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LEARNING OBJECTIVES

At the end of this course, participants will be able to:

1. Apply a more creative approach to accessible design that focuses on exceeding minimum standards.
2. Assess a school facility and identify where greater access in the educational environment is most beneficial and readily achievable.
3. Apply a cost-effective approach to accessible design.
4. Gained an understanding of which state and federal accessibility codes pertain to schools and about Department of Justice established priorities that clarify where resources should be directed when fulfilling continual barrier removal obligations.

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AGENDA

- Physical Accessibility 
- Wayfinding 
- Accessible Routes 

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AGENDA

- Kitchens 
- Bathrooms 
- Children's Environments 

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PHYSICAL ACCESSIBILITY

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PHYSICAL ACCESSIBILITY

- Law vs. Spirit of the law
- Planning for success
- Don't design to tolerances
- Products and Services
- Key Achievements

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Design in accordance with the standards.

That's it.

 **WHAT DOES THE LAW REQUIRE OF A DESIGN PROFESSIONAL?**



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TRUE ACCESS IS SO MUCH MORE.

- For instance, how products are chosen is important. Doors with good frames, like these, make it easier for people with low vision to find the door.
- It's not a requirement, but it makes sense especially if designing for an area with a lot of seniors.



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WHERE IS YOUR FOCUS?

When the ADA came out in 1990, the focus was on people with mobility impairments, specifically those using mobility aides.

In 2010 several things were added to update the standards to better serve people with sensory impairments. Good design can serve them as well. It starts with understanding the community and who is likely to utilize the building.



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DISABILITIES TO CONSIDER

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Categories of Disability

Autism/Neurodivergence	Dementia
ADHD	Intellectual Disabilities
Blind/Low vision	Learning Disabilities
Deaf/Hard of Hearing	Physical Disabilities




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WHO ARE YOU DESIGNING FOR?

By understanding the community around the project, you can be more creative in finding ways to incorporate accessibility, functionality and beauty.

Spaces designed for kids are different than spaces designed for adults. The same is true when a space is designed for people with disabilities. A simple barrier can communicate that someone isn't welcome.



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WHO ARE YOU DESIGNING FOR?

Human-centered design puts people first and accessible design works for everyone.

By its very nature, accessible design is human-centered and works for everyone but not everyone understands the words “human-centered”. In this presentation we use “inclusive” design, which is more widely understood.

Designing for inclusivity is more than just ticking off a list of accessibility features.

It's about understanding the nuances of individual experiences and tailoring your design to address them.



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INCLUSIVE DESIGN

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INCLUSIVE DESIGN

For decades accessible features were hidden and people with disabilities were excluded.

Access begins with intention. Universal access doesn't limit design to what's required but extends to what is right and welcomes everyone.

Everyone entering a space should feel valued.



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WHO ARE YOU DESIGNING FOR?

What do you know about designing for people with Autism? Think about:

1. Textures
2. Lighting
3. Sensory zones
4. Colors
5. Furniture choices
6. Auditory features



Photo Credit: Baux acoustic design panels



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INCLUSIVE DESIGN PROVIDES THE SAME SOLUTIONS FOR EVERYONE:

- Design is appealing and provides the same means of use to everyone
- The same provisions for privacy, safety and security are available



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INCLUSIVE DESIGN PROVIDES FLEXIBILITY:

- There is a choice in methods of use
- Accommodations for right or left-handed use
- Allow for accuracy and precision as well as adaptable to the individuals pace



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INCLUSIVE DESIGN PROVIDES FLEXIBILITY:

- Consider emerging markets and specialized options
- Use design as an advantage
- Think about symmetry



Photo Credit: Ascension Lifts

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INCLUSIVE DESIGN PROVIDES AN AMBIANCE:

- Use of the design is easy to understand
- Any undue complexity is removed
- The mood is calming

