

Review of Accessibility and Programming for Individuals with Disabilities

Colonial Heights Public Schools

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Colonial Heights, Va. 23834

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To: Chair, Senate Committee on Education and Health
 Chair, House Committee on Education

I. Executive Summary

We conducted an Accessibility Review for our schools - Colonial Heights High School, Colonial Heights High School Vocational and Technical Building, Colonial Heights Middle School, Tussing Elementary School, Lakeview Elementary School and North Elementary School. *The Accessibility Review was conducted to comply with the below General Assembly of Virginia Act.*

1. Each school board or division superintendent, in consultation with such other stakeholders as it deems appropriate, shall review the extent to which

(i) public elementary and secondary school buildings and grounds in the local school division present accessibility challenges and barriers for individuals with disabilities, including challenges and barriers that may prevent such individuals from fully participating in school activities;

(ii) challenges in access to programming and supports exist for individuals with disabilities at public elementary and secondary schools in the local school division;

(iii) such schools have begun or plan to address and eliminate all such challenges and barriers; and

(iv) state agencies can assist such schools to address and eliminate all such challenges and barriers and fully comply with all applicable state and federal laws.

Summary of Key Findings:

- **Inadequate turning space in restrooms: Many older restrooms don't have enough room for wheelchairs.**
- **Non-compliant stalls: Missing grab bars, stalls too small, doors that swing inward and block access or no handles on inside of door to close door.**
- **Some exposed pipes under sinks.**
- **Inaccessible accessories: Some mirrors, soap dispensers, and towel dispensers placed too high.**
- **Playgrounds: Surfaces (like wood chips) are not wheelchair-accessible**
- **Some athletic fields: Lack of accessible routes, seating, or restrooms.**
- **Some sites have water fountains that need modifications**
- **Lack of Braille or tactile signage: Parking lots, classroom and restroom labels may not be accessible to blind or low-vision students.**

High-Level Recommendations: (major recommendations for addressing identified barriers and improving access)

- **List specific concerns and develop Plan, including budget allocations to methodically correct issues**
- **Compare findings across school sites to identify patterns and disparities**
- **Review findings for Safe Harbor rules**
- **Identify Key Stakeholders**
- **Provide at least one accessible restroom per floor or area (Boys & Girls)**
- **Remediate other restrooms for compliance**
- **Remediate playgrounds for accessibility**
- **Address signage at each site for compliance**

II. Methodology

The review was conducted using the following methodology:

- **Tools and Methods Used: Facility Audits (Checklists and Site visits)**
- **Use of GAO Report 20-448 Framework: Evaluation guided by GAO criteria such as building and grounds condition and programmatic accessibility.**
- **ADA Checklist for Existing Facilities, Activities, Sports, Team or Player Seating, Exercise Sports Activities, Team or Player Seating, Exercise Machines & Equipment and Play Areas (Playgrounds)**

- Institute for Human Centered Design [www.Human Centered Design.org](http://www.HumanCenteredDesign.org) - www.ADAchecklist.org - Based on the 2010 ADA Standards for Accessible Design
- **Identification of major physical barriers and their prevalence**
- **Highlight any ADA compliance concerns or priority needs.**

III. Findings

A. Physical Accessibility (Clause i)

To evaluate physical accessibility, detailed checklists were completed for the following categories at Colonial Heights High School, Colonial Heights High School Technical & Vocational Building, Colonial Heights Middle School, Tussing Elementary School, Lakeview Elementary School and North Elementary School. Items of non-compliance were noted in the checklists and summarized in Key Findings. The detailed findings will be listed and tracked in a remediation Plan. The Checklists categories included the following:

- **Overview of current accessibility of buildings and grounds (entrances, elevators, signage, restrooms, playgrounds, etc.).**
 - **Approach & Entrance - An accessible route from site arrival points and an accessible entrance**
 - Accessible route from arrival points
 - Accessible parking spaces
 - Exterior accessible route
 - Curb ramps
 - Building ramps
 - Entrance points
- **Access to any area to participate in school activities**
 - Interior accessible routes
 - Ramps
 - Elevators
 - Signs
 - Interior doors
 - Rooms and spaces
 - Controls – light switches, security and intercom systems, emergency/alarm boxes
 - Seating: Assembly Areas – theaters, auditoriums, stadiums, theater style classrooms, etc.
 - Seating: At dining surfaces and non-employee work surfaces (libraries, conference rooms, etc.)
 - Seating: General – reception areas, waiting rooms, etc.
 - Benches – In locker rooms, changing rooms, etc.
 - Service Counters

