

Accessibility Plan 2025-28



**GREATER
SASKATOON
CATHOLIC
SCHOOLS**

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This plan is available in alternate format upon request.

To request an alternate format, please contact us at info@gscs.ca or (306) 659-7000.

Message From the Director

At the heart of Catholic education is the belief that every person is created in the image and likeness of God, possessing an inherent dignity that calls us to recognize and honour the diversity of all people. Our commitment to accessibility flows from this belief. It is not simply a matter of compliance or accommodation but a profound expression of our Gospel mission to create communities where each individual is welcomed, valued, and able to flourish.

Accessibility encompasses more than addressing physical barriers. It requires us to acknowledge the full spectrum of human diversity, physical, cognitive, emotional, cultural, linguistic, and social, and to respond with systems, spaces, and experiences that are flexible, inclusive, and designed with care from the beginning. This approach affirms that our schools are not only places of learning, but also places of belonging, where all can participate fully in the life of the community.

In this report, we reflect on the progress made and the work still ahead in building environments that serve all learners and families. Guided by the words of St. Paul, who reminds us that the Body of Christ has many parts and, “if one member suffers, all suffer together; if one member is honored, all rejoice together” (1 Corinthians 12:26), we recognize accessibility as a shared responsibility. By striving for accessibility in every aspect of our work, we are living out our mission as Catholic educators and bearing witness to Christ’s love for all.



François Rivard, Director of Education
Greater Saskatoon Catholic Schools

About our School Division

OUR SCHOOLS



We have 50 schools

- 43 elementary
- 7 high school



We serve the communities of
Saskatoon, Martensville,
Warman, Humboldt and Biggar

We also co-govern Humboldt Collegiate Institute

OUR STUDENTS

as of September 30, 2024

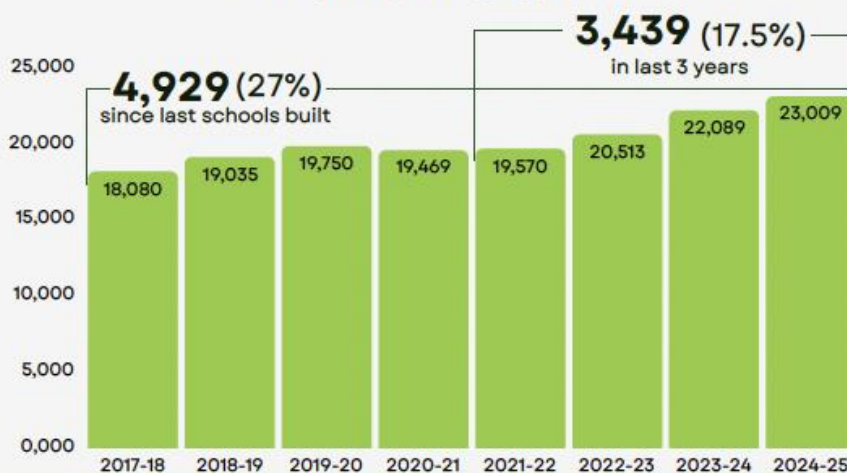
21,448 + 1,561 = 23,009

students in Saskatoon

students outside of
Saskatoon

Total Students

Enrolment Growth



3,359

English as an Additional
Language students

up from 2,017 in 2017 (56% increase)



3,289

First Nations, Métis and
Inuit students



1,506

students with
Intensive-needs

up from 878 in 2017 (59% increase)



6,695

Students transported
daily

plus students in Biggar, Humboldt, Martensville
and Warman who are transported by the local
public school division.

Introduction

In December 2023, the Government of Saskatchewan introduced *The Accessible Saskatchewan Act* to make Saskatchewan a more accessible province for persons with disabilities. The Act requires all public entities in the province, including Greater Saskatoon Catholic Schools, to develop and make public a plan on how we can remove and prevent accessibility barriers for persons with disabilities.



Greater Saskatoon Catholic Schools is committed to identifying, removing, and preventing accessibility barriers for individuals who work at or access school division facilities, programs, and services. Our accessibility plan attempts to identify accessibility barriers for people who are in, or interact with, our school division and describe the actions that will be taken to remove and prevent accessibility barriers.

