ACCESSIBILITY PLAN

MAPLE RIDGE - PITT MEADOWS SCHOOL DISTRICT NO. 42

SEPTEMBER 2023

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CONTEXT

Maple Ridge – Pitt Meadows School District No. 42 meets the learning needs of more than 16,000 students of all ages and is defined by its determination to keep student learning and growth at the heart of all its decisions. The district provides K-12 educational services in 22 elementary schools, six secondary schools and two alternate schools. It also provides a variety of certificate programs and relevant quality lifelong learning opportunities through Ridge Meadows College and Continuing Education.

All decisions made by Maple Ridge – Pitt Meadows School District No. 42 are guided by its vision, mission, and core values.

OUR VISION is for every individual to feel valued and for all learners to reach their potential.

OUR MISSION is to support all individuals in their development as successful learners, and as respectful, caring and responsible members of society.

OUR VALUES are a responsibility to all learners, embracing uniqueness, offering diverse learning opportunities, cultivating culture and community, personal and social responsibility and high expectations for success.

Responsibility to All Learners: We believe each individual in our school district community has the capacity to learn and we have a responsibility to support their educational journey.

Uniqueness of Each Individual: We value and celebrate the uniqueness of each learner and embrace diverse ways of learning. We provide a range of instructional methods and support systems to help all learners realize their full potential.

Diverse Learning Opportunities: We believe in offering choices to all learners, ensuring equitable access to all programs, and adopting a holistic approach to education. We encourage learning beyond the traditional classroom setting and support lifelong learning.

Culture and Community: We celebrate and appreciate the richness of our community's many cultures. We encourage interdependence and collaboration within the school district community, and actively seek partnerships with the wider community.

Personal and Social Responsibility: We recognize that a sense of belonging is essential for the success of all learners. We act as responsible stewards within our community, cultivating a culture of care. We strive to develop leadership and citizenship skills in all learners.

High Expectations for Success: We value the ability of all learners to set high expectations for themselves and define their own personal success. We believe success is measured through credible evidence of learning and rigorous self-assessment. We are dedicated to supporting all learners in achieving their personal goals.

In achieving our mission, our vision and living our values, we are guided by three strategic directions. These strategic directions are developed out of school growth plans, departmental operational plans, the strategic facilities plan, student forum, and feedback collected from partner groups, through round tables, and through broader consultation.

☛ 1. Inclusive culture of care and belonging where the well-being, diversity, identity, and success of all learners is supported and celebrated.

☛ 2. Intentional support for a growth mindset, collaboration, interdependence, and staff development.

☛ 3. Forward-thinking, research-informed, effective, efficient, sustainable, value-based, and connected school district.

MAPLE RIDGE - PITT MEADOWS SCHOOL DISTRICT NO. 42

VISION

Our vision is for every individual to feel valued and for all learners to reach their potential.

MISSION

Our mission is to support all individuals in their development as successful learners, and as respectful, caring and responsible members of society.

(Tree branches:)
- Inclusive culture of care where the well-being and success of all learners is supported and celebrated
- Intentional support for a growth mindset, collaboration, interdependence, and staff development
- Forward-thinking, research-informed, ethical, effective, efficient, sustainable & connected school district

VALUES

Responsibility to all learners
We believe that all individuals in our school district community have the capacity to learn and that we are responsible for supporting their learning.

Uniqueness of each individual
We value the uniqueness of each learner and embrace diverse ways of learning. We foster a variety of instructional methods and provide support to all learners so that they can realize their potential.

Diverse learning opportunities
We value choices for all learners, equity of access to all programs, and a holistic approach to learning. We encourage learning opportunities beyond the classroom. We support life-long learning.

Culture and community
We celebrate our many cultures and seek ways to appreciate and embrace diversity. We encourage interdependence and collaboration within the school district community. We value community partnerships.

Personal and social responsibility
We believe that a sense of belonging is at the heart of our school district community and is fundamental to the success of all learners. We are committed to acting as responsible stewards within our community. We cultivate a culture of care within our school district community, and seek to develop the leadership and citizenship capacity of all learners.

High expectations for success
We value the ability of all learners to set high expectations for themselves and to describe personal success. We believe success is measured through credible evidence of learning and rigorous self-assessment. We are committed to supporting all learners in achieving personal success.

School District 42
Maple Ridge & Pitt Meadows
Learning Today, Leading Tomorrow

MESSAGE FROM THE SUPERINTENDENT

In the Maple Ridge – Pitt Meadows School District, we are wholeheartedly committed to fostering a learning and working environment that embraces and uplifts every student and staff member.

Our objective is to ensure equitable opportunities that meet the needs of the wonderfully diverse community we serve. We are dedicated to this goal and with that in mind, the district is establishing a comprehensive three-year Accessibility Plan.

This plan will play a pivotal role in ensuring accessibility remains a priority as outlined in our vision and mission. It will allow us to continue working towards our vision by addressing the diverse needs of students and staff. We will be able to better support all individuals in their development as successful learners and respectful, caring and responsible members of society.

The *Accessible British Columbia Act* aligns with our district's core values and we are committed to supporting equity of access by identifying, removing and preventing barriers.

We are dedicated to providing a learning and working environment that embraces diversity, empowers **all** individuals, and celebrates the unique contributions each person brings to our community.

Harry Dhillon
Superintendent of Schools

TERRITORY ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

Maple Ridge – Pitt Meadows School District No. 42 is located on the shared traditional and unceded territories of the Katzie First Nation and Kwantlen First Nation.

We recognize all First Nations, Métis, and Inuit students and families in our schools and community, and celebrate the many different cultures of which our school district is composed.

We are committed to listening, learning and honouring the rich cultures, histories and contributions of Indigenous peoples.

DEFINITIONS

Accessibility: The state of having programs, services and environments that allow all individuals to participate fully in society without encountering barriers.

Accessibility Committee: An official group formed by one or more organizations in collaboration with people with disabilities to create an accessibility plan and feedback mechanism.

Accessibility Plan: A plan developed by an Accessibility Committee that identifies challenges and solutions for addressing accessibility barriers.

