

Annual Accessibility Plan
For the
Hamilton-Wentworth Catholic District
School Board
September 2006 - August 2007

Prepared by
Hamilton-Wentworth Catholic District School Board
Accessibility Working Group



Hamilton-Wentworth
Catholic Schools

Believing, Achieving, Serving

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MISSION AND VISION

MISSION

The mission of Catholic Education in Hamilton-Wentworth, in union with our Bishop, is to enable all learners to realize the fullness of humanity of which our Lord Jesus Christ is the model.

The Catholic Community of Hamilton-Wentworth believes the learner will realize the fullness of humanity:

If the learning process:

- begins at home and is part of family life
- is nurtured within the Parish
- is anchored in the Catholic Faith
- takes place within the context of worship, sacraments, and the life of the Church
- is enhanced by the school community
- is embraced by the learner as a personal responsibility for life.

If learning takes place in an appropriate and challenging environment:

- in which members of the school community exemplify the teachings of Jesus Christ
- which reflects Gospel values and responsible use of human, financial and natural resources

- which promotes academic excellence and clear indicators of achievement.

VISION

Learners from Hamilton-Wentworth Catholic Schools will demonstrate:

- knowledge and practice of their Catholic faith
- the capability of nurturing a strong family unit
- esteem, respect and responsibility for self and others
- academic competence
- the ability to listen accurately and express knowledge clearly
- independence, critical thinking and effective problem solving
- proficiency with technology in order to adapt to a changing world
- the values, attitudes and skills for effective partnerships
- the ability to transform our society.

To enable learners to achieve this Vision, the faith community of The Hamilton-Wentworth Catholic District School Board will reflect:

- the centrality of Jesus Christ in our lives
- the teachings of the Catholic Church
- exemplary role models
- social justice, respect and fairness for all
- a dedicated staff
- a curriculum that is dynamic, practical and relevant
- high standards
- an environment conducive to learning
- effective partnerships
- accountability at all levels

Executive Summary

The purpose of the *Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act, 2005* (ODA) is to improve opportunities for people with disabilities and to provide for their involvement in the identification, removal and prevention of barriers to their full participation in the life of the province. To this end, the Act, which replaced the *Ontarians with Disabilities Act 2001*, requires each school board to prepare an annual accessibility plan, to consult with people with disabilities in the preparation of this plan and to make the plan public.

This is the fourth annual plan (2006 - 2007) prepared by the Accessibility Working Group of the Hamilton-Wentworth Catholic District School Board. The plan describes: (1) the measures that the Hamilton-Wentworth Catholic District School Board has taken in the past, and (2) the measures that the Hamilton-Wentworth Catholic District School Board will take during the year (2006 - 2007) to identify, remove and prevent barriers for people with disabilities.

This year, the Hamilton-Wentworth Catholic District School Board committed to the continual improvement of access to school board facilities, policies, programs, practices and services for students, staff, parents/guardians, volunteers and members of the community with disabilities. The plan will expand to provide further information on accessibility issues and improve communication methods among staff.

The Accessibility Working Group identified a number of barriers for people with disabilities. Over the next several years, the Accessibility Working Group recommends focusing on a variety of different barriers, including attitudinal, technological, physical, architectural, information and communication.

The *Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act, 2005* allows organizations the flexibility to determine their own priorities for this cycle. Once the education standards working group of the Ministry of Citizenship and Immigration sets out the series of five year plans, the Board plan will be adjusted to reflect any changes in priorities.

The Act expects organizations to develop and implement accessibility plans within existing planning processes and using existing resources.

1. Aim

The aim of this plan is to describe the measures that the Hamilton-Wentworth Catholic District School Board has taken in the past and measures that will be taken during the next year (2006 - 2007) to identify, remove and prevent barriers for people with disabilities who work in, use or attend school board facilities and services.

