



# **The Bridge Educational Society**

## **Okanagan Waldorf School & Early Years Centre**

### **Accessibility Plan 2026–2029**

At the Bridge Educational Society (BES), we are committed to providing inclusive and accessible learning and working environments that support all students, staff, families, and members of our broader community. We recognize that accessibility is an essential part of creating equitable opportunities for participation, learning, employment, and engagement within our programs, services, and facilities.

A key part of this commitment is the development and ongoing implementation of our Three-Year Accessibility Plan. Our first Accessibility Plan was established in 2023 and guided our work from 2023–2026. Our 2026–2029 Three-Year Accessibility Plan builds upon the progress, learning, and priorities identified during that first cycle while establishing new goals and actions for the next three years.

This plan identifies accessibility priorities, areas for continued improvement, and measurable actions aimed at identifying, removing, and preventing barriers within our organization. It is informed by feedback from our school community, observations and experiences within our programs, and the ongoing work of accessibility committees at both the school and association levels.

Through this process, we aim to continually improve equitable access to education, employment, services, communication, programming, and our physical environments.

As a member of the Associate Member Society of the Federation of Independent School Associations of British Columbia (FISABC), Okanagan Waldorf School, on behalf of the Bridge Educational Society, participates in the AMS Association-Level Accessibility Committee. This committee supports member schools in understanding and responding to the requirements of the *Accessible British Columbia Act* and provides opportunities to share resources, practices, and strategies among member schools. Participation in this committee helps inform our ongoing work to identify, remove, and prevent accessibility barriers within our school community and across the independent school sector.



The Bridge Educational Society recognizes that accessibility benefits everyone. Creating accessible environments strengthens participation, belonging, independence, and equitable access for people with disabilities while contributing to a more inclusive and responsive community for all.

Through the actions outlined in this 2026–2029 Three-Year Accessibility Plan, we commit to continuing the work begun through our first accessibility planning cycle. We will review our practices, listen to the experiences and perspectives of our community, identify existing and emerging barriers, and take practical and measurable steps toward improving accessibility across our programs, services, communications, employment practices, and facilities.

Our goal is continuous improvement and the development of learning and working environments in which all members of our community are supported in participating as fully and equitably as possible.

## **Progress from Our 2023–2026 Accessibility Plan**

Our first Three-Year Accessibility Plan provided the Bridge Educational Society with an important framework for identifying barriers and making practical improvements to accessibility across Okanagan Waldorf School and the Early Years Centre.

Between 2023 and 2026, we completed a number of actions identified within our original plan. We also introduced additional initiatives in response to the needs and experiences of our students and staff. These actions have helped broaden our understanding of accessibility beyond physical access to include sensory needs, participation, safety, and employee well-being.

## **Physical Accessibility and Safety**

Several improvements were made to increase physical accessibility and reduce potential barriers within our facilities and grounds.

- The designated accessible parking space at Okanagan Waldorf School was cleared and made consistently available for individuals requiring accessible parking.
- An accessible parking space within the staff parking area was identified and can be assigned based on individual accessibility needs.



- Boot mats and entrance mats with potentially slippery surfaces were replaced with rubber-backed mats to improve safety and reduce slipping hazards.
- Greater attention has been given to identifying physical barriers throughout our campus and addressing these barriers as needs are identified.

## **Sensory Accessibility and Student Support**

During our first accessibility planning cycle, we also increased our focus on creating learning environments that recognize and respond to a range of sensory, learning, and self-regulation needs.

Classrooms have been increasingly equipped with sensory supports, including desk bands, appropriate fidgets, and other tools that can assist students with regulation, attention, and participation in classroom activities.

Quiet spaces have also been incorporated throughout the school. This includes comfortable and welcoming areas within our library where students can step away from busier classrooms or social environments when they need a quieter space.

Our Early Years Centre also has a dedicated sensory room that can be accessed by students and staff when appropriate. Having access to this additional space provides another option for individuals who benefit from a quieter or more sensory-supportive environment.