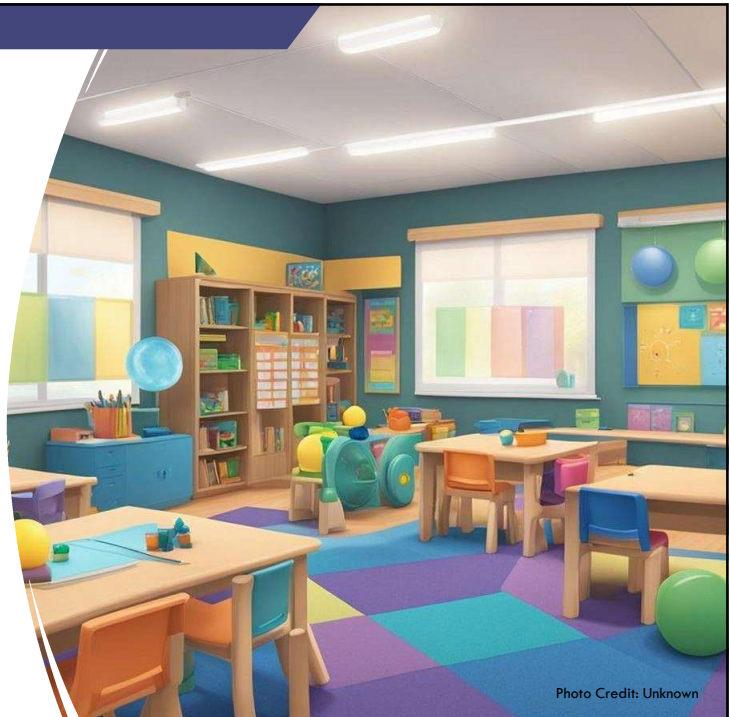


Photo Credit: Unknown

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INCLUSIVE DESIGN IS EASY TO UNDERSTAND:

- Environmental conditions do not affect use
- Consider individuals sensory abilities
- Provide contrast between essential information and its surroundings



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INCLUSIVE DESIGN UNDERSTANDS CONSTRUCTION:

- Design is not at minimum or maximum limits of law
- Provide fail-safe and independent features



Photo Credit: Accessology Too, LLC



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INCLUSIVE DESIGN REQUIRES LOW PHYSICAL EFFORT:

- Allows user to maintain a neutral body position
- Low force and minimum repetitive actions



Photo Credit: Accessology Too, LLC

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INCLUSIVE DESIGN PROVIDES SIZE AND SPACE FOR BOTH APPROACH AND USE:

- Provide a clear line of site to important elements for any seated or standing persons
- Provide comfortable reach for all users
- Provide adequate space for the use of mobility aids



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NEURODIVERGENCE

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NEURODIVERGENCE

Self-Reg invites us to identify and reduce stress across five interrelated domains:

Biological

Emotional

Cognitive

Social

Prosocial

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NEURODIVERGENCE

Behavior IS communication

And when we understand that, we can move from reacting to co-regulating, from enforcing sameness to embracing difference



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Biological Domain

What this can look like in the classroom:

Fidgeting, restlessness, or constant movement

Slouched posture, yawning, or zoning out

Avoidance of sensory-triggering activities (e.g., art class, gym)

Irritability after lunch, during transitions, or at certain times of day



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BIOLOGICAL DOMAIN

Common Stressors

- Fluorescent lighting, loud environments, crowded hallways
- Hunger, thirst, or irregular routines
- Illness or fatigue
- Sensory overload from sounds, textures, smells, or clothing

Ways to Support

- Create quiet corners or sensory-friendly zones in the classroom
- Offer movement breaks and fidgets without shame
- Let students eat or drink when needed, not just at scheduled times
- Offer noise-canceling headphones or sunglasses for sensory support

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Emotional Domain

What this can look like in the classroom:

Emotional outbursts or crying
Withdrawing or refusing to participate.

Overreacting to minor setbacks or corrections.

Perfectionism or fear of making mistake



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EMOTIONAL DOMAIN

Common Stressors

- Fear of judgment or failure
- Emotional masking to fit in
- Lack of emotional vocabulary or safe spaces to express feelings
- Unprocessed experiences from outside of school (e.g., trauma, grief)

Ways to Support

- Greet students with warmth and presence—small connections build trust
- Normalize all feelings (not just “happy”) through books, visuals, and conversations
- Use co-regulation before redirection—regulate first, then teach
- Teach emotional literacy explicitly: “Name it to tame it”

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Cognitive Domain

What this can look like in the classroom:

Difficulty starting or finishing tasks

Appearing “lazy” or unmotivated (often signs of overwhelm)

Struggling with transitions or changes in routine

Repeatedly asking for instructions or losing track of step



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COGNITIVE DOMAIN

Common Stressors

- Tasks that are too abstract, too long, or too vague
- Executive functioning challenges (e.g., planning, memory, task-switching)
- Lack of clarity or too much input at once
- Overwhelm from multitasking demands
- Creative individual spaces

Ways to Support

- Use visual schedules and chunk tasks into smaller steps
- Give extra processing time and reduce time pressure
- Offer multiple means of engagement and expression (UDL principles)
- Celebrate effort and persistence, not just correctness

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Social Domain

What this can look like in the classroom:

Struggles during group work, recess, or unstructured time

Misreading social cues or having “big reactions” in peer conflict

Isolation, masking, or mimicry to fit in

Clinginess or fear of rejection



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SOCIAL DOMAIN

Common Stressors

- Navigating group dynamics and unspoken social rules
- Sensory overwhelm in social spaces
- Peer rejection or bullying
- Inflexible social expectations (e.g., forced eye contact, turn-taking pressure)

