



TITLE: ACCESSIBILITY (CUSTOMER SERVICE STANDARDS)

Date Issued: 01 December 2009

Last Revised:

Authorization: Senior Staff: 27 October 2009

1.0 OBJECTIVE

To outline the considerations and procedures to be followed by OCDSB employees as a means to ensure the provision of accessible customer service to persons with disabilities, as defined in the *Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act, 2005* and Regulation 429/07 –Accessibility Standards For Customer Service.

2.0 DEFINITIONS

- 2.1 **Accessibility** means creating an environment in which systemic barriers to the full participation of people with disabilities are reduced or eliminated through reasonable efforts so that there is equitable access for all (e.g., services, systems, and policies).
- 2.2 **Assistive device** means any device used by people with disabilities to help with daily living. Assistive devices include a range of products such as wheelchairs, walkers, white canes, oxygen tanks, electronic communication devices.
- 2.3 **Accommodation** is a means through reasonable efforts of preventing and removing barriers that impede individuals with disabilities from participating fully in the District. Accommodation involves three principles:
- (a) Respect for Dignity
 - (b) Individual Accommodation
 - (c) Inclusion and Full Participation
- 2.4 **Barriers to Accessibility** (outlined in Attachment 1) mean anything that prevents a person with a disability from fully participating in all aspects of the District. This includes, but is not limited to, a physical barrier, an architectural barrier, information or communications barrier, an attitudinal barrier, a technological barrier, a policy, procedure or a practice.
- 2.5 **Community** is composed of students, parents/guardians, trustees, staff, and volunteers of the school and feeder schools/family of schools as well as the community of people in businesses and organizations that are served within the District

2.6 **Customer** means all members of the public who have disabilities and may require particular considerations in order to avail themselves of the services provided by a school board.

2.7 **Disability** means,

- (a) any degree of physical disability, infirmity, malformation or disfigurement that is caused by bodily injury, birth defect or illness and, without limiting the generality of the foregoing, includes diabetes mellitus, epilepsy, a brain injury, any degree of paralysis, amputation, lack of physical co-ordination, blindness or visual impediment, deafness or hearing impediment, muteness or speech impediment, or physical reliance on a guide dog or other animal or on a wheelchair or other remedial appliance or device;
- (b) a condition of mental impairment or a developmental disability;
- (c) a learning disability, or a dysfunction in one or more of the processes involved in understanding or using symbols or spoken language;
- (d) a mental disorder; or
- (e) an injury or disability for which benefits were claimed or received under the insurance plan established under the *Workplace Safety and Insurance Act, 1997*.

The definition includes disabilities of different severity, visible as well as non-visible disabilities, and disabilities the effects of which may come and go.

2.8 **Reasonable Efforts** vary depending on each situation. The OCDSB is expected to use reasonable efforts to ensure that its policies, procedures and practices are consistent with the following principles:

- (a) dignity
- (b) independence
- (c) integration (except when alternative measures are necessary to meet the needs of an individual with a disability or disabilities)
- (d) equal opportunity.

The principles may need to be balanced in order to meet the needs of the person with a disability.

2.9 **Service Animals and Support Persons** are used by people with various disabilities.

Service Animals: Examples of service animals include dogs used by people who are blind, hearing alert animals for people who are Deaf, deafened or hard of hearing, and animals trained to alert an individual to an oncoming seizure and lead them to safety.

Support Person: Means in relation to a person with a disability, a support person is another person who accompanies him or her in order to help with communication, mobility, personal care or medical needs or with access to goods or services. A support person may be a paid professional, a volunteer, a family member or friend.

3.0 RESPONSIBILITY

Superintendents, principals, managers / supervisors, front line staff (in the Board office and in the schools), office coordinators, and chief custodians.

4.0 PROCEDURES

Reasonable efforts relating to accessible customer service for all community members will include, at a minimum, the following and will be the responsibility of staff who interact with students, the public or other third parties on behalf of the OCDSB:

4.1 Communications and Assistive Devices

- (a) Communication is a process of providing, sending, receiving and understanding information. Communication with a person with a disability will be done in a manner or format with respect to print documents and services, which takes into account the person's disability. The employee and the person with a disability may agree upon the manner or format to be used for the document, information, or service requested (i.e. multiple formats or alternative service delivery for print and/or electronic documentation and services).
- (b) People with disabilities will be allowed to use their own personal assistive devices or services to access OCDSB goods or services.
- (c) The District website and each school website will indicate that all District facilities provide services that respect the independence and dignity of people with disabilities and offer services that include the use of assistive devices.
- (d) Each District facility that is open to the public will post information in the front office/reception area that welcomes the use of assistive devices and encourages users to seek support from staff and volunteers as they require it.

4.2 Use of Service Animals

- (a) For the purposes of this section, an animal is a service animal for a person with a disability,
 - (i) if it is readily apparent that the animal is used by the person for reasons relating to his or her disability; or
 - (ii) if the person provides a letter from a physician or nurse confirming that the person requires the animal for reasons relating to the disability.
 - (iii) where the person using the service animal regularly attends at the school or District facility, the principal or departmental manager may request to keep a copy of the letter on file but only as long as required by the circumstances. Alternatively, the person using the service animal may be asked to bring a letter with them on occasions when they visit the premises. The principal or departmental manager will preserve the confidentiality of the letter and information contained in the letter, and will not use or disclose the letter or information except as provided for in

the *Municipal Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act*, *R.S.O. 1990, cM56*, or as otherwise required by law.