## **Staff Wellness and Accessibility**

Our work during the 2023–2026 cycle also highlighted the importance of considering accessibility in the areas of health, and well-being within our workplace.

In 2024, a dedicated staff lounge was created within the Administration Building. The space provides employees with a comfortable and quieter area to take breaks, step away from the demands of the classroom or workplace, and support their well-being during the school day.

In 2025, the Bridge Educational Society introduced a new and more comprehensive employee benefits plan. The expanded plan includes greater access to mental health and paramedical benefits, providing staff with additional resources to support their physical and mental well-being.



Staff are also able to access the sensory room located within the Early Years Centre when appropriate, providing another quiet and supportive space during the workday.

Together, these initiatives reflect a growing understanding that an accessible workplace includes not only the physical environment but also practices and supports that contribute to employee health, well-being, and meaningful participation in the workplace.

## **What We Learned**

The 2023–2026 Accessibility Plan helped establish a stronger awareness of accessibility throughout our organization. One of the most important outcomes of our first planning cycle has been an expanded understanding of the different forms that accessibility barriers can take.

While some barriers are readily visible, such as access to parking or physical spaces, others may relate to sensory environments, communication, learning needs, workplace practices, or an individual's ability to participate comfortably and meaningfully in our community.

We also learned that improving accessibility does not always require large-scale changes. Smaller, practical actions, such as providing sensory tools, creating quiet spaces, improving entrance safety, or making appropriate parking available, can make a meaningful difference in an individual's experience.

Our first planning cycle also reinforced the importance of continuing to listen to students, staff, families, and community members. Their experiences are an important part of identifying barriers that may not otherwise be immediately apparent.

## **Building on Our Progress: 2026–2029**

As we enter our second three-year accessibility planning cycle, our focus will be on building upon the foundation established between 2023 and 2026.

The 2026–2029 Accessibility Plan will provide an opportunity to review what has been accomplished, identify barriers that remain, and establish new priorities for the next three years. We will continue to consider accessibility across the full scope of our organization, including:



- physical environments and facilities;
- learning environments and student participation;
- sensory accessibility;
- communication and access to information;
- employment and workplace practices;
- programs and services; and
- organizational awareness and understanding of accessibility.

Throughout the 2026–2029 cycle, the Bridge Educational Society will continue to seek feedback from our community, review our progress, and adjust our priorities as new needs and barriers are identified.

### **Our 2026–2029 Three-Year Accessibility Plan is Based on the Following:**

The Bridge Educational Society's 2026–2029 Accessibility Plan has been developed through a combination of physical accessibility review, community consultation, and ongoing opportunities for feedback.

1. **Physical Accessibility Audit:** A physical accessibility audit of the campus has been completed to identify physical and environmental barriers and opportunities for improved access and safety.
2. **Accessibility Survey:** An accessibility survey was distributed by email to parents, staff, and community members in September 2026 to gather feedback about accessibility barriers and priorities. The Society will continue to distribute the accessibility survey annually each September to provide ongoing opportunities for community input and to identify emerging accessibility needs.
3. **Ongoing Feedback Tool:** An accessibility feedback tool is available on the Society's website, providing students, families, employees, and community members with an ongoing opportunity to identify accessibility barriers and provide feedback throughout the year.

Based on the findings of the physical accessibility audit, the results of the accessibility survey, and ongoing community feedback, a number of priorities and actions have been identified for inclusion in the **2026–2029 Three-Year**



**Accessibility Plan.** These actions address physical accessibility, sensory needs, employee well-being, and access to learning and Inclusive Education supports.

