AP 1-313 – ACCESSIBLE COMMUNICATION AND INFORMATION

INTRODUCTION

This procedure supports the Western School Division's commitment to achieving consistent high-quality, accessible standards for any information and communications produced or utilized by or on behalf of the Division. This aims to comply with the Accessible Communication and Information under The Accessibility for Manitobans Act. This procedure applies to all policies, practices, and measures in order to remove barriers related to information and communication for people with disabilities.

Where a barrier is impossible to remove, the Western School Division will seek reasonable accommodations for affected individuals.

This procedure applies to every person who acts on behalf of the Western School Division, whether the individual is an employee, agent, volunteer, or otherwise.

This procedure is guided by the Accessibility for Manitobans Act (AMA) and its standards, such as the Accessible Information and Communication Standard. The procedure ensures that the Western School Division provides equitable access to information and communication for all individuals, regardless of their abilities.

DEFINITIONS

Accessible Formats: include but are not limited to accessible electronic formats, braille, text transcripts, large print, recorded audio, and other formats accessible to persons with disabilities. Upon request, the Western School Division will provide information in alternative formats, considering the following components' criteria and meeting the requirements provided with accessible information and communication guidance such as:

- Appropriate use of colour
- Colour contrast
- Text and language
- Document format and structure
- Logical reading order
- Signage standards
- Use of templates
- Images, non-text elements, and alternative text

The Division will ensure the production, procurement or delivery of information and communication is performed in light of considering all factors that will affect its accessibility for individuals with disabilities who may be blind, legally blind with partially sighted or have vision loss, have a developmental, cognitive or learning disability, have mental, physical condition or mobility limitations.

Communication Supports: include but are not limited to captioning, alternative and augmentative communication supports, plain language, sign language, and other supports that facilitate effective communication.

Assistive Device: a technical aid, the Western School Division will utilize assistive technologies such as screen readers, voice recognition, audio format, and other available tools such as large print programs such as the Zoom Text Magnifier / Reader to support individuals with different needs.

Educational Materials: Accessible educational materials (e.g., textbook, handouts, supplementary learning resources, reference books, workbooks, educational kits, student records, lesson, workshop or program description, scheduling, etc.) will be provided to the students, employees, applicants and prospective applicants, parents and guardians of students with needs as required.

Barrier: defined by the *Accessibility to Manitobans Act* as a long-term physical, mental, intellectual, or sensory impairment affecting an individual. A barrier is also anything that interacts with that impairment in a way that may hinder the person's full and effective participation in society on an equal basis.

ACCESSIBLE COMMUNICATION PRACTICES

Clear Communication: Information will be presented in a clear, concise, and easy-to-understand manner, avoiding jargon or technical language where possible.

Alternative Communication Methods: Options such as sign language interpretation and visual support will be provided for individuals who require them.

Meetings and Events: When hosting meetings or events, accessible seating, pathways, and interpreters will be provided upon request.

Libraries in the Western School Division: The Western School Division's libraries will plan and procure the necessary resources to accommodate the needs of the individuals who attend the libraries. The libraries will inform and notify the public and its users of accessible items and in what accessible format this item is provided.

Duty to Notify: The Western School Division will provide notice to the public, including students, employees, and visitors, that information, educational materials, and library materials are available through communication support and alternative formats. This will include requests related to emergency procedures and workplace health and safety information.

Respond to Request: The Western School Division will respond to the requests promptly following the consultation with the person making such request to identify a support or format needed that removes the barriers.

TRAINING AND EDUCATION

Staff Training: Western School Division's staff will receive training on accessibility best practices and the use of assistive technologies. The staff responsible for producing, procuring, or delivering public information and communications will be assigned specific training associated with their roles to gain skills and knowledge on how to create information and communication that are in accessible formats that meet the standards. The training will include a manual for creating accessibility in but not limited to:

- Word, PDF, and InDesign documents
- Web design and web content
- Print and electronic materials
- Meetings and presentations
- Signage design

Ongoing Education: Staff will have access to promotional and educational materials as well as regular professional development to stay current with accessibility standards and practices. The Division will develop an auxillary appendix sheet for this procedure to include and keep an updated record of all information regarding available training materials and manuals and assist with making specific training available upon request.

DIVISION WEBSITE AND WEB CONTENT

The Division's website(s) and all web content will be created in accordance with accessible information and communication requirements. The Division will ensure it complies with or exceeds Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (W.C.A.G) 2.1 Level AA standards. The staff who edit or post information or communications on the Division's website will receive training on creating and ensuring it is in an accessible format that meets the required standards. Permission to edit or post to the Division's website will not be granted without completing this training. The Division ensures that its website is compatible with assistive devices, such as screen readers, and provides users with multifunctional usage options, such as enlarging text, adjusting contrast, and keyboard navigation. Design, upkeep, and maintenance of the Division's website and web content will continually be aligned and uphold the four main principles of web accessibility, provided in more significant details by W.C.A.G., to be perceivable, operable, understandable, and robust.

