

ADA TRANSITION PLAN - PROCESS DOCUMENT
PORTLAND PUBLIC SCHOOLS
INTERNAL STAKEHOLDER SUMMARY
2020 JUNE 01

INTRODUCTION

While under the Stay Home, Save Lives directive, an internal stakeholder group met individually with the project liaison. During these discussions, staff reviewed current accessibility data for the District - much of which had been documented within six months of these conversations. Each stakeholder was then tasked with developing four transition scenarios. These transition scenarios, or prioritization frameworks, are documented below. Importantly, staff brought forward these priorities less as a menu of options for the wider community but rather as reference points for the community conversations planned for summer 2020. The responses are summarized below in addition to a detailed description of each framework.

STAKEHOLDERS

Stakeholders internal to PPS were selected based on one or more of the following criteria:

1. Project experience with work related to barrier-removal within the District
2. Anticipated stewardship of barrier-removal projects once the transition plan is complete
3. Leadership in education for students experiencing disability

In addition to their roles as accessibility stewards, this group offered expertise on the legislative, operational, and financial feasibility of barrier-removal. Members included:

Dept	Stakeholder
OSM	Heidi Bertman
SPED	Chris Burns
SPED	Maria Gianotti
OSM	Steve Simonson
SPED	Noelle Sisk
SPED	Claire Skelly
OSM	Jen Sohm
P&C	Rebecca Winn

RESPONSE SUMMARY

Many stakeholders indicated main-level accessibility as their highest priority, specifically main-level accessibility in multi-level schools without elevators. A number of respondents further detailed the minimum requirements of this approach: access to the cafeteria, gymnasium, and library in addition to classrooms and restrooms are critical for this approach to be meaningful.

Many responses reinforced a systems-approach to program accessibility. Examples include equitable program access for students across the District, including core curriculum as well as specialized student groups or clubs and educational areas such as STEAM, Maker Spaces, and Career Technical Education. To be sure, geographical considerations come into play with this approach as well.

Participants ranked multilevel access, accessible parking and playgrounds, and SPED classroom improvements as priorities but secondary to universal design considerations around the building entrance and essential functions. Notably, elevators did not appear until the third priority.

Throughout the responses, access to both focus-option and neighborhood programs were elevated in equal measure.

Five salient approaches to accessibility emerged across stakeholders. Each is detailed below.

Main-level Accessibility District-wide

Main-level accessibility would include portions of the site necessary to reach the main entrance from the bus or drop-off area, the main entrance, and access to essential programming. Here essential programming includes an individual's classroom(s), the cafeteria, library, and gym, in addition to one or more accessible restrooms.

This approach may require administrators to schedule programming around individuals with disabilities in multi-level buildings without elevators. In addition to instructional programming, sensitivity to the placement school-clubs and other extracurricular activities must be observed.

The advantage of this framework would be its economy and relative speed to implement District-wide. By omitting elevators - far and away the most costly accessibility improvement - the District's accessibility budget could reach many more schools.

To be sure, the operational challenges this approach may present to building administrators should not be underestimated. Consider a middle school student in a multi-level K-8 building without an elevator. While classrooms at the elementary level are for the most part interchangeable, this becomes increasingly less true in later grades. A science classroom has little in common with an english classroom in the eighth grade.

One accessible school at each configuration, per cluster

This approach would ensure that a student with a disability could remain, if not within their neighborhood school, at least within their nearest cluster. As a goal of the 2017 Bond, this commitment went unmet despite the allocation of \$8.2 million dollars in accessibility improvements. Of the six clusters, none currently have a fully accessible thread from kindergarten to graduation.

In as much as is practical or meaningful, this approach addresses full accessibility. It would not, however, account for optimal geographic distribution. As currently imagined, schools designated for improvements are the most affordable options, typically because they do not require elevators.

