

POLL SITE ACCESSIBILITY REPORT 2008

Prepared by The Long Island Center for Independent Living, Inc.

INTRODUCTION

On November 4, 2008, the Long Island Center for Independent Living, Inc. (LICIL) conducted poll site accessibility surveys throughout Nassau County. 12 teams headed out into the community to assess accessibility at 36 polling stations during this General Election and encountered a wide variety of barriers, as well as some best practices worth noting. This exercise was part of an ongoing initiative to improve overall voter accessibility for Nassau County residents with disabilities.

We respectfully present the following document for use as a tool to help identify architectural, organizational and programmatic barriers to access that prevent or in some way limit the ability of persons with disabilities to participate fully and equally in the voting process. Furthermore, we remain confident that our presentation of findings and recommendations will result in meaningful and effective resolutions to these issues.

FINDINGS

BETHPAGE

Bethpage Fire Headquarters
225 Broadway

1. This polling site offers only street parking with no provision of disabled accessible parking. The necessity to park on the street in this busy downtown area presents both access and safety concerns.
2. Ramp at main entrance features a step at its base, rather than the required smooth-with-walkway surface. Additionally, the only alternative approach to the same ramp requires extremely tight maneuvering and presents the potential for a wheelchair to slip off the edge of the sidewalk.



CARLE PLACE

Carle Place Fire House
460 Broadway

1. Parking area designed to accommodate more than 20 cars offers no disabled accessible parking spaces.

EAST ATLANTIC BEACH

East Atlantic Beach Clubhouse
Troy Avenue

1. The only entrance to this site features a 3” threshold with no ramp
2. BMD was placed in a room separate from the voting area. BMD was situated in such a way that a person with a disability could not access it.

FARMINGDALE

Farmingdale High School
150 Lincoln Street

This site offers satisfactory accessibility features. However, a lack of effective voter signage was observed. Since disabled parking and the most direct accessible route to the voting area are located in the back of the building (set back from the street) it would be helpful to place general voter location signs, as well as signs indicating an accessible entrance at both the main entrance on Lincoln Street, as well as adjacent to Intervale Avenue.

W.E. Howitt Middle School
70 Van Cott Avenue

This site offers satisfactory minimum accessibility features.

GARDEN CITY

Garden City Village Hall
351 Stewart Avenue

1. Ramp/curb cut in parking lot has 1” lip. This must be flush with the ground.
2. Although the rear entrance is accessible, there is no signage to indicate that such an entrance exists and where it is located.



Stewart Avenue School
501 Stewart Avenue

1. General voter signage and signage to identify accessible entrances was missing.



St. Joseph's School
450 Franklin Avenue

1. The main entrance features a ramp without necessary handrails



2. The main entrance does not allow the necessary 5 feet of level area on the outside of the doorway.

GLEN COVE

Glen Cove Middle School
1 Forest Avenue

1. Parking adjacent to main (accessible) entrance is in a horseshoe, and therefore, extremely limited. Upright signage for disabled parking missing.
2. More ample accessible parking is in a lot closer to the secondary entrance. However, this accessible entrance leads to an inaccessible route (steps) to the voting area.
3. Although the secondary entrance is accessible, once inside, the only way to access the voting area is via several steps. There is no signage here to indicate that there is an accessible entrance at the front of the building which is directly accessible to the voting area.

Landing School
60 McLoughlin Street

This site offers satisfactory minimum accessibility features.

HEWLETT

Hewlett Elementary School
1570 Broadway

1. Designated disabled parking is located at the rear of the site, while the accessible entrance is at the front of the building. An accessible entrance must be in close proximity to disabled parking.
2. Lack of signage to indicate location of accessible entrance
3. Lack of general voter related signage

Franklin Early Childhood Center, 1150 Henrietta Place



1. The accessible pathway from the parking area was blocked by a chain.



2. Door handles at main entrance not in compliance. Door handles should be easy to use without requiring tight grasping or twisting of wrists to open.