2. Objectives

This plan:

1. Describes the *process* by which the Hamilton-Wentworth Catholic District School Board will identify, remove and prevent barriers for people with disabilities
2. Reviews efforts at the Hamilton-Wentworth Catholic District School Board to remove and prevent barriers for people with disabilities during the *past year(s)*
3. Lists the policies, procedures, programs, practices and services that the Hamilton-Wentworth Catholic District School Board will review in the *coming year* to identify barriers for people with disabilities
4. Describes the *measures* the Hamilton-Wentworth Catholic District School Board will take in the coming year to identify, remove and prevent barriers for people with disabilities
5. Describes how the Hamilton-Wentworth Catholic District School Board will make this accessibility plan *available to the public*

3. Commitment to Accessibility Planning

The Hamilton-Wentworth Catholic District School Board is committed to:

- Maintaining an Accessibility Working Group
- Consulting with people with disabilities in the development and review of its annual accessibility plans
- Ensuring school board policies and procedures are consistent with the principles of accessibility
- Improving access to facilities, policies, programs, practices and services for students, staff, parents/guardians, volunteers and members of the community

The Board of Trustees has authorized the Accessibility Working Group to prepare an accessibility plan that will enable the Hamilton-Wentworth Catholic District School Board to meet these commitments. The plan has also been reviewed by the Special Education Advisory Committee.

4. Description of the Hamilton-Wentworth Catholic District School Board

The Hamilton-Wentworth Catholic District School Board traces its roots to 1852, when the Sisters of St. Joseph were asked by the vicar of St. Mary's Parish to establish education programs for Catholic children in the city. This was, in part, a response to a large influx of Catholic families from Ireland in the mid-1840's.

The Hamilton Separate School Board was formally established in 1855. Over the next 114 years, other Catholic school districts and boards were established in Wentworth County and by 1969 there were seven Catholic boards. These amalgamated into the single regional structure in 1969. In 1998, the Hamilton-Wentworth Roman Catholic Separate School Board became The Hamilton-Wentworth Catholic District School Board.

The Board is currently governed by nine Catholic trustees who are accountable to rate payers for:

- establishing the school system's mission and vision
- approving curriculum guidelines for Catholic schools
- establishing the annual budget
- developing policies to ensure the efficient operation of the Board
- determining the type, size and location of schools

Currently the Hamilton-Wentworth Catholic District School Board presides over 60 schools (53 elementary and 7 secondary) totalling approximately 28,300 students from Junior Kindergarten to Grade 12, with a total budget of approximately \$228.3-million.

The philosophy of the Hamilton-Wentworth Catholic District School Board is to meet the needs of all children and to develop the fullness of humanity in a Catholic Community. All students, regardless of special talents or challenging needs, can grow and they can grow best by attending their neighbourhood schools, along with their brothers and sisters. The Board's motto of "Believing, Achieving, Serving" upholds its faith commitment. Its "Each Belongs" philosophy of Special Education promotes an inclusive model of education for all students. The Board's Mission and Vision statement is included on page 3 of this document.

5. The Accessibility Working Group Members

The accessibility working group was formally constituted in March 2003 and consists of the following members:

<i>Working Group member</i>	<i>Department</i>
J. Bajus	Superintendent of Education
S. Cacoilo	O.E.C.T.A. Secondary
L. Marcanoto	O.E.C.T.A. Elementary
A. Davidson	Superintendent of Finance
L. Galambos	Principal of Programs-Special Education
N. Gallo	C.P.C.O. Secondary Principals
B. Hamilton	C.P.C.O. Elementary Principals
M. Jadon	Communications Officer
G. Kiely	Computers in Education, Consultant
M. Kowal	Plant Operations
V. Leroux	Special Education Advisory Committee
J. LoPresti	Human Resources
M. Piccini	Catholic School Council Representative
D. Sartor	Secondary School Teacher
P. Settle	Library Clerk
L. Durkin	C.U.P.E. President

6. Recent Barrier-Removal Initiatives

During the last several years, there have been a number of informal initiatives at the Hamilton-Wentworth Catholic District School Board to identify, remove and prevent barriers to people with disabilities. The Hamilton-Wentworth Catholic District School Board, through its Special Education Plan, 2005-2006, has addressed access for students with disabilities through modifications and accommodations of programs and services. The Special Education Plan is available on the board website at www.hwcdsb.edu.on.ca/

Accessibility has been facilitated with the inclusion of automatic door openers on some school interior and exterior doorways, ramps for school front and rear access points and accessible washrooms. Attitudinal barriers for people with disabilities are being addressed through staff and student in-services about diversity, examining diversity policy/procedures and examining other policies and procedures for barriers to accessibility. The designs of new schools have architectural features that incorporate principles of universal design as much as possible. Current renovations to existing buildings have accessibility for people with disabilities addressed in the plans. Communicating in a variety of formats

has been accomplished on a limited basis and this area will be addressed in the future plans.