- (b) People with disabilities accompanied by a guide dog or other service animal will be permitted to enter the premises of the District with the animal unless the animal is excluded by law from the premises. For example, the *Health Protection and Promotion Act* states that animals are not allowed in places where food is manufactured, prepared, processed, handled, served, displayed, stored, sold or offered for sale. It does make an exception for service dogs to allow them to go where food is normally served, sold or offered for sale. Service animals are not allowed into a kitchen classroom as this is a place where food is prepared and stored. However, staff will allow a safe place for service animals to wait during class, and will offer the assistance of sighted guides to individuals attending the class.
- (c) If a service animal is excluded by law (e.g., *Ontario Dog Owners' Liability Act* which places restrictions on pit bull terriers) from the premises, staff will ensure that other reasonable measures will be taken to provide the service to the person with a disability, as outlined in (b) above.

4.3 Use of Support Persons

- (a) Any person with a disability accompanied by a support person will be welcomed to enter the premises of the District together, into those areas of the premises where the public or third parties customarily have access. The person with the disability will not be prevented from having access to the support person while on the premises.
- (b) A person with a disability may be required to be accompanied by a support person when on the premises, but only if a support person is necessary to protect the health or safety of the person with a disability or the health or safety of others on the premises
- (c) Where an individual with a disability who is accompanied by a support person wishes to attend a school or Board organized event for which a fee is charged, the notice of the event will include information as to whether support persons will be charged a fee and specify the amount of the fee.
- (d) Where a support person is accompanying a person with a disability, who is the parent/guardian of a student, for the purpose of assisting in a discussion that may involve confidential information concerning the student, the superintendent, principal or other staff member must first secure the consent of the parent/guardian in writing regarding such disclosure.
 - (i) A copy of the signed consent will be retained in the school/board office.
 - (ii) If the parent/guardian uses a different support person for subsequent meetings, a new signed consent will be required.
- (e) Support persons for students are reflected in the Learning Support Services / Special Education policies and procedures of the Board.

4.4 Temporary Disruptions

- (a) Public notification of a temporary disruption in District facilities, goods or services (either in whole or in part) usually used by people with disabilities will be provided in a timely manner and will include information about the reason for the disruption, its anticipated duration and a description of alternative facilities or services, if any, that are available.
- (b) If the disruption is planned, notice should be provided in advance of the disruption. If the disruption is unplanned, notice should be provided as soon as possible after the disruption has been identified.
- (c) Notice will be given by posting the information at a conspicuous place on premises owned or operated by the District, by posting it on the District's website, or by such other method as is reasonable in the circumstances.
- (d) Consideration should be given to providing notice in multiple formats.

4.5 Training

- (a) Training will be provided to all staff who deal with members of the public (including other third parties, agents, volunteers or otherwise) as well as persons who participate in developing the District's policies, procedures, practices and accessibility materials.
- (b) Training will include the purposes of the *Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act, 2005* and the requirements of the regulation, and will be:
 - (i) provided in a timely manner for employees assigned with applicable duties; and
 - (ii) provided on an ongoing basis in connection with changes to District accessibility policy and procedures.
- (c) The training program will be documented which will include a summary of the contents of the training and details of when training is to be provided. Records on the training dates and number of attendees will also be kept.

4.6 Feedback Process

- (a) Users of OCDSB services will be invited through the District and school websites to provide feedback on their experience with or concerns about their access to services for people with disabilities.
- (b) A process for receiving and responding to feedback regarding the provision of services under this customer service standards procedure will be developed and available to the public. Through the Communications and Information Services department the process will outline the actions to be taken if a complaint is received.
- (c) Feedback can be provided in person, by telephone, in writing, or by delivering an electronic text by email or on diskette or otherwise.

4.7 Notice of Availability of Documents

- (a) Notice announcing the availability, upon request, of all District accessibility documents (such as policy, procedures, manuals, protocols) will be posted at a conspicuous place, on the District's website or other such methods as is reasonable in the circumstances.
- (b) A copy of the required documents will be provided to anyone who requests them and to a person with a disability in a format that takes into account the person's disability.

4.8 Accessibility Policy

There will be other circumstances not specifically described above where staff will be expected to provide service in accordance with the spirit of policy P.121.GOV: Accessibility.

5.0 APPENDICES

Attachment 1 - Barriers to Accessibility

6.0 REFERENCE DOCUMENTS

Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act, 2005

Ontario Regulation 429/07 Accessibility Standards for Customer Service

Accessibility Standards for Customer Services, Ontario Regulation 429/07 Guide January 2008 –

Ministry of Community and Social Services

Accessibility Standards for Customer Service: Summary of Requirements, March 2008

Board Policy P.125.SCO: School Board Code of Conduct

Board Policy P.121.GOV: Accessibility

BARRIERS TO ACCESSIBILITY

- a) **Architectural or structural** barriers may result from the design of a building such as stairs, doorways, the width of hallways and even room layout.
- b) **Information and communications** barriers can make it difficult for people to receive or convey information. Things like small print size, low colour contrast between text and background, confusing design of printed materials and the use of language that is not clear or plain can all cause difficulty.
- c) **Technology**, or lack of it, can prevent people from accessing information. Everyday tools like computers, telephones and other aids can all present barriers.
- d) **Systemic** barriers can occur through policies and procedures. These are any practices or rules that restrict people with disabilities – for example, denying access to a person with a service animal.
- e) **Attitude** is perhaps the most difficult barrier to overcome. Some people don't know how to communicate with those who have visible or non-visible disabilities or they simply discriminate against them because of stereotypes. Some may feel that they could offend an individual with a disability by offering help or in some cases they will ignore or avoid people with disabilities altogether.