REQUEST FOR ALTERNATE FORMATS AND COMMUNICATION ASSISTANCE

Upon request, the Division will make every reasonable effort to provide any public information and communications produced by or on behalf of the Division in an alternate format or with communication support. In discussion with the person who made the request and considering the individual's abilities, the Division will determine the appropriate alternate format or communication assistance. Alternate formats can include, but are not limited to:

- large print
- Braille
- recorded audio
- closed captioning
- descriptive video
- text transcripts
- print to electronic or electronic-to-print formats

Communication supports can include, but are not limited to:

- reading information out loud
- exchanging written notes
- sign language
- assistive devices, such as iPads
- using yes/no questions
- picture communication exchanges
- using a Teletypewriter
- clear speech and plain language

NOTICE TO THE PUBLIC

The Division will post a notice that alternate formats or communication supports are available upon request in a conspicuous location in all Division's facilities that are open to the public, including on the Division's website. Additionally, the Division will clearly provide this notice for:

- any public emergency response procedures, plans, or public safety information produced by or on behalf of the Division

- any public meetings, information sessions, or events held by the Division where information or communications will be produced, distributed, or displayed
- council and committee agendas and minutes
- standard public documents as appropriate

PROCESS

The Division will accept requests for alternate formats or communication supports through the Accessibility Request Form, which is available online. However, it is also open to receiving requests through various channels, including but not limited to email, online, in person, in writing, or over the telephone. These requests will be documented in the Accessibility Request Form for details and tracking of the response, and they will be retained for the records. The Division will make an effort to respond to requests in a timely manner, assigning a designee to communicate about the inquiries with the concerned individuals.

FEEDBACK

The Division will maintain a feedback process for the public to submit questions, comments, or concerns regarding accessibility provisions across the Division. The Division is committed to responding promptly to feedback it receives on the accessibility of the Division's information and communication, including educational materials. Processes for submitting, receiving, and responding to feedback will be in accessible formats, and we will give notice that alternate formats or communications supports are available upon request. The input and the Division's actions will be documented in a manner that takes into account an individual's abilities and selected method of correspondence.

PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT AND CONSULTATION

The Division will implement a consultation process with the public, employees, students and visitors regarding the accessibility of information and communication, educational materials or any associated barriers to access to the information, communication or educational materials to identify the support or format that would remove barriers. The consultation will be available through the following means:

- In-person,
- Request Form: Accessibility Request & Feedback Form
- Online Survey: Accessibility Survey

RECORD KEEPING

The Western School Division keeps a written record of its accessibility and training policies, procedures, and training materials. These documents include a summary of the training material's content and the date when the training was offered. WSD staff, managers, and the public are made aware of the Western School Division's policies and procedures. Along with other related information, these policies are available upon request in a format accessible to the user.

The Western School Division will inform the public and its staff regarding accessibility through training, policies/procedures, the WSD website, social media accounts, newsletters, job postings, advertising of events, and posters. Information will be distributed to all WSD locations, which will be located in offices and entrances. WSD provides all relevant information within a reasonable timeframe and in a format that meets the needs of individuals with a disability at no additional cost.

GLOSSARY OF COMMON TERMS AND ACRONYMS

Accessible Communication	Communication that is delivered in way(s) that is easily understood
Accessible Information	Information that is presented in a format that is easily understood.
Accessible Formats	Providing information or communication in a format that better accommodates an individual who is unable to use the original format.
AIC	Accessible Information and Communication
AMA	The Accessibility for Manitobans Act
ASL	American Sign Language. A language used primarily by persons who are deaf, deafened or hard of hearing. It utilizes hand positions, gestures, facial expressions and body movements. With its own grammar and syntax, it is not a manual translation of the English language.
Assistive Listening System	A device that assists an individual who is hard of hearing. It may be used to compensate for the effects of distance, background noise or poor room acoustics. Types of systems include FM, induction loop, infrared and one-to-one communicators. These use various means of transmitting a signal to the individual who adjusts his or her hearing aid or headset to gain a better hearing experience.
Audio – Described Videos	A process where a narrator describes the visual elements of a video. Persons who are blind or have vision loss are able to follow visual information such as actions, gestures, scene changes or text that appears on screen.
Braille	A tactile writing system that uses arrangements of raised dots to represent letters and numerals. Uncontracted Braille (sometimes referred to as Type 1 Braille) is a direct transcription of a Braille character for its written equivalent and is generally used by beginners. Contracted Braille (sometimes referred to as Type 2 Braille) makes more efficient use of space and increases reading speed by using a system of contractions.
Braille Embosser	A type of printer connected to a computer that renders text in Braille. The software translates the text into Braille before sending it to the embosser.
Captioning	Simultaneous transcripts of audio information.
CART (Communication Access Realtime Translation)	The instantaneous translation of the spoken word into written text using a stenotype machine or notebook

