



YESHIVA AND DAY SCHOOL BUILDING AND COMMUNICATION ACCESS: ACCESS MATTERS

Torah education is essential to the growth of the Torah-observant Jew and to the continuity of our people. Boys and girls as well as men and women with disabilities, like their peers, need access to *yeshivot* and day schools in order to acquire the skills they need in order to learn and pray and the information and knowledge they need in order to perform *mitzvot*. Unfortunately, there are *yeshivot* and day schools that still turn away school aged children with disabilities because they feel that they cannot accommodate them. Some of these children then attend public schools where Torah thought and behavior are often challenged and they have no natural access to a Torah observant peer group. This needs to change, for the good of the students, as well as for the good of our communities, and we all need to “think out of the box” to enable *everyone* to have access to Torah learning, from *cheder* through *smicha* or seminary.

This document addresses only yeshiva and day school building and communication infrastructure access. We cover general program access in a separate document in our “ACCESS MATTERS” series entitled, “Event and Program Access.” Other Jewish organizations have done much to develop strategies for adapting curricula to students with different learning, social, and behavioral capacities. Also, supports and equipment often can be acquired through your local board or department of education.

For yeshiva or day school building access, begin by consulting architects, contractors, carpenters and plumbers who are familiar with disability access codes. Their skills are needed and this is their day to shine! Don't forget to consult persons with various physical, vision, and hearing disabilities during *every phase of* evaluation and planning. By not doing so, you may make well-intended but inadequate, even wasteful, modifications.

Finance yeshiva or day school building and infrastructure accommodations by planning a fundraising strategy that involves everyone, young and old, rich and not-so-rich. Think about everything from bake sales, to special events, to capital campaigns that offer dedications in loving memory of a deceased relative. In addition, seek out community-based grants and low-interest loans. Celebrate each accomplishment.

Check for the following around and inside your existing building or in your design plan:

PATHS , ENTRANCES, AND PARKING (where applicable)

- Curb ramps to sidewalks are in place.
- Pathways are smooth and unobstructed and are at least 48” (inches) wide, with slopes of no more than 5 percent.
- At least one entrance is wheelchair accessible for men and women. Ideally, it is the main entrance where all arrive and greet each other.
- Signs direct people to wheelchair accessible entrance, if it's not the main entrance.
- Level resting space around entrance doors, 5 x 5 feet is provided.
- Accessible parking spaces are marked and are close to accessible entrances.

RAMPS AND STAIRS

- Ramps are 36" wide, minimum, extending one foot in length for every inch of rise, a 1:12 ratio. Thus, a ramp replacing an 8 inch step must extend 8 feet.
- Handrails are placed on at least one side of the ramp, 32" above the surface.
- Ramps have non-skid surfaces and are cleared from snow and protruding objects.
- Stair handrails on both sides are installed, 32" above the step, and extend a foot beyond the top and bottom of the stairs.
- Stairs have slip-resistant surfaces, i.e. rubber treads.
- A slightly raised abrasive strip is adhered to the top step of each stairway to warn people with limited sight where the stairs begin.

DOORS, DOORWAYS, AND INTERNAL PATHWAYS

- Door openings are 32" wide or more.
- Doorway colors contrast against the wall colors.
- No more than 5 pounds of pressure is needed to open doors.
- Doors can be opened with lever handles or with a push bar.
 - If not, the door will be kept open or a door assistant will be assigned.
- All pathways are slip resistant and free of protruding objects so that persons who use crutches, canes, and walkers do not fall.

CLASSROOMS, LUNCHROOMS, MEETING ROOMS, AND AUDITORIUMS

- All accessible rooms are on accessible, unobstructed pathways.
- Doors provide at least 32" clear width.
- There is at least one clear pathway (at least 36" wide) going through the room.
- Elevated areas in classrooms and the stage in the auditorium are wheelchair accessible.
- Height and angle suitable lecterns, tables, and hands-free microphones are available for *rabbeim*, teachers, and speakers with physical challenges.
- Scattered seating spaces are provided for wheelchair users who prefer to be seated in the main body of the classroom, lunchroom, or auditorium, not necessarily in the front or back of the auditorium or room, nor in the passageway aisles.
- There is adequate lighting for persons with low vision.
- An assistive listening system for people with hearing aids or cochlear implants is available and set up as needed.
- Hands free and adjustable microphones are available in very large rooms for *rabbeim*, teachers, and presenters.
- Seating near the presenter(s) is set up and designated for the sign language interpreters and participants who are deaf, hard of hearing, or have low-vision.
- If a class, program, or activity has been scheduled in a room that cannot be accessed by a wheelchair user or someone with limited mobility, it will be moved to an accessible location, as needed and as possible.
- For a webinar or teleconference, accommodations have been made for participants with hearing, vision, or speech disabilities.

BATHROOMS

- At least one bathroom for each gender is accessible to wheelchair users, ideally one on each floor. Unisex bathrooms are best for wheelchair users and their assistants. Two grab bars are installed, one adjacent to the commode and one behind the commode, to facilitate side transfer from a wheelchair.
- Floors are slip resistant and paths are unobstructed.
- Men or women can access a toilet stall that is 36" wide, with 48" of clearance from the closed bathroom stall door to the front edge of the toilet seat, 17" to 19" above floor, and a 32" door that swings out. Ideally, provide a 5ft x 5ft toilet stall with a 32" door that is placed off to the side and swings out.
- If major renovations are not possible at the moment, metal toilet stall dividers can be removed and an attractive washable curtain hung for full privacy for users.
- Toilet paper can easily be reached from the toilet seat by someone with minimal arm extension.
- A sink is placed with 29" of clearance from floor up to the bottom of the sink.
- Lever-type faucet controls and door handles are installed.
- Towel and soap dispensers are placed no higher than 48" from the floor.

WATER FOUNTAINS (if otherwise provided)

- A water fountain is mounted with a basin no more than 36" from the floor, making it easy to operate from a wheelchair. A bar in front is pressed for water.
- As an interim measure, a supply of paper cups may be mounted next to the water fountain, or a water cooler.

ELEVATORS AND LIFTS

- Elevators or platform lifts are installed for access to classrooms, meeting rooms, auditoriums, and accessible bathrooms that are located on higher or lower levels.
- Elevator or lift controls are reachable by a wheelchair user.
- Braille and raised number plaques are adhered to elevator or lift control panels.
- A handrail is installed on at least one side of the elevator, 30"-32" from the floor.

SIGNAGE, ALARMS, AND COMMUNICATION SYSTEMS

- The international symbol of accessibility identifies wheelchair accessible routes and bathroom facilities. Exits are clearly identified and are accessible.
- All permanent signage complies with Section 4.30 of the ADA Accessibility Guidelines (ADAAG), for people with various vision disabilities.
- Fire and emergency alarms have both audible and visible signals.

For further information, please contact Yad HaChazakah-JDEC; access@yadempowers.org; 646-723-3955. We will be happy to meet and begin access planning with representatives from your community, either in person or by web conferencing. www.yadempowers.org.