As a school division, we are committed to accessibility for all. Our plan is informed and guided by our belief in the inherent dignity of all, recognizing that accessibility is good for everyone. Greater Saskatoon Catholic Schools is also committed to the Calls to Action of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) and seeks culturally responsive solutions to all aspects of the accessibility plan. [Saskatchewan Human Rights Code](#), the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's Calls to Action that seek culturally responsive solutions, and above all, the Gospel message to treat all people with dignity, respect and love as members of the Body of Christ.

A school division committee has been created to gather and assess the feedback that will help identify gaps and courses of action that will make up the school division's three-year plan to improve the accessibility of facilities, programs, and services.

Educational partners (Saskatchewan School Boards' Association, Saskatchewan Association of School Business Officials, and League of Educational Administrators Directors and Superintendents) conducted thorough consultations with various provincial stakeholders that provide valuable insight to develop our plan.

The committee conducted a survey for students, families, and staff to provide feedback and help guide our plan.

Information gathered, both locally and provincially, gives valuable insight into what the division is currently doing well, what we can do better, and highlights gaps to accessibility that currently exist and so that our efforts may address them.

Our Mission

Greater Saskatoon Catholic Schools is a welcoming community where we nurture faith, encourage excellence in learning and inspire students to serve others, making the world a better place.

"We love because He first loved us." 1 John 4:19

Our Vision

At Greater Saskatoon Catholic Schools we are:

- Rooted in Faith
- Growing in Knowledge
- Reaching out to Transform the World

In addition to the division's mission and vision, our accessibility plan is based on the following principles and priorities:

1. We believe in the inherent dignity and worth of every individual as a child of God, and

we are committed to ensuring Greater Saskatoon Catholic Schools is a welcoming community for all.

2. We believe that parents are the first and primary educators of their children and that the home, school, and church community work together for the education and formation of children.
3. We believe that inclusive education benefits both individuals and society, and we strive to remove barriers to full participation in learning.
4. We believe that a representative workforce is important, and that barriers to employment and full participation can be addressed and removed through a collaborative approach.

While formalizing policy and planning into a central and comprehensive plan is new, the work to provide an accessible learning environment and workplace is not new. We want to recognize the hard work of everyone on our team to promote inclusion.

Existing policies, practices and programs include:

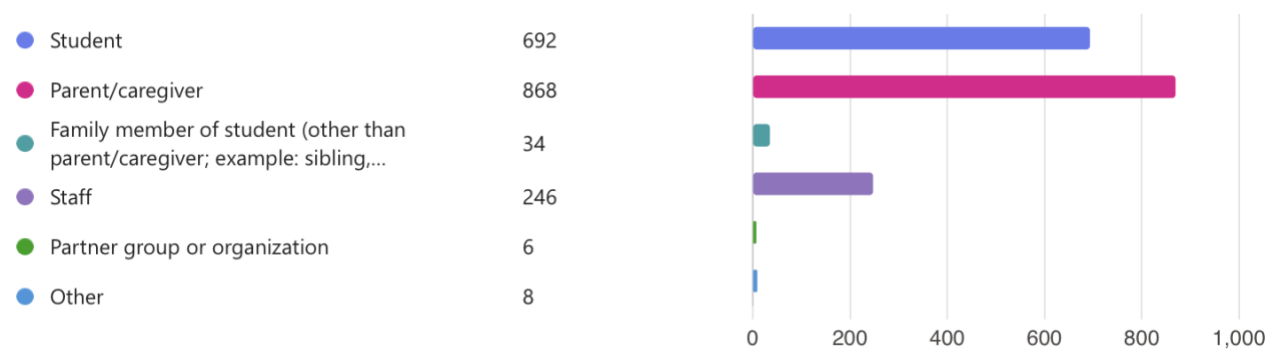
- Inclusive classroom philosophy and approach
- Adaptive learning environments and programming
- Human Resources policies and practices
- Administrative policies

Details on existing achievements toward accessibility are outlined later in this document.

What Did We Learn?

Greater Saskatoon Catholic Schools received 1,746 responses to a survey that was promoted to students (grades 5 – 12), parents/caregivers, and staff. Key areas of the survey were physical space, communication, and requesting an adaptation or

accommodation. All 50 schools and the board office and service centre were represented in responses.



A ranking scale was used to determine perspectives on physical accessibility in the areas of parking, exterior doors, office, classroom, staff room, washrooms, playgrounds and other outdoor spaces, and busing. With the exception of parking and busing, combined ratings of “very accessible” and “fully accessible” ranged from 60.7 per cent to 76.3 per cent, indicating that people generally perceive the physical space to be accessible.

