

ANIMALS SUPPORTING INCLUSIVE EDUCATION

Background

Animals supporting the learning of students are situationally important in supporting the Division's vision for inclusive education. In some cases, their use is essential in assuring that students have the same opportunities to learn as all other students. Animals dedicated to supporting the learning goals of students will be allowed in schools or on Division property when professional assessments have determined that such a program support will optimize student learning. Animals who are selected for this purpose will have been deemed to be optimal in achieving the goal of serving specific learning needs. At all times, decisions regarding the scope of animal support for educational programs must be balanced against the impact that animals have on the educational environment, and the health and safety of the school community.

Definitions

Service Animal:

This animal is most commonly determined to be a dog trained as a guide for a disabled person and having the qualifications prescribed by a regulatory framework (*Service Dogs Act* of Alberta, 2009). For the purposes of this administrative procedure, the service animal definition will include animals that have been trained by a recognized program such as Canine Vision Dog Guides, Special Skills Dog Guides, Hearing Ear Dog Guides, Seizure Response Dog Guides, and Autism Assistance Dog Guides. Service animals are deemed to be essential in assuring the rights of students with disabilities and human rights afforded to all students. Evolving practice suggests that based upon a student's specific medical and cultural need, a service animal could be recommended that is not a dog (ie. Miniature horse).

Therapy Dogs:

Therapy Dogs provide educational supports for students by serving as a resource to support psychological or physiological needs. Provisions that apply to protecting people with disabilities and their service animals do not apply to Therapy Dogs and their handlers. Although Therapy Dogs are specially evaluated, trained, and registered for their volunteer work, they do not undergo the same extensive specialized and unique training required of Service Animals.

Procedures

1. Service Animal

- 1.1 Parents / guardians of students requesting the support and assistance of a service animal while at school shall:
 - 1.1.1 provide a letter outlining the benefits of having the service animal attend with their child, descriptions of the animal's activities, and the duration of the support. Parents need to complete the Request for a Certified Service Animal form (Appendix A) or [F-202](#) and attach it to the letter;
 - 1.1.2 provide a letter from a physician confirming the diagnosis, recommendation and confirmation that the student's need for the use of a Service Animal in school is essential and directly related to the learning needs of the student;
 - 1.1.3 provide a copy of the Service Animal Team Identification Card issued by the Government of Alberta. All financial costs to obtain this card are the sole responsibility of the family. Parents can apply to servicedogs@gov.ab.ca for a service dog license;
 - 1.1.4 provide up-to-date proof of vaccinations, licensing, adequate insurance and ensure the animal is in good health;
 - 1.1.5 work with the school administrator to provide for the responsibility of care of the Service Animal. This includes the need for "bio-breaks", disposal of waste, provision of food and water;
 - 1.1.6 work with the school administrator to schedule training for the student's school team and bus driver(s) by the Service Animal organization and to educate the student body in the school and those on the bus on the role of the Service Animal and on the rules of conduct concerning the animal. This process will be ongoing as staff changes, grade changes, and other circumstances warrant it;
 - 1.1.7 provide the school with signage (generally provided by the Service Animal organization) alerting visitors/emergency service providers to the Service Animal's presence;
 - 1.1.8 indicate who will accompany and handle the service dog both inside and outside the school and what arrangements have been made with regard to alternate handlers when necessary;
 - 1.1.9 pay for any financial implications regarding the training, use and care of the Service Animal.
- 1.2 When a Principal receives a written request for permission to have a Service Animal accompany a student to school, the administrator will:

- 1.2.1 inform the Director – Early Childhood Education & Learning Support Services of the request;
- 1.2.2 arrange a case conference involving: parents, teacher(s), classroom assistants, transportation staff (if appropriate), administration from feeder schools (if appropriate), a representative of the Service Animal organization (if appropriate), and appropriate inclusive learning personnel to:
 - 1.2.2.1 review the purpose and function of the Service Animal in relation to successful learning and/or safety for the student;
 - 1.2.2.2 discuss the notification and involvement of school staff;
 - 1.2.2.3 clarify all responsibilities of the family, school, and division;
 - 1.2.2.4 discuss transportation of the student and Service Animal, if appropriate;
 - 1.2.2.5 discuss other concerns including interference with delivery of an educational program, possible changes to in-class routines and procedures, increased demands on staff, other children and staff who are allergic to animals, and recognition of children with fear of animals.
- 1.3 Development of a comprehensive transition plan for the introduction of the animal which may involve the use of social stories, visits by the animal to the school/classroom and may also include:
 - 1.3.1 informing school staff, School Council representatives, and parents of the potential arrival of a Service Animal to the school;
 - 1.3.2 sending a specific letter home to the parents of students who will be in any of the classes where the animal will possibly be present in case of allergies, anxieties, or other concerns;
 - 1.3.3 working with appropriate personnel to revise emergency and safety procedures, as required, to include the Service Animal.
- 1.4 The approval of the Service Animal into the learning environment shall be determined by the principal based on information gathered through the processes above, as well as a review of submitted documentation pertaining to the:
 - 1.4.1 student's educational needs;
 - 1.4.2 fulfillment of family responsibilities;
 - 1.4.3 fulfillment of school and Division responsibilities to all stakeholders, including liability; and