George W. Hewlett High School
60 Everitt Avenue

1. Gymnasium area featured floor matting that would be difficult for a wheelchair user to navigate and could pose a trip-and-fall hazard to ambulatory persons with mobility impairments.

HICKSVILLE

Hicksville Middle School
215 Jerusalem Avenue

This site offers satisfactory accessibility features but lacked sufficient voting specific signage.

Dutch Lane School
50 Stewart Avenue

1. The secondary entrance does not feature a curb cut to gain access from nearest parking lot.
2. General voter signage in the interior was lacking.

Old Country Road Elementary School
49 Rhodes Lane

1. The main entrance has a ramp that is not readily visible.
A sign including the universal symbol of access and an arrow is necessary to direct visitors to the ramp.



2. Signage identifying location as a voting site and directing voters where to go was lacking.



LEVITTOWN

Division Avenue High School
120 Division Avenue

1. The accessible entrance closest to parking lot is at the rear of the building and can be reached only by maneuvering through parking lot traffic.
2. The rear entry door features an inaccessible door handle that people with disabilities would have difficulty using independently. [No one was posted at this doorway to provide assistance.]
3. Although the main (front) entrance is accessible, the closest parking option is on-the-street only. Those wishing to access the front entrance from the parking lot must navigate in path of vehicle travel.

Gardiners Avenue School
610 Gardiners Avenue

1. Rear entrance door handle inaccessible. Since this entrance is closest to both a parking area and the voting assembly area, this door should meet accessibility standards.
2. Insufficient clear signage to direct voters to voting area

Wisdom Lane School
120 Center Lane

1. Curb cut at main entrance has a 1.5" lip. Should be flush with roadway.

Jonas Salk School
3359 Old Jerusalem Road

1. The only accessible pathway from parking to the single accessible (main) entrance is long and requires travel in the path of automobiles.
2. Lack of signage to identify as a voting place

LONG BEACH

East End School
456 Neptune Blvd

Poll watchers at this site are to be commended for their efforts to create and post handmade signs pointing visitors to the accessible ramp as well as signs identifying the voting area.

Long Beach City Hall
1 West Chester Street

1. The main entry features a steep ramp with a slope of greater than 1:12.
2. Main entry doors are heavy and cannot be easily opened by a wheelchair user or a person with a mobility impairment.
3. Restrooms on second floor are inaccessible with a doorway of 25" wide, rather than the required minimum width of 32".

Long Beach Housing Authority
225 Park Avenue West

1. Lack of signage to identify as polling site

Temple Emanuel
455 Neptune Boulevard

1. Main entry doors were propped open in such a way that the door was blocking part of the required clear space, making it difficult for a wheelchair user to navigate.
2. Voting area was difficult to navigate due to small space.
3. BMD was located in a secondary room that was impossible to navigate.
4. BMD was placed in a corner, making it impossible to access. When asked, poll watchers said they "would move it if someone needed to use it"

West School
91 Maryland Avenue

1. Main entrance doors are too heavy for a person with any disability to access without assistance. No one was posted there to provide help when needed.
2. The secondary entrance was blocked by a garbage dumpster, thereby preventing access.

