools will continue to offer a variety of specialized and “programs of choice” for students. Through a range of services and supported by skilled professionals, staff will work with students and their families to provide an inclusive and welcoming learning environment.

We will build upon opportunities that enhance the ability for students to experience belonging, competence and self-determination as we know this will also enable deeper engagement in their learning. Meeting students where they are at academically and emotionally is a fundamental belief whether the student attends one of our elementary, middle, or high schools, the individual learning center, the Children’s Development Center, or provincial on-line learning options.

Mental Health and Well-being We will continue to promote mental health and wellness through social emotional learning and increase the opportunities for students and staff to engage learning that will reduce the stigma and barriers to mental health.

Through existing federal programs, we can ensure students are provided with the meals and healthy snacks required to support and enrich the capacity to learn and engage at school.

ACHIEVE



Accessibility Plan

Priority #3 Strategic Priorities (2024-2027) - Initial Strategies to Increase Access

Schools and Facilities

All schools and facilities within the District are constructed to meet building code at the time of construction. In addition to these requirements the District continues to add accessibility enhancements in an ongoing manner.

As new students with diverse abilities come to our District the Facilities department will work closely with Learning Services to implement other prescribed solutions such as grab bars, high visibility markings, lifts, ramps, and many other options depending on the need.

Transportation

The District owns and operates three (3) buses equipped with wheelchair lifts and has two (2) additional buses within the fleet equipped with wheelchair access to support the needs of students utilizing regular bus transportation as well as field trips and alternate education related opportunities.

Technology

Technology In collaboration with the Information Technology Department, we will ensure technology is accessible, current, and training is ongoing for students to be successful with learning and for staff to be productive in their roles.

Accessibility Plan

Priority #3 Strategic Priorities (2024-2027) - Initial Strategies to Increase Access

Communication and Engagement We will review, re-design and continue to enhance District webpages and online services to increase accessibility and ease of use. This includes a commitment to meeting the Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG) which includes a typeface designed to be displayed on any device that can assist with some common symptoms of dyslexia.

Employment We will continue to work collaboratively with individuals and their corresponding associations, where applicable, to identify and remove barriers in their access to equitable employment opportunities.

We will continue to hire diverse educators and support staff who can leverage representational voice in relation to required organizational change while also supporting students through lived experience.

We will focus on professional development opportunities for staff that increase knowledge and skills associated with diverse learning and employment needs.

Ongoing - Monitoring and Evaluation

SEAT will meet at a higher frequency during the initial phase of the plan which includes the development and roll out of the consultation process. This will ensure the information utilized in the barrier and strategy identification processes is fulsome and representative of all stakeholder groups.

SEAT will then endeavor to meet three (3) times per year to review feedback received through the feedback mechanism and to discuss any new successes and/or challenges requiring consideration.

How to Give us Feedback

Anyone can provide feedback on the plan itself, and or raise concerns about a barrier experienced while accessing educational services or employment by visiting the Saanich School District website. In particular, click on the Resources tab and under the General /Community list you will see a link to Accessibility. An online form will be found on the Accessibility page.