Open-ended responses indicated a lack of clarity. Respondents appear to have confused accessibility for people with disabilities with availability or quantity. For example, a large number of comments simply wanted more parking and an expansion of bus service. That being said, there are legitimate comments about accessibility for both of those areas.

Key areas identified for improvement of accessibility to physical spaces include:

- Accessible parking spaces: more of them and wider spaces.
- Doorways and doors: heavy exterior doors, automated doors not working, and interior doorways that are too narrow.

- Classrooms and interior navigation: interior barriers and layouts that make moving about with mobility aids difficult.
- Playgrounds: sand, wood chips and other soft surfaces decrease accessibility to outdoor spaces.



Age and size of some schools/facilities limit the division's ability to adequately respond to some concerns.

Access to technology, alternate learning or work material, and communication generally ranked high (as high as 74.5 percent combined for "very accessible" and "fully accessible" responses). There was a high response rate for "no rating or response".

Again, open-ended responses indicated a lack of clarity between availability and accessibility for people with disabilities. Some feedback indicated respondents want technology/computers provided more broadly, not specifically to improve accessibility.

Fifteen percent of respondents (262) indicated they experienced barriers within the school division and requested an accommodation or adaptation to improve accessibility. Responses indicate room for improvement to inform people about the process.

Definitions:

Accessibility barriers

The Accessible Saskatchewan Act defines a barrier as anything that hinders or challenges the full and equal participation in society of persons with disabilities.

There are many types of barriers that persons with disabilities may experience, including physical barriers, information and communications barriers, and attitudinal barriers. Definitions and examples of each barrier type are outlined below to help people understand the experiences of people with disabilities.

Physical barriers

Physical barriers exist when spaces are designed in ways that prevent or limit mobility or access.

For example:

- Hosting public events at a venue that is only accessible by stairs.
- Parking lots with no curb cuts that make it difficult to access sidewalks.
- Washrooms that lack accessible stalls or automatic door openers.



Information and communications barriers

Information and communications barriers exist when information or material is shared in a way that is not accessible to all people.

For example:

- Using small print that is hard to read.
- Websites and documents that are not accessible for screen readers or convert text to

multiple languages.

- Videos that do not have closed captioning.

Attitudinal barriers

Attitudinal barriers exist when people act or think based on false assumptions.

For example:

- Not including persons with disabilities in decisions that impact them.
- Making assumptions about a person's ability to communicate or do things for themselves.
- Avoiding a person with a disability for fear of offending them.

Accessibility goals and actions

Greater Saskatoon Catholic Schools has taken steps to improve the accessibility of division facilities, programs, and services. However, we recognize that progress will be ongoing as we aim to become more inclusive. This plan outlines the actions that the school division will prioritize over the next three years to remove accessibility barriers that persons with disabilities experience.

Division staff will work together to complete the actions outlined in this plan and raise awareness about accessibility. Greater Saskatoon Catholic Schools will work to identify and remove barriers that people with disabilities experience in the school division and facilities.

The actions and initiatives listed below are targeted using the following timeframes:

- Ongoing
- Short Term (Completion expected within 1 – 2 years)
- Mid Term (Completion expected within 2 – 5 years)



Goal 1: Improve employee knowledge and awareness of Accessibility

Increasing employee awareness about accessibility and understanding the importance of inclusion are key to improving the quality of services provided to all individuals, including persons with disabilities.

Actions for 2025-28:

- Provide accessibility awareness training to all staff. This training will promote a more inclusive and accepting work environment (Midterm).
- Explore opportunities for additional specialized training for employees related to the services that the school division provides (Ongoing).
- Develop a template to guide in-school administrators with setting local accessibility goals (Ongoing).

Goal 2: Make school division buildings and properties more accessible

Greater Saskatoon Catholic Schools recognizes that accessible buildings are an important part of improving the accessibility of school division services.

Achievements to date:

- One or more auto door operators are located at accessible entrances at 52 facilities.
- Knob style locksets are replaced with barrier free lever style locksets during maintenance cycles when locksets need to be replaced.

- Renovations of existing washroom facilities include an accessibility assessment to ensure all possible improvements are included in the scope of work. 47 locations have at least one accessible washroom available.
- All facilities have ramps or thresholds installed at entrances and exits to ensure they are accessible.
- Facility assessments for visually impaired students are completed as required to ensure safety, dignity and independence.
- Braille continues to be installed on signage as it is replaced.
- GSCS has 30 facilities that either have an elevator and/or lifts providing full or partial access within the facility.
- GSCS has 11 outdoor play structures that are fully or partially accessible.