### **Physical Barriers Audit Results and Resulting Plans:**

1. **Non-Slip Stair Coverings – Target 2027:** Install appropriate non-slip coverings or treatments on stairs throughout the campus to improve traction and reduce the risk of slips and falls, particularly during wet or winter conditions.
2. **Ramp Visibility and Tactile Markings – Target 2027:** Add high-contrast colour and textured or tactile strips at ramp transitions to clearly indicate changes in elevation and improve awareness for individuals with visual impairments or mobility needs.
3. **Automatic Door Openers – Target 2029:** The installation of automatic door openers on the main entrance doors remains an accessibility goal for the Bridge Educational Society. This action was identified in the previous 2023–2026 Accessibility Plan but was not completed within the original timeline due to competing facility priorities and available financial resources. This goal will therefore carry forward into the 2026–2029 Accessibility Plan, with an adjusted target of 2029, subject to available financial resources.
4. **Cedar Bridge School House Entrance – Target 2029:** Improve accessibility to the Cedar Bridge School House by adding a ramp with appropriate railings at the front entrance and modifying the entrance doors to improve ease and safety of access. This will include exploring outward-opening doors and slow-close mechanisms. Completion is targeted for 2029, subject to available financial resources.

### **Accessibility Survey Results and Resulting Plans**

The Accessibility Survey identified several areas where the Bridge Educational Society can continue to reduce barriers and strengthen accessibility for students, employees, and families. In response to the feedback received, the following actions have been identified:



## **1. Sensory Supports – Ongoing**

In response to identified sensory needs, classrooms will continue to be equipped with a range of sensory supports, as appropriate to the age and needs of students. These may include noise-reducing headphones, adjustable or dimmable lighting, sensory nests or quiet spaces, appropriate fidgets, flexible seating options, and designated spaces for movement, regulation, or brain breaks.

Sensory supports will continue to be reviewed and added or adapted on an ongoing and as-needed basis, as resources and budget allow.

## **2. Employee Well-Being and Mental Health – Ongoing**

In response to concerns related to employee mental health and well-being, the Bridge Educational Society will continue to provide an employee benefits program that includes access to mental health and therapeutic supports.

The Society will also continue to explore reasonable scheduling practices that support employee well-being and provide opportunities for preparation, collaboration, and breaks from direct classroom responsibilities where operationally possible.

Beginning in the 2026–27 school year, the school introduced a Friday early dismissal at 12:30 p.m. This schedule provides dedicated time within the regular workweek for OWS teachers to complete planning, preparation, collaboration, and other professional responsibilities while supporting greater work-life balance. School Age Care is available for families requiring childcare following the early dismissal.

## **3. Learning Support and Inclusive Education – Ongoing Goal, 2026–2029**

The Accessibility Survey and ongoing school review have identified access to appropriate learning support as an important area for continued development. In particular, students with additional support needs who do not meet the eligibility criteria for Inclusive Education funding from the Ministry of Education and Child



Care may not always have access to the level of individualized support needed to participate fully and successfully in all aspects of the school program.

The Bridge Educational Society continues to identify the establishment of a dedicated Learning Support Lead Teacher position as an important accessibility goal. This role would provide coordinated oversight of learning support and Inclusive Education programming, assist teachers in developing appropriate strategies and accommodations, and help provide greater continuity of support for students, including those whose needs may not qualify for additional Ministry funding.

During the 2023–2026 Accessibility Plan cycle, budgetary constraints prevented the Society from establishing the Learning Support Lead Teacher as a dedicated position. During this period, the Principal continued to oversee the Inclusive Education program and fulfill the responsibilities associated with learning support coordination alongside their administrative duties.

For the 2026–2029 Accessibility Plan cycle, the Society will continue to work toward establishing a dedicated Learning Support Lead Teacher position as enrolment and financial resources allow. In the interim, the Principal will continue to oversee and coordinate Inclusive Education and learning support needs.

The Society recognizes the ongoing challenge of providing appropriate levels of support for students who have additional learning needs but do not meet provincial funding criteria and will continue to explore reasonable strategies, staffing approaches, accommodations, and available resources to reduce these barriers.

As new information is gathered via the Feedback Form on the website, the Accessibility Plan will be updated by the Director of Education.