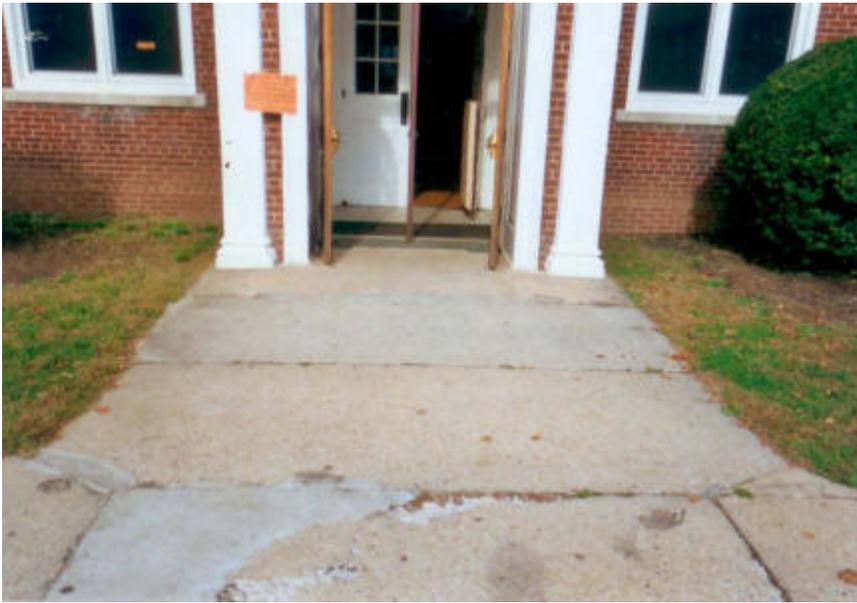


NORTH MERRICK

Camp Avenue School
1712 Camp Avenue



1. Inaccessible entrance featured two conflicting signs about the location of an alternative. A permanent sign pointed to the right, while a temporary hand-written sign pointed to the left.



2. The “accessible” entrance features a small step that would prove difficult for persons with disabilities to navigate.

3. Walkways leading to and around the site were dangerously uneven and cracked, posing a safety hazard to people with disabilities as well as to the general public.

Harold D. Fayette School
1057 Merrick Avenue

1. Main entrance inaccessible with no signage to indicate location of an accessible alternative.
2. Ground level entrance (“accessible”) at rear of building was closed and locked.

Old Mill Road School
1775 Old Mill Road

1. Designated disabled parking did not feature required upright signage.
2. Main entrance closest to voting area (gymnasium) not identified as voting site.
3. Secondary entrance (located at a fair distance from voting area) did not indicate location of alternate entrance adjacent to voting.
4. No interior signs to direct voters

PLAINVIEW



Jamaica Avenue School
85 Jamaica Avenue

1. The main entrance offers ample parking with designated disabled spaces. However, the pathway from parking to the accessible entrance was not level and therefore hazardous to persons with disabilities.
2. Inaccessible door hardware that requires twisting, turning or grasping.

POINT LOOKOUT

Ye Olde Fire House
102 Lido Boulevard

1. Although this site offers ample space in the area used for voting, the BMD was situated so that there was no voter privacy.

WANTAGH

Forest Lake School
3100 Beltagh Avenue

1. Although the front parking lot offers approximately ten parking spaces, no disabled parking is designated. Since ADA standards require one disabled parking space for every 25 spaces, a parking lot this size should feature at least one disabled designated parking space.

Wantagh School
1765 Beech Street

This site met all minimum accessibility requirements.

Wantagh High School
3297 Belagh Avenue

1. The main parking lot consists of approximately 60 spaces and offers one designated parking space. Since ADA standards require one disabled parking space for every 25 spaces, a parking lot this size should feature at least two disabled designated parking spaces.

2. Door handles at main entrance not in compliance. Door handles should be easy to use without requiring tight grasping or twisting of wrists to open.

WOODMERE

Woodmere Fire Department
20 Irving Place

1. Door handle at main entrance not in compliance. Door handles should be easy to use without requiring tight grasping or twisting of wrists to open.

ACCESSIBLE VOTING MACHINE ISSUES

This election marked the first time that each polling site across Nassau County was equipped with one accessible voting system designed for use by all voters and complete with features designed to make them independently useable by voters with disabilities. Unfortunately, our canvassing of polling places revealed several problems concerning these machines that in some way prevented or otherwise interfered with their use by the public, both non-disabled and disabled. The issues encountered were as follows:

I. Placement of machines in such a way that they were not readily visible to the public:

The majority of polling places observed had accessible voting systems placed in corners, against walls, or in other ways that rendered them unrecognizable as voting machines available for use by the public.

II. Absence of any signs or other indicators to identify the machines as an available voting option:

All polling sites observed were set up in such a way that accessible voting systems were their “best kept secret”. Voters and other observers reported that they had no idea what the machine was, and in fact, would not have noticed it if it was not specifically pointed out to them. One citizen commented, “I thought it was a Xerox machine.”