Actions for 2025-2028:

- The school division will include accessibility requirements during the procurement and tendering processes. Including accessibility considerations will ensure that the school division proactively considers accessibility when purchasing goods and services (Ongoing).
- Inform the public when there are temporary barriers to building spaces or services; an example would be an elevator that is out of order (Ongoing).
- Create barrier free access to goods and services so that they benefit everyone as intended; an example being the removal of obstructions from corridors such as boxes and storage materials (Ongoing).
- Continue to audit our existing facilities to determine opportunities for accessibility improvements as part of renovation planning (Ongoing).
- Continue to work with our consultants and local authorities to ensure a clear understanding of current and future accessibility codes to inform new school projects and renovations within existing facilities (Ongoing).

- Work with school-based caretaking teams to ensure that barrier free parking stalls and walkways are clear of snow and ice during the winter season (Ongoing).
- Review accessible parking strategies and work with local authorities regarding on-street accessible parking at school division facilities (Ongoing).
- Provide student and staff furniture that is adjustable to meet the needs of all individuals (Ongoing).
- GSCS will include accessible and single use washrooms in all new school projects and renovation projects (Ongoing).

- Braille signage to be included as part of design specifications for new construction projects as well as renovations (Short Term).



- Ensure that planning and design for new schools includes the best design practices with respect to accessibility and that all current codes are met or exceeded (Short Term).



- Provide accessible play structures when new structures are installed or existing structures are replaced (Short Term).

- As part of washroom renovations, GSCS will determine accessibility

improvements and include this scope as part of the renovation (Mid Term).

- GSCS will include visibility strips as part of new capital projects as well as part of renovation projects (Ongoing and Long Term).
- Installation of elevators or lifts to provided full access within facilities. GSCS has 12

facilities requiring lifts (Long term).

- Installation of card access at facilities where it currently does not exist (Long Term).

Goal 3: Improve the accessibility of school division programs and services

Greater Saskatoon Catholic Schools is taking steps to remove accessibility barriers that limit access to division programs and services.

Achievements to date:

- Provision of a variety of professional staff to directly support students, including Medical Facilitators, Interpreters, Speech Language Pathologist, Occupational Therapist, and Braillists.
- Contracting for additional professional services such as Occupational Therapy (OT), Physical Therapy support, and Psychologist support.
- Deployment of Educational Assistants (EAs) to provide classroom and individual student support.
- Implementation of adjustable furniture and seating to meet varied physical needs.
- Purchase of specialized technological aids and equipment to support students, such as swings and Gait Trainers.
- Ensuring students have access to technology specifically designed to support their individual learning and communication needs.
- Providing a Bilingual program for students who are Deaf to support language and cultural access.

- Offering ASL interpreters at some division-wide events to ensure accessibility for the Deaf community.
- Provide alternative formats for students (i.e. Braille, large print, digital text).
- Provide accessible transportation to students who use wheelchairs or other mobility devices.
- Every learning space has a sound field system.
- Free Wi-Fi accessibility in all our facilities to allow devices that support communication for all students, families, staff, and community members. Free Wi-Fi helps all people to access information. Providing access to Wi-Fi also ensures persons who are Deaf and Hard of Hearing can use internet-based sign language interpretation services and allows them to access information and forms on their mobile devices without impacting their mobile data usage.
- The school division has ensured that students have access to technology that supports their learning in many ways based on the individual needs of the student. These include, but are not limited to: Apps and technology to support communication, adaptive readers, voice to text and text to audio technology, etc.



Actions for 2025-28:

- Continue providing sound field systems to classrooms across the division for all new and renovated learning spaces (Ongoing).
- Offer ASL interpreters at all school board events to ensure accessibility for the Deaf community (Short term).
- Review and update division documents to ensure information is easy to find, easy to read, and easy to understand (Ongoing).

Goal 4: Make digital content more accessible

As most individuals access a majority of information through digital platforms like websites, Edsby and social media, it is important to make sure that digital content is understandable and accessible on the devices that people use.

Achievements to date:

- Public-facing website is Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG) compliant, resulting in improved accessibility. The WCAG outlines steps that can be taken to make sure that everyone can use websites, no matter their abilities.