Elevators at buildings with multi-level programming

This approach would be tantamount to full accessibility at buildings with multi-level programming. Where second and third floors are accessible, accessible restrooms must be provided, to say nothing of an accessibility route from and including the main entrance to the elevator access.

The logistical and financial challenges of this approach cannot be overstated. Recent elevator installations have ranged from \$800,000 to \$1.5 million dollars. At a minimum, construction is invasive and can only occur during the summer recess in most cases. To be sure, elevators are significant building modifications: adding an elevator to the interior of an existing building is essentially inserting a structural core into an existing structure.

On this score, the structural benefit of adding an elevator is worth further discussion. When concrete, as opposed to metal studs, is used to construct elevator shaft walls, they can reinforce buildings against lateral movement significantly improving seismic performance. While this is not in itself a seismic solution, it can be a significant step toward seismic safety.

Title I First

Schools with large concentrations of low-income students receive supplemental federal funds to assist in meeting student's educational goals. This program is known as Title I. During the 20/21 school year, 22 schools qualified for Title I support. The location of these schools corresponds to a high degree to Portland's historically under-served and historically Black neighborhoods.

While not directly associated with disability, Title I indicators correlate with disproportionately higher percentages of disability in the United States. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, one in four Black Americans has a disability, compared with one in five for White Americans.

¹ In fact, Black Americans are more likely than Non-Hispanic Whites to have a disability in every age group.

¹ Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.
<https://www.cdc.gov/ncbddd/disabilityandhealth/materials/infographic-disabilities-ethnicity-race.html>

Likewise, poverty is a risk-factor for disability. Children living in poverty are more likely to have asthma, chronic illness, environmental trauma such as lead poisoning, learning problems and low birth weight that lead to disabilities.² Moreover, those experiencing poverty are less able to treat disabling conditions and mitigate their impact. While the reasons for this are complex, limited access to high quality medical care and early intervention certainly exacerbate many conditions.³

Our schools are key institutions in Portland neighborhoods. Creating environments that elevate the health, dignity, and independence for all students - but with special consideration for those from communities in the long shadow systemic racism - reinforces Portland Public School's role as vital neighborhood centers.

Program Uniqueness

In addition to neighborhood schools, the District supports a number of focus option programs ranging in emphasis from environmental science to the arts. The curriculum for each of these programs is unique, and so unlike neighborhood program curriculum - replicated throughout the District - admission to a focus option program is an unparalleled opportunity.

For this reason, focus options programs present a challenge to a number of accessibility approaches described above. No transportation solution exists for a student experiencing a disability and hoping to attend a focus option program in an inaccessible building. Prioritizing accessibility for sites with focus option programs should therefore be distinctly considered in this transition plan.

Similar in uniqueness, the District supports two dedicated special education programs: the Pioneer Special School Program and Community Transition Program at Green Thumb. While the Pioneer Program supports students with social/emotional needs, and fragile mental health, rather than medically fragile individuals, these students have unique sensitivities; their environment plays a critical role in reducing incidents of emotional dysregulation. And of course the converse is also true.

Green Thumb - the District's only dedicated Community Transition Program site - supports young adults in their transition to life by helping them achieve the greatest degree of independence and quality of life. Many of the physical barriers at Green Thumb work against these goals, however. While only three classrooms, the Green Thumb buildings lack important accessibility aids such as door actuators. An individual relying on a power-assisted chair may therefore be the position of needing assistance opening doors to their classroom or restroom in the context of a program nominally intended to support independence.

² Woolf, SH, Aron, L., Laudan, Dubai, L. Simon, S.S., Zimmerman, E. Luk, K.X. (2015) How Are Income and Wealth Linked to Health and Longevity?
<http://www.urban.org/sites/default/files/alfresco/publication-pdfs/2000178-How-are-Income-and-Wealth-Linked-to-Health-and-Longevity.pdf>

³ Pokempner, Jennifer and Roberts, Dorothy E. (2001), "Poverty, Welfare Reform, and the Meaning of Disability"