

ENVIRONMENTAL BARRIERS

Environmental barriers are conditions which make buildings, equipment or products inaccessible or not useable. A handicap occurs when obstacles are imposed on a person which puts him or her at a disadvantage.

Barrier – free environments will improve the usability of buildings for all people, those with and without physical disabilities, including people with shopping carts, students on skateboards, elderly, etc. More than 11% of the U.S. population has some degree of activity limitation. This means that 1 out of every 10 people is physically limited.

This is a barrier checklist. Is your school barrier-free? If your school does not do well on the checklist, don't be too surprised. Most buildings have barriers, and barriers can be changed.

EXAMPLE:

If the main entrance to the school has a ramp, it is "barrier-free". If it has stairs and no ramp, it has a barrier.

YES NO

- Are the door knobs of all main doors 3 feet from the ground so that people in wheelchairs can use them?
- Do the hallways have handrails to help people walk?
- Parking spaces. Are there parking spaces reserved for people with physical disabilities? Are they near the entrance? Are there 2 out of 100 parking spaces reserved for people with disabilities?
- Are there curb cuts so people in wheelchairs can pass?
- Are there tactile markings (can be felt by touch) cut in the sidewalk to warn people who are blind?
- Are the doorways to all bathrooms at least 33 inches wide?
- Are your sinks low enough? Get a chair, sit in it and see if you can reach the sink.
- Are the telephones accessible? Use the same test as you would for the sink. How many inches should they be lowered?
- Are the fire alarms low enough for people in wheelchairs?

- Are there grab bars in the bathroom stalls so that people can lift themselves from a wheelchair to a toilet and back again?
- Are the windows 24-28 inches from the floor?
- Are the aisles in the classroom at least 32 inches wide so people in wheelchairs or on crutches can get around?
- Are there flashing lights for fire alarms so deaf people will know if there is a fire?

Total Yes _____ Total No _____ Multiply Yes by 100 _____

Now that you have studied your school, you probably know some ways that it can be improved. What are the things that you think should be changed first? Are there some things that you and your friends could fix, like making signs for rooms, or a ramp for a short flight of stairs? Do you know of some buildings that would score better on the checklist? How do these buildings make it easier for disabled people?

Prepare a report of your findings and send a letter or go in person to the Superintendent or the Parent/Teacher Association (PTA) to share you findings and to seek change.

* Barnes, Berrigen & Biklen, What's the Difference?, Human Policy, 1978