The Board’s annual Diversity Program promotes the identification of barriers to persons of varying abilities and backgrounds. This unique experience for elementary and secondary students has been instrumental in enabling students, with their teacher advisors, to develop school-based initiatives to promote acceptance of all people.

Attitudinal barriers among staff have been addressed throughout all in-services and professional development activities. The 2005 Review of Special Education Programs and Services recommendations have led to better use of technology as a means of meeting the needs of all learners.

Physical barriers in each school and Board site were identified through a survey which has provided data on future accommodation needs and architectural modifications to better meet student, staff and visitor’s needs. The recent renovations to several schools and to one Board building have been timely. The new Dr. Nicholas Mancini Centre now allows for professional meetings to be conducted in a fully accessible facility. The expansion of resource staff for deaf and hard of hearing students has met a growing need for interpreters, signers and hearing equipment.

7. Preventing new barriers

All school board programs, policies, practices and services are subject to the guiding principles of inclusionary practice. We strive to create an environment that is accessible to all people, regardless of age, language, experience or ability. Through the annual accessibility planning process, the Hamilton-Wentworth Catholic District School Board’s programming, policies and practices will be assessed to ensure continuous improvement in accessibility.

8. Barrier-identification Methodologies

The Accessibility Working Group used the following barrier-identification methodologies:

<i>Methodology</i>	<i>Description</i>	<i>Date</i>
Presentation to Senior Administration	Opportunity for input and feedback	On-going
Presentation to Trustees	For approval	Jan. 2007
Presentations to Employee Groups	For information	On-going
Presentation to SEAC	For information	November, 2006
Communication with Public	Plan posted on Board website	Jan. 2007,
Accessibility Working Group	Review, plan and make recommendations for Year 4 Plan; report progress	Meetings, as called

9. Barriers Identified

In its review, the Accessibility Working Group identified many barriers. Over the next several years, the Accessibility Working Group has decided to focus on the following:

Type of Barrier	Description of Barrier	Strategy for barrier removal/prevention
Information	Many forms and records are only available in print.	Make all forms available on the web, on disk or in other electronic formats.
Information	Student information and brochures are sometimes difficult to procure in alternative formats.	Working Group will discuss concern with Ministry of Citizenship (Accessibility Directorate of Ontario).
Attitudinal	Teaching and non-teaching staff members are often unaware/lack knowledge of non-physical disabilities (i.e. students with mental health disabilities).	Education sessions for staff and preparation of material for new staff orientation.
Attitudinal	Several students and parents have identified bullying and social isolation as significant problems in several elementary schools.	Explore strategies for disability sensitivity and awareness programming for classmates.
Technological	Board website is not accessible to people who are blind and visually impaired or who use screen-reading software.	Recommend that Information Technology staff enrol in courses on accessible web design. Make necessary changes to website.
Policy/Practice	No central location for raising and addressing accessibility issues.	Convene Accessibility Working Group to review internal communications.
Physical	Physical barriers to accessibility such as wheelchair ramps, special needs washrooms, lifting devices are missing and required in many schools.	Access to adequate funding to ensure that physical barriers are removed in a timely fashion.

10. Barriers to be Addressed in 2006 - 2007

The Accessibility Working Group will address the following barriers during the coming year. This plan will focus on the areas of *attitudinal, physical, technological and information and communication barriers* during the year.

BARRIER	OBJECTIVE	MEANS TO...	CRITERIA	TIME	RESPONSIBILITY
Information and Communication	Provide information on Bill 118, on disabilities and on accessibility rights and accommodations to staff, parents, visitors and the public	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Distribute copies of Accessibility Handbook to all Board sites. ▪ Distribute copies of PowerPoint CD to all site managers. Managers to use at future staff meeting. ▪ Update current Board website. ▪ Include article on Bill 118 and Accessibility Plan in future Catholic School Council Newsletter 	To ensure that students, staff and public are aware of Bill 118 and of Board plans	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ October, 2006 ▪ November, 2006 ▪ November, 2006 ▪ Winter, 2006-07 	<p>L. Galambos J. Bajus</p> <p>L. Galambos J. Bajus</p> <p>M. Jadon</p> <p>M. Jadon</p>
	Make available to all new immigrants or non-English speaking parents accessibility to the Newcomers' Guide to Elementary School	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ To provide families new to Ontario with information and suggestions to help child be successful in School. (Appendix A) 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Winter, 2006-07 	<p>J. Bajus M. Jadon</p>