	computer with real-time software to display text on a laptop computer, monitor or screen
Closed Captioning	A means of presenting the audible portion of a broadcast in a text format. The audible portion is transcribed into text across the bottom of the screen. A decoder allows for the captioning to be turned on or off, unlike open captioning, which remains on screen.
Collaboration Software	Types of software that allow people engaged in a common task to work together
Communication Support	Devices or practices that facilitate communication
Communication Systems	Systems that provide for the transferring of information between individuals or equipment.
DAISY (Digital Accessible Information System)	A system that assists individuals who have a print disability. An improvement over audiobooks, it provides a means of skipping to chapters, using an index and placing bookmarks.
Deafblind	A type of disability where an individual has both a loss of vision and hearing. The term deafblind does not necessarily imply that an individual is completely deaf or blind. In many cases, there may be residual hearing or vision.
Described Video	The synchronized verbal description of the visual action is usually interjected in pauses in the audio dialogue
HTML (HyperText Markup Language)	The authoring language is used to build web pages.
Information System	A system that provides any combination of information technology and people's activities using that technology to support operations, management and decision-making.
Interpreter	An individual who acts as a moderator between parties who do not share a common language. ASL interpreter would moderate between a hearing and deaf individual by translating American Sign Language to spoken English
Intervenor	An intervenor is a person who acts as a moderator for an individual who is deafblind. The intervenor assists with communication and interaction with the environment.
Large print document	A document that is formatted with text that is larger than what is typically used.
OCR (Optical Character Recognition)	The recognition of text characters by a computer is a possible solution for quickly creating an electronic version of a printed document
Open captioning	Captioning provides a text version of the dialogue and sounds contained in a video. Open captions are permanently displayed on the screen and cannot be turned off the way closed captioning can.
PDF (Portable Document File)	A file format that is highly portable across computer platforms.
Plain language	Use language that is simple, clear, and direct and only uses as many words as necessary. It avoids complicated sentence structures and inflated words. It allows the reader to understand and focus on the message quickly.

Point size	A unit of measurement for font sizes and other small items on a printed page.
Portable assistive listening system	A type of assistive listening system that can be relocated.
Procurement procedure	A policy that guides how a business will go about sourcing and purchasing items for business use.
Real-time LED information screen	A display to allow information to be instantly delivered. It may be one component of an emergency notification system
Sans-serif font	A style of font such as Arial or Helvetica that does not have the flared extensions (serifs) at the ends of strokes.
Screen reader	A software application that attempts to interpret what is being displayed on-screen and translate it to a medium such as speech, Braille or sound icons that are more accessible to the user.
Semantic mark-up	A type of website programming language that provides the foundation for a more accessible website
Sign-Language	A language used primarily by persons who are Deaf. It utilizes hand positions, gestures, facial expressions and body movements.
Tactile map	Raised tactile surfaces are used to convey information that is contained in a map. Tactile information can also be used for other non-text documents such as graphs, diagrams or artwork.
TeDUB (Technical Drawings Understanding for the Blind)	A project to design a system to automatically generate descriptions of graphics to allow them to be understood by people unable to access them visually.
TTY (TDD) (TeleTYpewriter)	A device that allows persons who are deaf, deafened or hard of hearing or who have a speech impairment to communicate by typing messages. It allows for a continuous conversation as opposed to individual text messages.
VoIP (Voice over Internet Protocol)	A technology that allows telephone calls to be made over the Internet.
W3C (World Wide Web Consortium)	An international consortium focussed on ensuring the long-term growth of the Web. This committee develops standards and core principles to promote compatibility.
WAI (Web Accessibility Initiative)	An initiative of the W3C to promote the accessibility of the Web for persons with disabilities.
WAI-ARIA (Web Accessibility Initiative – Accessible Rich Internet Applications)	Information created by the W3C to guide the creation of accessible dynamic content and user interface components. It helps address barriers such as those encountered by individuals who use screen readers or are unable to use a mouse.
Web-TV	Use of an online service and a television in place of a computer monitor.
WCAG 2.0	The second version of the WAI's accessibility initiatives was published in 2008 following the original guidelines that dated back to 1999.
Web content	Information provided on a Web site includes, but is not limited to, Web pages, documents, videos, audio files, records and archived materials.

Reference:

The Accessibility for Manitobans Act (CCSM C A1.7)
The Accessibility for Manitobans Act – Accessible Information and Communication
Respect for Human Diversity and Equity Education
Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms
Manitoba Human Rights Code
Public Schools Act
Checklist for Educational Institutions - the Accessibility Standards for Information and Communication

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