Barrier: Anything that prevents a person with a disability from fully participating in all aspects of society because of their disability. This includes physical/environmental, attitudinal, information, communications, policy or practice, and technological barriers.

Types of barriers:

- **Physical/Environmental Barrier**: A barrier resulting from building design, smells/sounds, lighting, the area adjacent to the building, shape of rooms, the size of doorways, and so on.
- **Attitudinal Barrier:** A barrier that arises from the attitudes of staff, students and the school community, including discriminatory behaviours and a lack of disability awareness.
- **Communication Barrier:** A barrier that arises from difficulties receiving information in person, by telephone or online, interacting with teachers, peers, receptionists or other staff, and receiving training.
- **Information Barrier**: A barrier that arises from inadequate or incomprehensible signage, difficulties reading brochures, forms, manuals, websites, fax transmissions, equipment labels, computer screens, and so on.
- **Policy or Practice Barrier:** Rules, regulations and protocols that prevent a person from performing their job satisfactorily or participating in society. Policy, practice, and procedures that prevent a student from accessing the curriculum and fully participating in the school community.
- **Technological Barrier:** Barriers resulting from computers, photocopiers, fax machines, telephones and switches, including the lack of assistive technologies.

Disability: The state of being unable to participate fully and equally in society as a result of the interaction between an impairment and a barrier.

Impairment: A physical, sensory, mental, intellectual, cognitive limitation, whether permanent, temporary or episodic.

FRAMEWORK GUIDING THE WORK

* For additional information on related publications and legislation, see Appendix B.

GLOBAL CONTEXT

UNITED NATIONS

The United Nations (UN) stands as a strong advocate for diversity, equity, and inclusion in the workplace, recognizing its pivotal role in achieving sustainable development and social progress. The UN promotes these principles through various initiatives and policies, emphasizing equal opportunities, non-discrimination, and the empowerment of underrepresented groups. The organization actively encourages member states and partners to adopt inclusive hiring practices, create diverse work environments, and ensure equitable representation at all levels. By championing diversity, equity and inclusion, the UN not only sets a powerful example, but strives to cultivate a global culture of respect, understanding and collaboration.

CANADIAN CONTEXT AND LEGISLATION

The *Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms*, the *Employment Equity Act*, and the *Accessible Canada Act* all play crucial roles in supporting accessibility in Canada.

CANADIAN CHARTER OF RIGHTS AND FREEDOMS

The *Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms* guarantees fundamental rights and freedoms to all individuals within Canada. It provides protections against discrimination based on varying grounds, including disability. This ensures that individuals with disabilities are entitled to equal protection and benefit of the law, promoting their access to essential services, facilities and opportunities.

EMPLOYMENT EQUITY ACT

Employment Equity Act is a federal legislation that aims to achieve workplace equality by removing barriers and promoting the inclusion of four designated groups, including persons with disabilities. The act requires federally regulated employers to take proactive actions to address disadvantages and ensure equal employment opportunities. By specifically including persons with disabilities, the *Employment Equity Act* works to enhance accessibility in the workplace and ensure fair and equitable treatment for individuals with disabilities.

ACCESSIBLE CANADA ACT

Accessible Canada Act is a landmark federal legislation that came into force in 2019, aiming to create a barrier-free Canada for individuals with disabilities. The act establishes a framework for identifying, removing, and preventing accessibility barriers in areas under federal jurisdiction, such as transportation, employment, and public services. It mandates accessibility standards, promotes inclusive design, and establishes mechanisms for accountability and enforcement. By setting a national standard for accessibility, the *Accessible Canada Act* aims to enhance the participation and inclusion of persons with disabilities in all aspects of society.

Together, these legislative measures provide a comprehensive framework for enhancing accessibility, ensuring equal rights, and removing barriers that hinder the full participation and inclusion of individuals with disabilities in Canada.

BRITISH COLUMBIA CONTEXT AND LEGISLATION

ACCESSIBLE BRITISH COLUMBIA ACT

The *Accessible British Columbia Act* was established in June 2021 to promote accessibility in the province. The goal of the act is to improve opportunities for individuals with disabilities and actively engage them in the identification, elimination, and prevention of barriers.

Principles of the Accessible British Columba Act:

INCLUSION

All British Columbians, including persons with disabilities, should be able to participate fully and equally in their communities.

ADAPTABILITY

Accessibility plans should reflect that disability and accessibility are evolving concepts that change as services, technology, and attitudes change.

DIVERSITY

Every person is unique. People with disabilities are individuals with varied backgrounds. Individual characteristics including race, gender, sexual orientation, religion, and lived experience greatly inform the experiences of individuals.

Accessibility plans should acknowledge the principle of intersectionality and diversity within the disability community.

COLLABORATION

Promoting accessible communities is a shared responsibility and everyone has a role to play.

Accessibility plans should create opportunities for organizations and communities to work together to promote access and inclusion.

Accessibility plans should seek to empower people with disabilities to make their own choices and pursue the lives they wish to live.

UNIVERSAL DESIGN

The Centre for Excellence in Universal Design defines Universal Design as "the design and composition of an environment so that it can be accessed, understood, and used to the greatest extent possible by all people regardless of their age, size, ability or disability."

Acessibility plans should be designed to meet the needs of all people who wish to interact with the organization.

EQUITY IN ACTION

DEEPENING INDIGENOUS EDUCATION AND EQUITY

Maple Ridge – Pitt Meadows School District supports the wholistic well-being of all learners and equal educational opportunities.

During the 2020/21 school year, the district joined the provincial *Equity in Action* project. Spearheaded by principal investigator Dr. Amy Parent, a dedicated joint research team from the Faculties of Education at Simon Fraser University and the University of British Columbia carried out a review to shed light on the educational experience for Indigenous learners.

The project employed multiple research methods during the process, including Indigenous methodologies.