Physical and Architectural	Address physical modifications and accommodations in Board buildings	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Review 2004 survey data; update if required. ▪ Where budget allows, make building changes to meet accessibility needs ▪ Ensure future new or renovated sites meet accessibility needs 	To ensure physical accessibility to all sites	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ November, 2006 ▪ As advised ▪ As arises 	<p>L. Galambos J. Bajus</p> <p>Plant Manager</p> <p>Plant Manager</p>
Technological	Provide students and staff accessibility to technological supports and assistive technology to improve teaching and learning.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Maintain numbers of technological support staff in Special Education ▪ Identify additional technology (hardware & software) for learning disabled students ▪ Provide staff (as identified) with necessary equipment (e.g. larger screen computer for low vision teacher) 	<p>To ensure supports are in place to implement and maintain equipment and to provide training</p> <p>To provide fair learning opportunities for identified students</p> <p>To respect dignity of all learners & staff</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ November, 2006 ▪ November, 2006 ▪ As needed 	<p>J. Bajus</p> <p>J. Bajus</p> <p>J. Bajus Human Resources</p>

Attitudinal	Continue to make staff, students, parents and visitors aware of acceptable and appropriate language and behaviours.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ On-going point of discussion at all meetings, in-services, etc. ▪ Include reference to ODA plan in all new hiring orientation programs ▪ Encourage through modeling that all staff use proper terminology, e.g. “student with autism”, not “autistic student” 	<p>To ensure respect and dignity of all persons</p> <p>To ensure new staff are aware of expectations of acceptance</p> <p>To promote respect for the person rather than reference to the disability</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ On-going ▪ As held ▪ On-going 	<p>All</p> <p>Human Resources</p> <p>All</p>
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11. Review and monitoring process

The Accessibility Working Group meets as needed during the planning year to review progress. Throughout the year, evaluation of the effectiveness in implementing the barrier-removal and prevention strategies will be ongoing in preparation for the next year of accessibility planning.

The Working Group reminds staff about roles in implementing the plan.

12. Communication of the plan

The Hamilton-Wentworth Catholic District School Board's accessibility plan will be posted on the board website at www.hwcdsb.edu.on.ca and hard copies will be available. The plan can be made available in accessible formats. The plan may be included within the school board orientation package to new staff.

Contact information for accessible format requests: 905-525-2930.

Abstract of the Newcomers Guide to Elementary and Secondary Schools

Many newcomer parents find our school system vastly different from the one in their home country and are surprised by what is expected of parents in Ontario schools. Most newcomer students have a daunting challenge – to learn English as well as the curriculum. Helping parents adjust to their new role is one way to ease the challenge for students.

The Settlement Workers in Schools (SWIS) organization helps newcomers adjust to life in their community. One of the innovative projects just completed this year is a series of resources for parents with children in elementary or secondary school and explains some of the basic processes and the role for parents. All the information in the Newcomers' Guide to Elementary School and the Newcomers' Guide to Secondary School has been the work of SWIS, several district school boards and the Ministry of Education. The handouts produced by these groups are published in 18 languages, downloadable at www.settlement.org/edguide. The languages include Arabic, Bengali, Chinese Simplified, Chinese Traditional, Croatian, English, Farsi, French, Gujarati, Hindi, Korean, Pashtu, Pilipino, Punjabi, Russian, Serbian, Somali, Spanish, Tamil and Urdu. No permission is needed to reproduce and distribute the handouts.

The Newcomers' Guide to Elementary School contains information in 18 languages about the following topics:

<i>School Event</i>	<i>Newcomer Guide Handout</i>
Registration	Helping your child adjust to a new school
Curriculum night or a welcome event for newcomers	Learning, English, School Procedures and/or Student Behaviour
Distribution of report cards	The Report Card
Sign-up for parent-teacher interviews	Parent-Teacher Interviews
Preparation of EQAO Testing	Provincial Testing

The Newcomers' Guide to Secondary School contains six secondary-specific handouts:

- Starting School
- Learning English and Other Subjects
- School Policies and Procedures
- Choosing Courses and Developing and Education Plan
- Report Cards and parent-Teacher Interviews
- Ways that parents Can Help

Both of these Guides answer important questions that families may not even have considered as they begin to understand the workings of their new country. As the newcomer population in Hamilton grows, schools may find that including some of the handouts during key times of the year helpful for increasing family understanding. The information in the handouts may be included in school newsletters, as part of the registration package, to guide parent meetings, as a handout when meeting with individual parents about student issues and on curriculum nights.