



MEMO

Date: March 5, 2021
To: Board of Education
From: Dan Jung, Chief Operating Officer
Subject: ADA Transition Plan - Engagement Summary

Overview

Review and input from members of the disability community were critical to the development of the transition plan. The District hosted three virtual town halls between July and August 2020. These included a brief overview of work on the transition plan completed to date, followed by an open forum for community members to voice their concerns, ask questions, and advocate for transition approaches. Each town hall was recorded and posted to pps.net/accessibility.

The dates of the Virtual Town Halls together with listening notes are provided below. All notes were reviewed, commended on, and edited by participants of the respective town halls.

DATE	TOWN HALL	NOTES
2020-07-30	Virtual Town Hall - 1	LINK
2020-08-11	Virtual Town Hall - 2	LINK
2020-08-13	Virtual Town Hall - 3	LINK

To reach the disability community, the District partnered with [FACT Oregon](#) and [Community Vision](#) – two organizations with a long history of disability advocacy and deep ties to the disability community in Portland. Both FACT and Community Vision were able to connect with families directly impacted by the physical barriers at our schools. Between 12-20 parents of students with disabilities and students affected by disability attended each town hall. The conversations ranged across many aspects of accessibility and disability culture. Key outcomes of these conversations are detailed below.

To reach our Spanish-speaking community, multi-lingual staff reach out to parents directly to conduct phone interviews.

In addition, three individuals experiencing disability were paid by the District to review and provide input on the document. These individuals each experienced a different type of disability so as to garner perspectives on the mobility, sensory, and cognitive impact of District-barriers. This feedback has been incorporated into the current draft of the ADA Transition Plan.

Outcomes

Our conversations with the disability community provided meaningful and actionable direction in shaping accessibility outcomes District-wide. These conversations provided insight to a deeper dimension of accessibility as well as unequivocal support for accessibility priorities: main-level accessibility District-wide was a logical and necessary first step to a fully accessible District and should be addressed first.

Elevators in Middle Schools were identified as the next logical priority. Middle school classrooms support a wide range and variety of programming, suggesting a greater urgency for barrier-free circulation. In elementary schools, where students typically remain in a homeroom most of the school day and therefore circulate less than in Middle schools, there is more opportunity for administrators to shift programming to accommodate students with disabilities. Elevators should be installed at K-5s last.

Beyond outlining phasing options, community members elevated aspects of accessibility where federal guidelines are anemic or silent altogether. Examples include the minimum size of restrooms, playgrounds and play equipment, and most broadly, building access.

Restrooms. During community meetings, staff learned that ADA restroom dimensions and grab bar layouts are intended to support individuals with normative upper body strength - a consequence of the selected research models informing the guidelines: veterans with spinal cord injuries. Disability in our students differs in important ways from this research model. Our students with disabilities often have attenuated musculoskeletal systems and struggle with the fine motor operations required for independent toilet transfers.

This input has important implications for the size and layout of our school restrooms - information that was not previously been documented in the District's guiding design documents. Staff are currently working to revise restroom standards in collaboration with community members and District occupational therapists.

Building access. Townhall participants stressed the importance of accessible primary student entries throughout the dialogues. Students with disabilities face obstacles and social barriers daily and should not be excluded from the social ritual of morning arrival or afternoon dismissal. Accessibility improvements in phases I and II of the transition plan will therefore prioritize accessibility solutions integrated into the social patterns of the building.

Playgrounds. The ADA does not include provisions for accessible playgrounds. Accessible paths to play equipment must be provided, but the play equipment and structures themselves are not required to be accessible per federal requirements. The disability community was unanimous in its support for providing accessible and inclusive playgrounds. The community noted playgrounds are where young students learn indelible social lessons, and too often students with disabilities are segregated from their peers by physical barriers. What's more, District playgrounds tacitly communicate values of inclusion and accessibility to the public and community.

Staff are currently developing guidelines and standards to reflect these values with continued collaboration from the disability community. To be sure, the continued involvement of community members speaks to the durable connections formed during the transition plan development. These standards will guide all future playground improvements District-wide.