Ways to Support

- Provide options for solo or parallel play during social activities
- Explicitly teach social scripts and offer social stories or visuals
- Honor different communication styles (e.g., AAC, gestures, silence)
- Ensure every child has access to a sense of belonging—not just friendship

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Prosocial Domain

What this can look like in the classroom:

Taking on others' emotions or "over-helping"

Feeling responsible for classmates' moods or outcomes

Guilt when things go wrong

Over-identifying with others' pain, leading to emotional exhaustion



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PROSOCIAL DOMAIN

Common Stressors

- Pressure to be “the good kid” or classroom helper
- High empathy without boundaries
- Being a peacekeeper in conflict-prone classrooms
- Carrying adult expectations without support

Ways to Support

- Model and teach boundaries alongside empathy
- De-center the idea of “being good” and focus on “being whole”
- Create space for self-care and autonomy, even in service-based roles
- Offer reflective tools for children to understand what’s theirs to hold and what’s not

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DESIGN PRINCIPLES

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For people with low or no vision

Think about your
audience. Who might
use the space?

As noted above,
defining edges will
better serve the public.



Photo credit: Beautiful Universal Design by Cynthia A. Leibrock and James Evan Terry

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WHAT IF

Your design choices can
provide more than design.

They can provide direction.



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FOR PEOPLE WITH LOW OR NO VISION

There's a big difference between complying with the law and designing for people with disabilities.

The standards are in place for a reason, but what you do with them is up to you and you are limited only by your imagination.

Restroom orientation is important. Ensure each time someone arrives to the restroom, the orientation is the same.



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FOR PEOPLE WITH LOW VISION

Flooring texture and color differences can be used to provide direction.

Depending on the facility type, flooring changes can alert someone to the location of the restrooms or other important features.