III. Discouragement of use of machines

In the overwhelming majority of cases, poll site observers and voters with disabilities were not invited to use the ImageCast voting system, nor were they informed that there was an accessible option available for their use. Instead, individuals had to ask to use the system and were told by poll watchers that it would take anywhere from 20 to 40 minutes to vote using ImageCast.

Although it is understood that the current technology behind use of the audio option can increase voting time, this possible timeframe should not be used as a way to promote use of the inaccessible lever machines. Furthermore, only a portion of voters with disabilities require the audio option. The flexibility of the accessibility technology allows for others to vote using a host of other features that do not necessarily extend the time to cast a ballot.

These practices served to significantly discourage voters from using the accessible voting system, thereby reducing the overall numbers reported for statistical purposes, and more importantly, defeating the purpose of the voting machines – to increase accessibility to the vote for persons across the disability spectrum.

IV. Inability of poll watchers to set up and provide accurate usage information pertaining to machines

In part, this tendency to downplay the availability of accessible voting machines may stem from a lack of confidence on the part of poll watchers regarding their ability to manage, set-up, use and respond to voter questions involving the machines.

The four items cited above directly contributed to the inability of voters with disabilities to access the voting machines and has resulted in a serious misconception now being perpetuated in the media. On Monday, November 17, 2008, Newsday’s Rick Brand wrote “Elections officials in Nassau and Suffolk say only 130 disabled voters used 747 new handicapped-accessible voting machines, costing \$8.8 million.” Clearly, failure on the part of the Board of Elections to make the machines visible and available to the public, coupled with the calculated effort to discourage their use by instructing poll watchers to emphasize (inaccurate) time constraints, and poor poll worker training, led to the results reported in Newsday. However, the unfortunate implication is that people with disabilities simply chose not to use the machines, thereby wasting taxpayer dollars. That notion must be identified for what it is – patently false. As our results demonstrate,

people with disabilities were at the polls on November 4, 2008 with the intention of casting their ballots. But as a result of circumstances that could only be controlled or mitigated by the Board of Elections, they were prevented from doing so with the technology purchased by County taxpayers – many of whom are, in fact, citizens with disabilities.

SUMMARY & RECOMMENDATIONS

The most recurrent trends identified:

- Lack of signage or poor placement of signs to identify accessible entrances and alternate accessible entrances
- Lack of signage to identify sites as voting places
- Inaccessible or segregated placement of ImageCast voting machines
- Insufficient poll worker training -- leading to poll workers' fear, lack of confidence and inability to set up and facilitate use of ImageCast voting machines
- Provision of misinformation to voters wishing to use the ImageCast voting machine, particularly in terms of time period necessary for casting ballots on the machines

In the interest of promoting discussion and action on the issues raised herein, we recommend that the following areas be considered in conjunction with the correction of architectural barriers noted:

- Closer inspection of poll sites prior to elections in order to assess signage to identify accessible entrances, alternate accessible entrances, ramps, Etc. If locations do not provide permanent indicators and cannot be brought up to specifications before an election, temporary signage should be provided.
- Improved poll watcher training that specifically addresses disability issues and provides for direct hands on use of voting technology by each poll watcher.
- Provision of detailed information on voting technology posted on Board of Elections website and in pre-election advertising
- Careful placement of voting machines that promotes their availability, allows for comfortable physical access and voter privacy and provides the opportunity to cast a ballot within the mainstream of the voting public.
- Development of a more systematic approach to posting voting place identification signage. Signs directing voters to polling places must be visible at a distance and posted in such a way that they are secure and offer clear information to the public.

CONCLUSION

The various obstructions to the vote faced by people with disabilities, as identified over the course of this research, indicate that the issues around providing for equal access to the vote for Nassau County residents with disabilities are, for the most-part, basic, and can be resolved with creative thinking and cooperation among the Nassau County Board of Elections, voting site officials, and people with disabilities and the organizations that advocate with them. The Long

Island Center for Independent Living, Inc. (LICIL) welcomes the opportunity to provide continued input for the development of strategies and solutions that result in seamless access to the vote for persons with disabilities.