AP 1-314 – ACCESSIBLE CUSTOMER SERVICE

INTRODUCTION

This procedure supports the Western School Division's commitment to providing equitable, respectful, and accessible customer service to all students, parents, employees, volunteers, and members of the public.

The Western School Division (WSD) strives to remove and prevent barriers to accessibility and ensure compliance with *The Accessibility for Manitobans Act (AMA)* and *The Accessible Customer Service Standard Regulation.*

WSD is committed to providing services and programs in a manner that upholds the principles of **dignity, independence, integration, and equal opportunity**. Where barriers cannot be removed, reasonable accommodations will be provided.

This procedure applies to all employees, trustees, volunteers, contractors, agents, and any other individuals who provide goods, services, or facilities on behalf of the Division.

DEFINITIONS

Accommodation – A process of removing barriers that limit access for individuals with disabilities. This may include modifying environments, schedules, or practices to support full and equal participation.

Assistive Device – A technical aid, communication device, or other instrument used to maintain or improve the functional abilities of people with disabilities. Examples include wheelchairs, hearing aids, or communication boards.

Barrier – Anything that interacts with a person's disability in a way that may hinder full and effective participation in society. Barriers may be physical, attitudinal, informational, or systemic.

Reasonable Accommodation – Adjustments that remove barriers without causing undue hardship to the Division.

Service Animal – An animal trained to assist a person with a disability as defined by *The Manitoba Human Rights Code*.

Support Person – An individual who accompanies a person with a disability to assist with communication, mobility, personal care, or access to services.

ACCESSIBLE CUSTOMER SERVICE PRACTICES

The Division will make every reasonable effort to ensure that its policies, procedures, and practices are consistent with the principles of accessibility.

1. Communication

- Staff will communicate with individuals in ways that consider their communication needs.
- Options may include writing things down, reading aloud, allowing extra time for discussion, or using plain language.

- When documentation is requested by a person disabled by barriers, WSD will provide the information/documentation in a manner that takes into account the barrier, within a reasonable time frame and at no cost to the individual.

2. Assistive Devices

- Individuals may use their own assistive devices when accessing goods and services at WSD facilities.
- Where Division-owned assistive devices are available, staff will be trained on their proper use and how to assist respectfully.
- When safety or accessibility concerns exist, alternative arrangements will be made to ensure service continuity.

3. Support Persons

- Support persons are welcome in all Division facilities open to the public.
- If admission or service fees apply, WSD will notify the public in advance and will make every effort to waive or reduce fees for support persons.
- The Division may require a person to be accompanied by a support person when necessary to protect health or safety.

4. Service Animals

- Service animals are permitted in all public areas of Division facilities unless prohibited by law.
- If it is unclear whether an animal is a service animal, staff may respectfully ask:
    - Is the animal assisting you with a disability?
    - What assistance has the animal been trained to provide?
- The individual is responsible for the care and control of the service animal.
- If exclusion is required for legal or safety reasons, WSD will offer alternative accommodations.

5. Maintaining Barrier-Free Access

- WSD will maintain accessible features such as ramps, automatic doors, and accessible washrooms to ensure continued usability.
- Aisles, entrances, and public spaces will be kept free of obstructions.

6. Temporary Disruptions

- In the event of a planned or unexpected disruption to accessibility features or services, WSD will provide notice that includes:
    - The reason for the disruption.
    - The expected duration; and
    - Alternative facilities or services, if available.
- Notices will be posted on-site, on the Division website, or distributed by other reasonable means.

FEEDBACK PROCESS

The Western School Division welcomes and values feedback about the accessibility of its services and facilities. Feedback helps identify and address barriers in a timely and effective manner.

Feedback may be provided in person, by phone, email, or in writing. The Division will acknowledge receipt of feedback promptly, document the actions taken, and ensure records are available upon request in accessible formats.

Contact:
Western School Division
4-75 Thornhill St., Morden, MB, R6M 1P2
Phone: (204) 822-4448
Email: accessibility@westernsd.mb.ca

TRAINING AND EDUCATION

WSD will provide mandatory accessible customer service training to all employees, trustees, volunteers, and contractors who interact with the public or are involved in policy development.

Training includes:

- A review of *The Accessibility for Manitobans Act, The Accessible Customer Service Standard Regulation* and *The Manitoba Human Rights Code*.
- How to interact and communicate with persons with various disabilities.
- How to assist individuals using assistive devices, service animals, or support persons.
- What to do if someone has trouble accessing a service; and
- The principles of dignity, independence, integration, and equal opportunity.

Training will be provided as part of orientation for new staff and refreshed as required when procedures or legislation change. Records of training dates, participants, and materials will be maintained and made available upon request.

ACCESSIBLE PUBLIC EVENTS

The Division is committed to ensuring that all public events are accessible. A public event includes a public meeting, a public hearing and a consulatation process required under an enactment in Manitoba.
When holding a public event, WSD takes reasonable measures to ensure that:

- Notice of the event is given in a manner that is accessible to persons disabled by bariers.
- Advance notice is provided that accessibility features and supports are available upon request.
- Venues are chosed that have accessible parking, entrances, and washrooms.
- Interpreters, captioning, or other communication supports are arranged where requested.

DOCUMENTATION AND AVAILABILITY

WSD will maintain and make publicly available all policies, practices, and procedures related to accessible customer service. Documents will be provided in accessible formats upon request at no additional cost, including large print, electronic text, or plain language formats. Information about the availability of accessible formats will be posted on the Division's website and at public facilities.

CONFIDENTIALITY

WSD respects the privacy and confidentiality of all individuals with disabilities. Information shared as part of an accommodation or feedback process will be managed confidentially and in accordance with privacy legislation and WSD's Privacy and Access to Information Procedure (*AP 1-600 Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy*).

RECORD KEEPING

WSD will maintain written records of its accessibility and training policies, procedures, and training materials. These records will include training content, delivery dates, and attendance lists. Accessibility-related documents will be made available to staff and the public through the WSD website, newsletters, or upon request.

REVIEW AND REFERENCES

This Administrative Procedure will be reviewed every three years or as required by legislative changes to *The Accessibility for Manitobans Act* or related standards.

References:

- *The Accessibility for Manitobans Act (CCSM c A1.7)*
- *Customer Service Standard Regulation*
- *The Manitoba Human Rights Code*
- *The Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act (FIPPA)*
- *Western School Division Accessibility Plan (AP 1-311 Accessibility Plan Update)*
- *Animal Service Administrative Procedure (AP 2-800 Use of Trained Service Animals)*

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