The *Equity Scan* resulted in the formulation of **97 recommendations**, which were grouped into eight overarching strands, aligning with the project's core research questions. The strands include:

1. Indigenous Educational Governance
2. Indigenous Knowledges: Teaching, Learning and Assessment
3. Engaging Colonialism
4. Indigenous Specific Racism and Responses
5. School District Strategic Plan, School Growth Plans and Policies
6. Professional Development
7. Transitions
8. District Alternate Continuing Education/Connected Learning Community Remote Learning Sharing Circle

In September 2022, the school district and the Aboriginal Education department welcomed Kathleen Anderson to assist in actioning the report's recommendations.
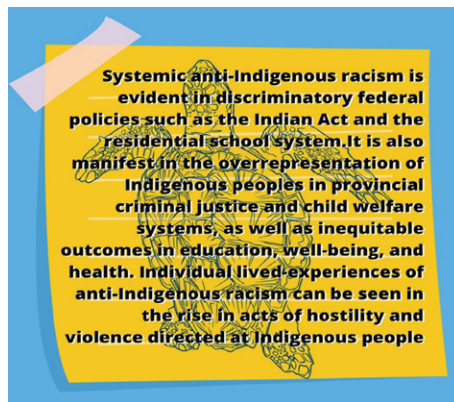
Artist credit: Ivy Edad

Artwork created by Rain Pierre for Deepening Indigenous Education and Equity (June 22) report.

ACCESSIBILITY COMMITTEE

RESPONSIBILITIES

The Accessibility Committee is established pursuant to the requirements outlined in the *Accessible British Columbia Act* and serves as an advisory body. The Committee's responsibilities are to:

☛ Assist the school district in identifying barriers to individuals in or interacting with the district.

☛ Advise the school district on removing and preventing barriers to individuals in or interacting with the district.

☛ Advise the school district on the development, implementation, review and updating of an accessibility plan.

COMPOSITION

In accordance with the *Accessible British Columbia Act*, the Committee must, to the extent possible, have members who are selected consistent with the following goals:

a. at least half of the members are:
   i. persons with disabilities, or
   ii. individuals who support, or are from organizations that support, persons with disabilities;
c. the members described in paragraph a reflect the diversity of persons with disabilities in British Columbia;
d. at least one of the members is an Indigenous person;
e. the committee reflects the diversity of persons in British Columbia.

MEMBERSHIP

Kim Dumore	*Trustee (Alternate: Pascale Shaw – Trustee)*
Hilaire Ford	*Teacher*
Caroline Gaudet	*Parent*
Louie Girotto	*Director of Facilities*
Aiden Kelly	*Student*
Trish Osmack	*CUPE*
Amanda Reber	*Manager, Health, Safety and Wellness*
Michael Scarcella	*Director of Instruction (Learning Services)*
Cheryl Schwarz	*Deputy Superintendent*
Dana Sirsiris	*Director of Human Resources*
Sherri Skerratt	*District Principal Safe and Caring Schools*

* For Accessibility Committee Terms of Reference and related school district policies, refer to Appendix A.

RECRUITMENT

Harry Dhillon, Superintendent for Maple Ridge – Pitt Meadows School District, appointed Deputy Superintendent, Cheryl Schwarz, to chair the Accessibility Committee.

The Deputy Superintendent met with district leadership team members to review the *Accessible British Columbia Act* and discuss expectations for the creation of an Accessibility Committee and selection of its members (noted under composition).

The chairperson appointed a co-chair and members to the committee. The terms of reference for the Accessibility Committee were approved by the School Board.

The following meeting norms have been established by the Accessibility Committee to guide discussions:

☛ **Speak your truth, listen for understanding.**

☛ **Listen with all three ears; two in our head and one in our heart.**

☛ **Hold awareness that discussions about accessibility can be retraumatizing for people with disabilities.**

☛ **Self-care is crucial as we engage in dialogue. It is essential to recognize that if a participant feels the need to step out of the conversation for a few moments, it is not only welcomed but fully understood. Taking breaks and prioritizing one's well-being during discussions is important and will be supported.**

CONSULTATION PROCESS

The Accessibility Committee will identify barriers through an audit of policies and practices, a district student forum, feedback from teachers teaching on call, the creation of a district accessibility feedback tool, story gathering, a survey to the school community and a physical accessibility audit.

COMPLETED

DISTRICT STUDENT FORUM

The purpose of the forum was to hear from students and use their voices to inform future planning. On February 1, 2023, the committee collected feedback from a diverse group of students in Grades 9-12, representing all secondary schools and alternate education programs.

The theme for the student forum was *Imagine… Be Seen, Heard and Understood*. The focus areas for discussion included Managing Stress, Be Seen, Be Heard, Be Understood and Mental Health.

The feedback from the conversations and activities highlighted that students are concerned about their mental health. Students indicated explicit teaching, having more access to resources, safe spaces and engagement with caring adults are significant in promoting student mental health in schools. Students ask that their teachers be compassionate and flexible with respect to homework, due dates and how they represent their learning. They would like to see representation in their classrooms and in their learning resources. Each student needs to be supported and reflected in their classrooms, learning resources and community.

We strive to empower students and ensure their perspectives play a significant role in shaping future plans, policies and educational experiences.

AUDIT POLICIES AND PRACTICES

As part of its responsibilities, the Accessibility Committee conducted a comprehensive review of existing policies and practices aimed at promoting accessibility and inclusion. In May 2023, the committee focused its attention on two specific policies:

School District Policy 9410: "Safe, Caring and Healthy Schools," and School District Policy 9415: "Inclusive Schools." The objective of this review was to assess the effectiveness of these policies in ensuring accessibility and fostering inclusion within the school district.

FEEDBACK FROM TEACHERS TEACHING ON CALL

In June 2023, Teachers Teaching on Call (TTOCs) expressed the following concerns regarding accessibility:

ACCESS TO KEYS

Importance of having a school set of keys to access staff-only spaces and/or lock up belongings.

Need for universal access to elevator keys.

(ACCESSIBLE) WASHROOMS

Not located in close proximity to where a staff member is working; not having key access to locked accessible washrooms and/or staff washrooms.

HALLWAYS

Too narrow or too crowded to use mobility aids during block change.

This means those with a mobility aid may have to leave classes earlier or later than others to safely navigate the hallways.