- Food Service Lines – in cafeterias
- Restrooms
 - Accessible route
 - Signs
 - Entrance
 - Room in the toilet area
 - Sinks
 - Soap dispensers and hand dryers
 - Closets in Single-User Toilet Rooms and Compartments (Stalls)
 - Stalls
- Drinking fountains and telephones
- Fire Alarm Systems
- Sports Activities - Soccer fields, football fields, basketball courts, tennis courts, baseball & softball fields, running tracks, Field hockey fields, etc.
 - Exercise
 - Machines & Equipment
 - Team or Player Seating
- Play Grounds and Play Areas
 - Accessible routes
 - Ramps
 - Grounds, surfaces
 - Equipment
- Identification of major physical barriers and their prevalence

B. Programmatic Access (Clause ii)

- The CHPS, Office of Support Services develops appropriate Individual Education Plans and 504 Plans to establish appropriate accommodations and engagement
 - An Individualized Education Program (IEP) is developed and implemented for each child with a disability served by the Colonial Heights School Board. The program is developed in a meeting of the child's IEP team, which includes the child's teachers, parent, the student (when appropriate), a school division representative qualified to provide or supervise the provision of special education services, an individual who can interpret the instructional implications of evaluation results and other individuals at the discretion of the parent or school division in accordance with State and federal law and regulations. This IEP is reviewed at least annually.
 - The IEP includes areas and requirements specified by state and federal statutes and regulations

C. Actions Taken or Planned (Clause iii)

- **Summary of ongoing or planned initiatives addressing accessibility**
 - Review of Accessibility Checklists and develop a Plan, including budget allocations to address non-compliance identified
 - Maintain a robust Office of Support Services which meets or exceeds requirements specified by state and federal statutes and regulations
 - Maintain ADA compliance with any new Capital Projects or renovations
- **Capital improvement or renovation projects**
 - None funded at this time for 2026-2027 - Budget process will evaluate needs and priorities and be completed by the end of March 2026
 - Any plans for new buildings and renovations or alterations of existing buildings will offer such design, construction, and accommodations as to make the newly constructed buildings and renovated or altered areas accessible to and usable by individuals with disabilities as required by law.
- **Accessibility training and awareness programs for staff**
 - The Colonial Heights School Board provides a program of high-quality professional development as part of the license renewal process, to assist teachers and principals in acquiring the skills needed to work with students with disabilities to increase student achievement and expand the knowledge and skills students require to meet the standards for academic performance set by the Board of Education;
 - The Student Transportation Department provides required transportation services for students with disabilities
 - The Maintenance and Operations Department maintains infrastructure needed to accommodate students, staff and visitors with disabilities

D. State Agency Support Needed (Clause iv)

- **State agency assistance would enhance local capacity, including funding, guidance, and legal compliance expertise.**
 - Funding to build new and modern schools
 - Funding to modernize aging school infrastructure similar to Security Grants for specific projects - restrooms, playgrounds, ramps, etc.

Recommendations

- **Short-Term Recommendations: Immediate, actionable improvements**
 - Develop detailed list of actionable items and a Plan to remediate and fund
 - Identify Key Stakeholders to assist with the Plan:
 - Students with disabilities and their families.
 - Special education teachers, aides, and coordinators.
 - Building maintenance and facilities personnel.
 - School administrators and principals.

- Transportation coordinators and contractors.
 - Compare findings across school sites to identify patterns and disparities
 - Signage upgrades
 - Restroom improvements, painting, handrails, Stall improvements
- **Long-Term Recommendations: Systemic or capital-based improvements**
 - Funding requests for costly improvements in 2026-2027 Budget and Division's 5-Year Capital Improvement Plan (Playgrounds, costly restroom modifications, Sport field accessibility)
- **Requests for State Support or Legislative Action:**
 - Funding to build new and modern schools
 - Funding to modernize aging school infrastructure similar to Security Grants for specific projects - restrooms, playgrounds, ramps, etc.