Actions for 2025-28:

- Continue to review and improve the accessibility of the school division website and web-based services (Ongoing).
- Use descriptive links where possible (e.g. “View our accessibility plan.”, not “Click here”) (Ongoing).
- Limit use of PDFs to improve usability for translation and text-to-voice services. (Ongoing).

- Consistently use descriptive alternative text for images. (Ongoing).
- Inform and train staff responsible on best practices. (Ongoing).

Goal 5: Support a diverse and inclusive workforce

Greater Saskatoon Catholic Schools recognizes the importance of fostering an inclusive environment for all employees.

Achievements to date:

- At Greater Saskatoon Catholic Schools, we value the contributions of all members. The division's Diversity and Inclusion Strategic Plan is based on the following principles and priorities:
 - We believe in the inherent dignity and worth of every individual and are committed to ensuring Greater Saskatoon Catholic Schools is a welcoming community for all.
 - We believe that as a school division with the mandate to educate children and youth, their reality needs to be affirmed and reflected in those who serve them.
 - We believe in the investment and resourcing of diversity, equity and inclusion initiatives that help to actualize division goals.
 - We believe that a coordinated diversity, equity and inclusion plan has targets and metrics that are championed by organizational leaders.
 - We believe that barriers to employment and full participation can be removed through education and the provision of initiatives that address such barriers.
- The division's Diversity and Inclusion Strategic Plan includes various goals and targets which guide the strategic direction through candidate experience, community engagement, cultivating change through training, equity in procurement, workforce development and communication and participation with stakeholders and partners.

- Through the Human Resources department, the division will continue to work through accommodation requests ensuring consistent practice and process.
- Greater Saskatoon Catholic Schools has a Division Staff Mental Health and Well-being Committee. This committee focuses on fostering a supportive environment where staff feel valued, engaged, recognized, and supported. By prioritizing mental wellness, the committee's aim is to support positive morale, reduce stress, and enhance the quality of workplace wellbeing throughout the division. The Wellness Plan reflects the shared responsibility framework by promoting individual, collaborative, and systemic actions that nurture all dimensions of wellness: spiritual, physical, mental, financial, nutritional, and social.
- Greater Saskatoon Catholic Schools endorses individual and family access to counselling supports through the division's Employee and Family Assistance Program.

Actions for 2025-28:

- Review the current process for school division employees to self-declare a disability to identify opportunities for improvement. Improving understanding of employee diversity in the context of recruitment, retention, and career advancement helps the school division to better support employees with disabilities and realize a more engaged and productive workforce (Ongoing).
- Review and re-communicate process to request medical accommodations (Short term).

Conclusion

Greater Saskatoon Catholic Schools is committed to improving accessibility in our schools, facilities, communications, and our processes to better serve students, families and staff. The actions outlined in this plan are intended to improve accessibility and remove barriers that persons with disabilities experience. As a Catholic school division, we

also believe that it is important to recognize and respect the God-given dignity inherent in each and every member of our community.

This plan will be reviewed and updated every three years. If you have feedback to improve future versions of this plan, contact us at:

Phone: (306) 659-7000

Email: info@gscs.ca

Address: 420 22nd Street East, Saskatoon SK S7K 1X3



Appendix A: Accessibility Barriers

There are many types of accessibility barriers that persons with disabilities may experience. Examples of different types of barriers are outlined below.

Physical and architectural

Structural and design-based obstacles that prevent or limit mobility or access.

Examples of physical barriers include:

- Doorknobs that cannot be turned by a person with limited dexterity or strength instead of easier to use lever-style handles; and
- Public events hosted at venues that can only be accessed by steps; and walkways with obstacles, such as snow-covered paths into buildings.

Information and communications

Obstacles experienced by persons with disabilities related to hearing, speaking, reading, writing or understanding, and those who communicate in different ways.

Examples of information and communication barriers include:

- Using small print and poor color contrast;
- Creating websites and documents without considering how some people with vision impairments use screen readers; writing documents with complex language instead of simple and easy to understand words; and
- Only providing customers with one option to contact your organization such as by phone instead of multiple options like email, text message, and in-person.

Attitudinal

When people act or think based on false assumptions.

Examples of attitudinal barriers include:

- Assuming that someone with an intellectual disability cannot make decisions, instead of asking them if they would need any support;
- Speaking to an aid or interpreter instead of directly to a person with a disability;
- Assuming that all persons with disabilities require the same accommodations instead of asking how you can support them; and
- Not considering the needs of people with different types of disabilities when planning event.