IN PROGRESS

DISTRICT ACCESSIBILITY FEEDBACK TOOL

A specific email address to gather feedback about accessibility in the district was created in June 2023. The email address will be shared with school communities (students, staff, parents and guardians) in October 2023, and posted on the district website.

The community can also provide verbal feedback by calling the district office and speaking with a committee member to share stories of their lived experiences. Additionally, a townhall-style gathering will be held in the spring of 2024 as another opportunity for community members to provide feedback.

All these options will be shared in a link on the website and in school newsletters.

STORY GATHERING

The book "Street Data: A Next-Generation Model for Equity, Pedagogy, and School Transformation" by Shane Safir and Jamila Dugan emphasizes the significance of embracing human stories and experiences to foster knowledge and comprehension. In alignment with this perspective, the Accessibility Committee is dedicated to actively listening to the narratives shared by our students, families and employees.

This undertaking commenced in June 2023, as committee members began sharing their own stories pertaining to accessibility. Recognizing the value in understanding the strengths and areas for improvement within our school district's accessibility practices, the committee decided to extend this approach to include the support teachers who work closely with families and students daily.

Throughout the 2023/24 school year, our primary focus will be engaging with support teachers, followed by listening to parents, students and other staff members to develop qualitative accessibility data.

PENDING

SURVEY TO STAFF, STUDENTS AND PARENTS AND GUARDIANS

An accessibility and inclusion survey will be created and distributed to staff, students, parents and guardians in November 2023.

PHYSICAL ACCESSIBILITY AUDIT

Facilities will investigate the feasibility of conducting a district wide audit in the fall of 2023. This audit aims to assess the current state of physical accessibility within the school facilities and identify areas that may require improvements to ensure inclusivity and accessibility for all individuals. The results of the audit will guide the Accessibility Committee's recommendations.

ACCESSIBILITY ACCOMPLISHMENTS

DISTRICT WORKING GROUP RECOMMENDATIONS

In the fall of 2021, a working group was formed to collaboratively review both programming supports for students demonstrating complex needs/behaviours and employee safety, as these two priorities are inextricably linked: Successful programming for students would also better ensure staff safety.

In addition to increased levels of education assistant staffing, the group's recommendations included the need for additional learning spaces within schools to meet the diverse learning needs of students in alignment with Individual Education Plans (IEP) goals and strategies.

The working group also identified the need to create downregulating and calming spaces for students, with a focus on schools where such spaces currently do not exist. Another recommendation from the working group is to provide education assistants (EA) with extensive personalized training focused on the skills and strategies required to support students in the early primary grades who exhibit significant complexity of needs and/or behaviours.

For the upcoming school year, the learning services team will assume responsibility for planning and delivering these training sessions on professional development days, in consultation with partner group representatives. This collaborative effort will ensure a wholistic approach to professional development and address the specific needs of education assistants.

The Accessibility Committee fully endorses these recommendations and intends to liaise with the learning services team during the 2023/24 school year to assess the efficacy of the newly implemented downregulating and calming spaces for both students and staff. This ongoing collaboration will inform future planning efforts in relation to student well-being and accessibility.

TRAUMA-INFORMED NETWORK

The trauma-informed network in the school district has the following goals:

☛ To provide a formal platform for EAs, teachers, and administrators to learn and be exposed to principles in understanding behaviour from a trauma-informed lens (i.e., understanding "acting out" behaviour as a "fear" response).

☛ To provide educators with access to strategies and resources to shape support for students in schools.

☛ The ultimate outcome of the learning is to grow compassion, empathy, connections, and resilience that will, in turn, benefit the students in the district.

A trauma-informed practice network aligns with the goals of 1.1, 1.3, 2.2 and 2.3 of the B.C. Ministry of Education and Child Care's *Mental Health in Schools Strategy* by expanding access to guidance surrounding trauma-informed practice and corresponding programming in schools.

MENTAL HEALTH STRATEGY

Maple Ridge – Pitt Meadows School District's *Mental Health Strategy* aligns with the B.C. Ministry of Education and Child Care's *Mental Health in Schools Strategy* (MHiS) and directly supports the Accessibility Plan.

There are three key focus areas in the strategy: Building capacity, compassionate systems leadership, and mental health in classrooms.

The primary purpose of this strategy is to support the district in developing and implementing systems and structures that ensure every member of our school community feels seen, heard, and valued and has access to the processes supporting the well-being of adults, students and families.

COMPASSIONATE SYSTEMS LEADERSHIP

The focus for this key area is cultivating systemwide well-being through **compassionate leadership**. Central to this pillar is supporting adult well-being, offering compassionate systems training to school district staff, participating in the development and implementation of our Integrated Child and Youth teams, and building a school district diversity framework.

BUILDING CAPACITY

Providing the school system with the tools and supports needed to **build capacity** for mental health in schools is the core focus of the second pillar of our strategy. Fundamental to this element is ensuring that we are educating our communities in the areas of mental health and trauma-informed practice (see section above).

Mental health literacy destigmatizes the hidden disability mental illness brings. Through this education, teachers become more knowledgeable about mental health and better understand the requirements and means to making learning more accessible to students who struggle with mental illness.

MENTAL HEALTH IN CLASSROOMS

The final pillar in the strategy is centred around ensuring **mental health in classrooms** by embedding mental well-being and Indigenous knowledge and perspectives through all learning environments. There are three key actions that support this goal:

- Centering the Core Competencies throughout all learning in both elementary and secondary.
- Implementing recommendations provided by our district Equity in Action report.
- Continuing to provide professional development on elements of the PHE curriculum (mental health literacy, substance use literacy and sexual health literacy).

NEURODIVERSITY

Supporting neurodiverse students and staff involves creating an inclusive and understanding environment that recognizes and accommodates their unique strengths and challenges. We will continue to promote a culture of acceptance and inclusion for neurodiverse students and staff through the education of neurodivergent conditions such as autism spectrum disorder, attention deficit hyperactivity disorder, and dyslexia among others. The Accessibility Committee intends to raise awareness about neurodiversity in the school and workplace community through training sessions, workshops and guest speakers.