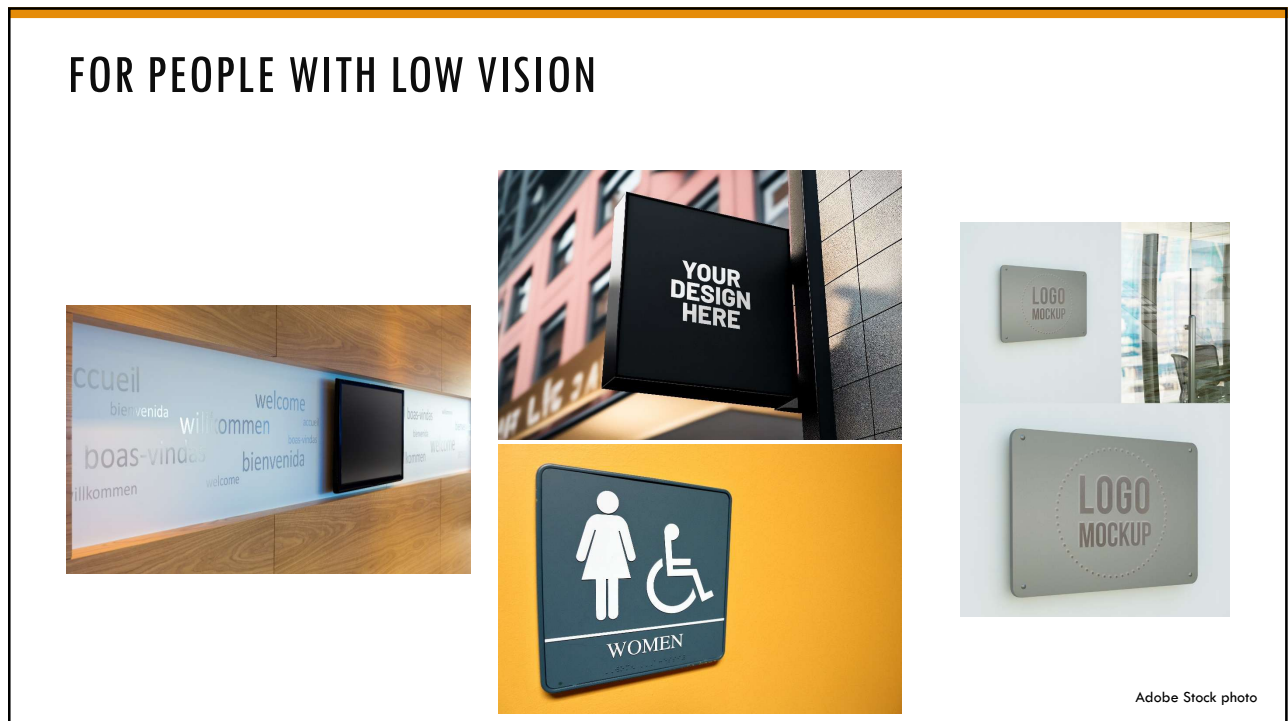


Photo Credit: Accessology Too, LLC

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CONSTRUCTION DECISIONS

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Construction Decisions



- Internal Standards
- Min/Maximum
- Marketing Opportunities

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INTERNAL DECISIONS

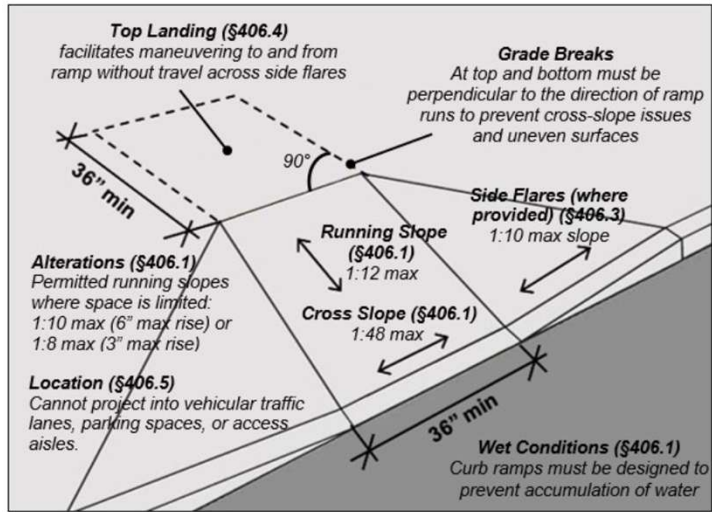


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INTERNAL DECISIONS

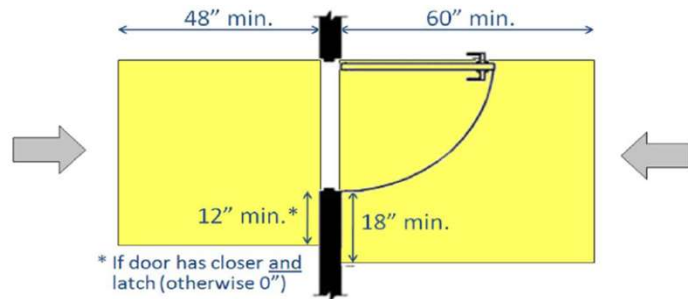


Photo Credit: US Access Board

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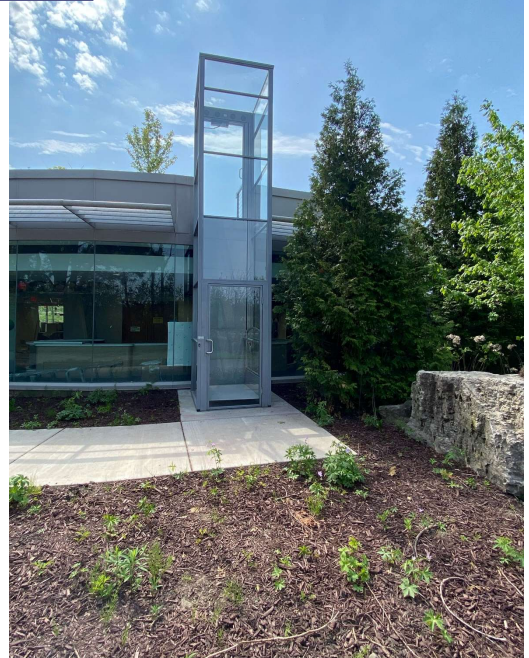
INTERNAL DECISIONS

Functional



Or functional and aesthetically pleasing?

Photo Credit: Upper photo Adobe Stock. Photo to the right: Ascension Lifts



INTEGRATION AND ACCESSIBLE CHOICES

Making Choices



- Start planning access features early in the process, preferably with schematics
- Improve internal processes to ensure responsibility is assigned for accessibility
- Develop marketing strategies

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HOW DO YOU PROTECT YOURSELF AND YOUR COMPANY FROM POTENTIAL LITIGATION?

From FEDERAL exposure ...

Ensure your entity has a federally
Required ADA Self-Evaluation and Transition Plan

Follow state or local procedures designed to document
conditions

Ensure any changes are approved by someone looking
out for access

Document, document, document

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WHATEVER YOUR PROCESS, IT SHOULD ...

01

Ensure you either have full compliance or a documented reason for noncompliance

02

Ensure you establish a good working relationship your access consultant

03

Ensure they have professional liability and a long-standing background in accessibility issues



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BOTTOM LINE

- ADA is not going away
- New cases are filed every day
- New decisions are made in the courts every day
- ALWAYS create a paper trail

Photo Credit: Adobe Stock

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QUESTIONS?

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