Through the principles of **Universal Design for Learning** (UDL), teaching methods, curriculum design, and workplace practices, we will ensure accessibility and inclusivity for all learners, including neurodiverse individuals. Supporting neurodivergent individuals is an ongoing process that requires collaboration, flexibility and a willingness to adapt to individual needs. Regular feedback and open communication will enhance support.

The district is working with the [Integrated Child and Youth team](#) (ICY), counselling hubs and school counsellors to encourage the formation of peer support networks or mentoring programs to promote social connections and inclusion.

Strategies to supporting neurodiverse students in our schools include:

- Welcoming different ways of learning.
- Recognizing student strengths and offering learning opportunities through the use of strength-based participation.
- Implementation of assistive technology.
- Offering professional development opportunities focused on refreshing staff knowledge around neurodivergence.
- Focusing on early intervention by providing strategies and support while students are in the primary grades.
- Collaborating with parents/guardians, who often provide insight that allows educators to provide targeted support.
- Offering upregulating and/or downregulating spaces within each school.

HUMAN RESOURCES

The Human Resources department works closely with supervisors, staff and union representatives to provide a meaningful and engaging workplace for employees. Areas of achievement from an accessibility lens include:

☛ Supporting staff who are impacted by a permanent or episodic disability through workplace medical accommodations, including removing any barriers where possible.

☛ Improving psychological safety in the workplace by training employees at each location in Mental Health First Aid (MHFA) and ensuring that trained mental health first aid providers are available for staff to connect with.

☛ Increasing access for external applicants by implementing employment application accessibility online.

☛ Providing meaningful work opportunities to qualified applicants with disabilities.

☛ Employing a diverse workforce.

☛ Providing professional development or training opportunities for employees in the areas of diversity and equity and supporting students with disabilities.

The district has taken steps to improve psychological safety in the workplace by training employees at each location in Mental Health First Aid. MHFA has also been offered as a professional development training opportunity open to all employee groups to attend.

Through the upcoming feedback and story sharing opportunities, we will be reviewing the responses provided to explore further initiatives the school district may undertake to support both employment applicants and staff with disabilities and eliminate any barriers that may currently be a deterrent to work in the school district.

THREE-YEAR PLAN

Reflections, conversations, school growth plans and individual stories suggest the following areas need to be further explored from a lens of accessibility. As stated in the consultation section, the committee will continue to collect data in the fall to further inform decisions for the accessibility plan moving forward.

PRIORITY 1: TECHNOLOGY

1) An accessibility review of the school district website potentially done by a consultant, including the assessment of:

- Images
- Human Resources forms
- Web Content Accessibility Guidelines
- Hyperlinks (accessible link names)
- PDFs (accessible tags)

2) Technology access for students

- Assistive technology.
- Training and understanding of accessibility features.

3) In an effort to ensure equitable access to technology for vulnerable youth, a bank of laptops will be made available throughout the 2023/24 school year to support student learning, particularly for students in their graduating years.

The distribution of laptops to students will be done in consultation with secondary school principals and site-based learning services teams to ensure that those with the greatest need receive the necessary support.

PRIORITY 2: SELF-REGULATION/CALMING SPACES

Self-regulation and calming spaces play a crucial role in supporting the well-being and academic successes of students. These practices provide students with the tools and environments they need to manage their emotions, regulate their behaviour and cultivate a sense of calm. The benefits of self-regulation and calming spaces for students include:

EMOTIONAL REGULATION

Self-regulation practices help students recognize and manage their emotions effectively. By providing tools such as deep breathing exercises, mindfulness techniques, and self-reflection activities, students learn to identify their emotions and develop strategies to regulate them. This ability to navigate their emotions allows students to respond to challenging situations with greater composure and make more thoughtful decisions, leading to improved self-control and emotional well-being.

REDUCED STRESS AND ANXIETY

School environments can sometimes be overwhelming, leading to heightened stress and anxiety levels among students. Calming spaces provide a designated area where students can retreat and engage in relaxation activities, such as reading, listening to calming music, or engaging in sensory-based experiences. These spaces offer a respite from the demands of the classroom, allowing students to recharge, reduce stress and restore a sense of calm. Regular use of calming spaces can contribute to a more positive and relaxed learning environment.

IMPROVED FOCUS AND ATTENTION

When students are feeling stressed, anxious, or overwhelmed, their ability to concentrate and focus on tasks is often compromised. Self-regulation practices, such as mindfulness exercises or guided visualization, can help students center their attention and increase their ability to concentrate. By incorporating these practices into their routine and utilizing calm spaces when needed, students can enhance their focus and attention, leading to improved academic performance.

ENHANCED SELF-AWARENESS AND SELF-CONTROL

Engaging in self-regulation practices fosters self-awareness, as students learn to recognize their physical sensations, thoughts and emotional states. This increased self-awareness allows students to develop a better understanding of their triggers, strengths and areas for growth. By developing self-control and regulation skills, students become better equipped to manage impulsive behaviors, make informed choices and navigate challenging situations with greater resilience and maturity.

Calming spaces not only benefit individual students but also contribute to a positive and supportive learning environment as a whole. By acknowledging the importance of self-regulation and creating designated spaces for calmness, schools send a message that emotional well-being is valued and prioritized. This encourages students to develop a greater sense of empathy, understanding and respect for themselves and others. A positive and supportive learning environment fosters collaboration, cooperation and overall well-being among students.

PRIORITY 3: UNIVERSAL DESIGN FOR LEARNING

Universal Design for Learning (UDL) is an educational framework that aims to provide all students, including those with diverse learning needs and disabilities, with equal opportunities for access and success in education. It recognizes that students learn in different ways and promotes the creation of flexible learning environments and instructional strategies that can be customized to meet individual needs.

UDL focuses on removing barriers to learning and engaging all students in the educational process.

One of the key principles of UDL is providing multiple means of **representation**. This means presenting information and content in various formats to accomodate different learning styles and preferences. For example, a teacher may use visual aids, audio recordings and written text to convey information.

> 👉 By offering multiple modes of representation, students can choose the format that best suits their learning style, making it easier for them to understand and process information.

Another principle of UDL is providing multiple means of **action and expression**. This involves offering students different ways to demonstrate their knowledge and skills. For instance, students may have the option to write a traditional essay, create a multimedia presentation or participate in a class discussion.

> 👉 By allowing students to choose how they express themselves, UDL promotes autonomy and encourages them to showcase their abilities in a way that is comfortable and effective for them.

The third principle of UDL is providing multiple means of **engagement**. This means fostering students' interests and motivations in the learning process. UDL encourages the use of diverse and engaging learning materials and activities that can capture students' attention and maintain their interest.

> 👉 By incorporating students' personal interests and allowing them to have a sense of ownership over their learning, UDL helps to promote intrinsic motivation and a positive learning experience.

BENEFITS

Implementing Universal Design for Learning (UDL) in classrooms offers several benefits for students.

It creates a more inclusive learning environment by addressing the diverse needs and abilities of all learners. Students with disabilities or specific learning challenges are not singled out or stigmatized but are provided with the necessary support and accommodation to fully participate and succeed academically.

UDL also promotes student engagement and active learning. By providing multiple means of representation and engagement, UDL encourages students to explore content in various ways, enhancing their understanding and retention of information. It also fosters creativity and critical thinking skills as students are encouraged to express themselves and solve problems in their own unique ways.

Furthermore, UDL promotes the development of self-regulation and metacognitive skills. When students can make choices and set goals based on their own learning preferences, they become more aware of their strengths, growth areas and learning strategies. This self-awareness allows them to become more independent learners, take responsibility for their own learning and develop lifelong learning skills.

IMPLEMENTATION PLAN

- Learning opportunities during Superintendents, Vice-Principal and Principal meetings about UDL. They can share this information during their monthly staff meetings.
- District Helping Teachers supporting their colleagues with UDL in the classroom.
- Opportunities to delve deeper in UDL during Professional Development Days.

APPENDIX A - ACCESSIBILITY COMMITTEE TERMS OF REFERENCE

TERMS OF REFERENCE

PURPOSE

The Accessibility Committee ("the committee") is established pursuant to the requirements outlined in the Accessible British Columbia Act and serves as an advisory body.

ACCESSIBILITY COMMITTEE RESPONSIBILITIES

- assist the school district to identify barriers to individuals in or interacting with the organization.
- advise the school district on how to remove and prevent barriers to individuals in or interacting with the school district.
- advise the school district on the development, implementation, review and updating of an accessibility plan.

ACCESSIBILITY COMMITTEE COMPOSITION

In accordance with the Accessible British Columbia Act, the Committee must, to the extent possible, have members who are selected in accordance with the following goals:

a. at least half of the members are:
   i. persons with disabilities, or
   ii. individuals who support, or are from organizations that support, persons with disabilities;
c. the members described in paragraph a reflect the diversity of persons with disabilities in British Columbia;
d. at least one of the members is an Indigenous person;
e. the committee reflects the diversity of persons in British Columbia.

FREQUENCY OF COMMITTEE MEETINGS

The Committee shall meet at least four times per year and additional special meetings may be called if required.

MINUTES

Minutes of recommendations made by the Committee shall be kept by the Chairperson. Such minutes are to record recommendations of the Committee but not the contents of speeches.

Verbal reports made by Committee members shall not be recorded in the minutes of the committee meetings unless the Committee makes a recommendation as a result of such reports.

A copy of the committee meeting minutes shall be provided to the Board of Education.

SD 42 POLICY: 9415

INCLUSIVE SCHOOLS

PHILOSOPHY

Consistent with the *School* Act, and Ministry of Education policy, the Board believes that students benefit from learning together in an inclusive environment. Inclusive schools celebrate uniqueness and diversity and enhance the dignity and self-respect of all students. The Board is committed to providing every student with the most inclusive learning environment possible, consistent with their educational needs.

AUTHORITY

The Board assigns the responsibility for the implementation of the policy to the Superintendent of Schools and authorizes the Superintendent of Schools to establish procedures that will guide the implementation of this policy.

GUIDING PRINCIPLES

Inclusive schools:

- Recognize equitable access to public education regardless of ability, family status, culture, ethnicity, religion, gender identity or sexual orientation;

- Ensure that the delivery of curriculum encompasses a variety of cultural perspectives consistent with the BC provincial curriculum, including the perspectives of indigenous peoples;

- Develop and refine learning environments that are safe, flexible, provide for age-appropriate placement and support student learning and development;

- Require a flexible and personalized learning environment where curricular accommodations are assumed, ensuring curricular relevance and accessibility for all students;

- Ensure a variety of systems of assessment are in place that respect individual learning styles and needs of students;

- Actively support educators to understand and accommodate the diverse learning needs of all students so that students are supported in the development of their personal and cultural identity, their social and emotional well-being and their academic, artistic and physical growth;

- Have a variety of professional learning supports available for educators so that educators can respond knowledgeably to the diversity presented by our students;

- Actively support, promote and welcome meaningful consultation with parents/guardians and all educational partners, and provide communication assistance to parents/guardians who speak other languages or otherwise face communication barriers;

- Actively work with other agencies and community organizations to facilitate access to services for children and families.

APPROVED: APRIL 29, 2020

SD 42 POLICY: 9410

SAFE, CARING AND HEALTHY SCHOOLS

1.   PHILOSOPHY

The Board of Education ("Board") recognizes that each member of the school and community must share the responsibility for supporting all students in addressing and facing challenges, and that the School District ("District") is responsible for providing an educational system that is safe, welcoming, inclusive, and affirming for all students, families and staff.

The Board recognizes and values the diversity found within its school communities and believes that each individual contributes to the strength of the district's culture.

Through ongoing educational initiatives and opportunities for all students and employees, the District is committed to raising awareness and improving the understanding of the lives of people who are identified above as well as all persons who experience challenges within our schools as a result of their race, religion or other personal characteristics.

The Board recognizes that students identifying as: Lesbian, Gay, Bi-Sexual, Transgender, Transsexual, Two-Spirit, Intersex, Queer, or questioning ("LGBTTIQ") face a unique set of challenges within our schools and communities including being targets for discriminatory behaviours.

This policy is meant to be congruent with the *Canadian Human Rights Act*, BC Human Rights Code, and the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedom.

The Board is committed to providing safe, caring and socially responsible school environments in which all learners can achieve academic excellence, personal growth and responsible citizenship.

Safe, caring and socially responsible school environments are free of acts of:

(a)   Bullying, cyber-bullying, harassment, threat and intimidation;

(b)   Violence of any form;

(c)   Verbal, physical or sexual abuse;

(d)   Discrimination in any form;

(e)   Theft; and

(f)   Vandalism.

Safe, caring and socially responsible school environments do not tolerate the presence of:

(a) Intoxicating or banned substances;

(b) Weapons (or replica weapons) and explosives; and

(c) Intruders or trespassers.

2. DISTRICT-WIDE CODE OF CONDUCT

The Board promotes a safe environment, free from harassment and discrimination to ensure that all members of our school community are equally welcomed and are included in all aspects of their educational and school life.

The Board promotes clearly defined behavioural expectations representing the highest standards of respectful and responsible citizenship leading to a culture of acceptance and tolerance among all persons in all schools and at all school-authorized events and activities.

To this end, the Board expects persons will:

(a) Comply with all applicable federal, provincial and municipal laws, and with District policy and regulations;

(b) Value and encourage learning and working environments that are inclusive and respectful of the diverse social and cultural needs of our community;

(c) Treat one another with dignity and respect;

(d) Refrain from engaging in, or encouraging any acts of bullying, discrimination, harassment and violence of any form;

(e) Show care and regard for school property and the property of others;

(f) Take appropriate measures to help those in need; and

(g) Respect those in positions of authority.

3. SCHOOL CODE OF CONDUCT

(a) Each school shall establish a School Code of Conduct including statements of expectations regarding behavior. These Codes of Conduct shall be displayed in a prominent area in the school visible to visitors and ambassadors of the school (e.g. coaches, volunteers).

(b) School Codes of Conduct shall be consistent with the *School Act* and relevant District policy and regulations.

(c) Behavioural expectations and Codes of Conduct shall be communicated and distributed to employees of the Board at the school, students and parents/guardians in written form at the beginning of each school year.

(d) Any language (oral or written) or behaviour that deliberately degrades, denigrates, labels, stereotypes or incites hatred, prejudice, discrimination or harassment towards students or employees on the basis of their real or perceived sexual orientation or gender identity will not be tolerated. Schools will be expected to specifically include the prohibition of such language and behaviour in their student Codes of Conduct.

(e) School Codes of Conduct shall be reviewed annually to assess the effectiveness and relevance in addressing current school safety issues with staff, parents and students.

(f) Disciplinary actions arising as a result of persons not adhering to the School Code of Conduct shall be based on District policy and regulation.

(g) Each school shall adopt a dress code that attempts to balance individual liberty, social convention, functionality and school community values.

(h) Schools should include in their Codes of Conduct, specific reference to discrimination on the basis of the following (but not limited to): appearance, capacity, disability, colour, ethnicity, religion, real and/or perceived sexual orientation, gender identity, or gender expression.

4. IMPLEMENTATION GUIDELINES

This policy expects all members of the school community to model respectful and inclusive conduct and refuses to tolerate any form of discrimination.

The following guidelines will assist the School District with the implementation of this policy:

(a) The School District should provide opportunities for school communities to increase awareness of the scope and impact of discrimination against LGBTTIQ and to create an inclusive environment.

(b) Schools are expected to ensure that students and staff are educated in and free to discuss the areas of understanding diversity, harassment, discrimination, anti-homophobia, anti-transphobia, and anti-heterosexism in ways that are curricularly relevant and age appropriate.

(c) The schools should provide support or direct people to appropriate community support for any student or employee in their school communities.

(d) The Board in the regular course of reviewing policy ensures language is representative of the diversity in our community.

(e) The Board shall promote opportunities for staff to increase their knowledge and skills in promoting respect for human rights, supporting diversity, and addressing discrimination in schools.

(f) In the interest of safe and supportive environments, the Board is committed to ensuring that the confidentiality of the sexual orientation and gender identity of students and employees will be protected.

5. SAFETY AND SECURITY

(a) The Threat Assessment Protocol ("TAP") shall be followed when anyone displays threat-making behaviour.

(b) With the exception of peace officers, no person shall possess or use any weapon on any school premises or at any activity off school premises that is organized or sponsored by a school.

(c) No person shall possess or use any replica or toy weapon on any school premises or at any activity off school premises that is organized so sponsored by a school, except as a prop in a theatrical production. If the replica or toy weapon is used in a school theatrical production, it shall be stored appropriately when not required for the production.

(d) Students shall not attend school or any school organized or sponsored event while under the influence of alcohol or any other intoxicating or controlled substance (exceptions to this are for adult sponsored alcohol related events organized in accordance with existing Consumption of Alcohol policies).

(e) No person shall buy, sell, distribute or possess any intoxicating or controlled substances on or off school premises at any event that is organized or sponsored by a school.

(f) Anyone violating this policy shall be subject to discipline in accordance with relevant district regulations and a school Code of Conduct established pursuant to this policy.

(g) For purposes of enforcing school rules, Principals and Vice-Principals may conduct searches of students, lockers, and any other property found on school premises in accordance with the procedures set out in relevant district regulations.

(h) The procedures set out in relevant District regulations shall apply with respect to the presence of intruders or trespassers on school property.

Glossary

Ally: An individual who is supportive of the LGBTTIQ community. They believe in the dignity and respect of all people, and are willing to stand up in that role.

Banned Substance: Any pharmacological substance with no current approval by any governmental regulatory health authority for human therapeutice use.

Bisexual: Generally used to describe people who are romantically and/or sexually attracted to people of more than one sex or gender.

Bully: One habitually cruel to others who are weaker; to treat abusively; to affect by means of force or coercion.

Bullying: Differs greatly from conflict as a confirmed incident of bullying will contain one or more of these specific elements: an imbalance of power, intention to harm, feelings of distress on the part of the victim, and repeated incidents over a certain time period.

Conflicts: Generally a disagreement or a difference of opinion between peers who typically have equal or close to equal power within their relationships.

Cyberbullying: The electronic posting of mean-spirited messages about a person (as a student) ofent done anonymously.

Discrimination: The act, practice, or an instance of discriminating categorically rather than individually; prejudiced or prejudicial outlook, action, or treatment.

Gay: A man who is romantically and sexually attracted to other men. It is sometimes used to refer to the general GLBTQ community, but most often refers to gay men.

Gender Identity: A person's gender identity is the way in which they define and act on their gender. Gender Expression is how they express their gender.

Genderism: Refers to the assumption that one's gender identity or gender expression will conform to traditionally held stereotypes associated with one's biological sex.

Harassment: To annoy persistently; to create an unpleasant or hostile situation for especially by uninvited and unwelcome verbal or physical conduct.

Heterosexism and Homophobia: The term heterosexism refers to the assumption that all people are heterosexual and that heterosexuality is superior and more desirable than homosexuality. "Homophobia" is defined as "the irrational fear and hatred of homosexuals." Both of these are perpetuated by negative stereotypes and are dangerous to individuals and communities.

Heterosexual: Created around the same time as 'homosexual' to describe individuals who are sexually attracted to the opposite sex/gender.

Homosexual: A scientific term invented in the 1800's to refer to individuals who are sexually attracted to their own sex/gender.

Inclusive: Broad in orientation or scope; all-embracing; complete; global; universal.

Intersex: An intersex individual may have biological characteristics of both the male and the female sexes.

Intimidation: To make timid or fearful; to compel or deter by or as if by threats.

Intoxicating: To stupefy or excite by the action of a chemical substance such as alcohol; to stimulate or excite; to poison.

Intruding: To thrust or force in or upon someone or something especially without permission, welcome, or fitness; to cause to enter as if by force.

Lesbian: A woman who is romantically and sexually attracted to other women. This term originates with the female poet Sappho who lived in a community comprised predominantly of women on the Isle of Lesbos in ancient Greece.

Liberty: The quality or state of being free; the power to do as one pleases; freedom from physical restraint; freedom from arbitrary or despotic control; the positive enjoyment of various social, political, or economic rights and privileges.

Queer: The term queer has a history of being used as a derogatory name for members of the LGBTTIQ (and Ally) community and those whose sexual orientation is perceived as such. Many people use this word in a positive way to refer to the community; they have reclaimed the term as their own. Not everyone believes this and sensitivity should be used when using or hearing it as there are still many negative connotations with this term and its use by anyone other than someone who is proud to identify as queer.

Questioning: People who are in the process of questioning their sexual orientation are often in need of support and understanding during this stage of their identity. They are seeking information and guidance in their self-discovery.

Sex & Gender: It is easy to confuse these two concepts and terms; however, they are different. Sex refers to the biological sex of a person. Gender refers to their social appearance, mannerisms, and roles.

Sexual Orientation: A personal characteristic that covers the range of human sexuality from gay and lesbian to bisexual, transgender and heterosexual orientations.

Social Convention: Accepted conduct; in a way in which something is usually done; behaviour that is considered acceptable or polite to most members of a society.

Straight: A slang word used to refer to the heterosexual members of our community.

Threat: an expression of intention to inflict injury or damage.

Threat Assessment Protocol ("TAP"): Threat assessment is applicable if students or staff members are threatened. The role of the Administrator is to gather preliminary information in consultation with the school-based threat assessment team to determine if a more comprehensive assessment is warranted. Any School District employee having knowledge of threat making behavior (either toward staff or students) will promptly report the information to the Principal or designate who will respond accordingly. School-Based Threat Assessment Procedures will be followed.

Transgender: An umbrella term used to refer to people who transcend the traditional concept of gender. Many feel as though they are neither a man nor a woman specifically, and many feel as though their biological sex (male, female, etc.) and their socialized gender (man, woman, etc.) don't match. Some opt to change or reassign their sex through hormones and/or surgery and some change their outward appearance, or gender expression, through clothing, hairstyles, mannerisms, etc.

Transsexual: Used to describe those individuals who use hormone therapy and/or surgery to alter their sex.

Transvestite: More appropriately referred to as "cross-dressing", the term transvestite most often refers to males who dress in the clothing of women. The term drag usually refers to dressing in the clothing and styles of another gender for entertainment purposes.

Transphobia: Is the irrational fear of hatred of, aversion to, and discrimination against people who are transgender or who otherwise transgress traditional gender norms.

Trespasser: An unlawful act committed on the person, property, or rights of another.

Two-Spirit: Used by some First Nations to describe people in their culture who are gay, lesbian, bisexual or transgender.

Vandalism: Willful or malicious destruction or defacement of public or private property.

Violence: An Exertion of physical force so as to injure or abuse; injury by or as if by distortion, infringement, or profanation; intense, turbulent, or furious and often destructive action or force.

Weapons: Any item used to injure, defeat, or destroy; a means of contending against another.

With appreciation to:
1. *The Saanich Teachers' Association for providing these definitions based upon research done by various agencies and universities; and*
2. *Dictionary and Thesaurus - Merriam-Webster Online.*

APPROVED: February 27, 2013

APPENDIX B - RELATED PUBLICATIONS

GLOBAL ACCESSIBILITY CONTEXT AND LEGISLATION

United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities

CANADIAN ACCESSIBILITY CONTEXT AND LEGISLATION

Canada Ratifies UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities

Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms

LOCAL ACCESSIBILITY CONTEXT AND LEGISLATION

British Columbia Framework for Accessibility Legislation

Accessible British Columbia Act

BC Accessibility Legislation Plain Language Summary

MAPLE RIDGE - PITT MEADOWS SCHOOL DISTRICT NO.42
22225 Brown Avenue
Maple Ridge BC
V2X 8N6