- 1.4.4 eligibility for transportation, the Human Rights Code and the Blind Person's Rights Act establish the right for an authorized Service Animal to be allowed to accompany them on the bus.
- 1.5 At the end of each year, the student's learning team shall review the student's program needs related to the service animal. This includes the school's input with regard to monitoring the service animal's capacity to provide the targeted service. Decisions regarding the appropriate use of the Service Animal, program planning, and training need to be considered. If the Service Animal is deemed essential, comprehensive transition planning for future teachers, staff, students, transportation providers, and the wider community needs to occur.
- 1.6 A copy of all Service Animal request documentation shall be placed in the student record.
- 1.7 The principal shall inform school staff, School Council representatives, and parents of the arrival of a service animal to the school(s), including feeder schools as required.
- 1.8 A transition plan for introduction of the animal shall be created which may involve the use of social stories, visits by the animal to the school / classroom, etc. An assembly may be arranged for the student body involving representatives from the Service Animal Association, the parent and possibly the handler to explain the role of the service animal.
- 1.9 An appropriate emergency exit plan shall be put into place and the fire department shall be alerted as to the existence of an animal in the school.
- 1.10 A sign (generally provided by the service animal organization) shall be placed on the doors of the school alerting visitors / emergency service providers to the animal's presence.) The Service Animal Provider shall provide training to the student's school team (principal, teacher, teacher assistance, etc.).
2. Therapy Dog
- 2.1 Anyone wishing to use a Therapy Dog to support programming goals in a school shall provide a letter outlining the benefits of having the Therapy Dog work with the children, descriptions of the Therapy Dog's activities, and the duration of the support. Parents need to complete the request for a Service Animal / Therapy Dog Form (see Appendix A for example of the form [F-202](#)) and attach it to the letter.

- 2.2 Additionally, those wishing to use a Therapy Dog to support children's programs shall:
 - 2.2.1 provide documentation indicating who the handler is, certification of authenticity, and that the Therapy Dog is in good health (retired certified service animals may qualify as therapy animals). There are a number of different certifying agencies for this purpose including but not limited to St. John's Ambulance and the Pet Therapy Society of Northern Alberta. All financial costs to obtain this certification are the sole responsibility of the trainer/handler;
 - 2.2.2 provide up-to-date proof of vaccinations, and ensure the Therapy Dog is in good health;
 - 2.2.3 provide for the responsibility of care of the Therapy Dog including the need for "biobreaks," disposal of waste and provision of food and water;
 - 2.2.4 provide the school with signage (generally provided by the Therapy Dog organization) alerting visitors / emergency service providers to the Therapy Dog's presence;
 - 2.2.5 indicate who will accompany and handle the therapy dog both inside and outside the school and what arrangements have been made with regard to alternate handlers when necessary;
 - 2.2.6 pay for any financial implications regarding the training use, and care of the Therapy Dog; and
 - 2.2.7 ensure the Therapy Dog has appropriate controls in place (leashed, caged, or harnessed) while on school property.

- 2.3 When an administrator receives a written request for permission to have a therapy dog brought to the school, the principal shall:
 - 2.3.1 arrange a meeting involving staff to discuss:
 - 2.3.1.1 notification and involvement of school staff;
 - 2.3.1.2 the purpose and function of the Therapy Dog in relation to optimizing student learning / and or safety for the student;
 - 2.3.1.3 other concerns including interference with delivery of an educational program, possible changes to in-class routines and procedures, increased demands on staff, other children and staff who are allergic to the therapy dog, recognition of children with fear of Therapy Dogs, and cultural sensitivities of those who will not share space with a specific animal;
 - 2.3.2 inform school community of the potential arrival of an Therapy Dog to the school using the Sample Letter to the School Community re: Service / Therapy Dog in School (Appendix B);

- 2.3.3 send a specific letter home to the parents of students who will be in any of the classes where the Therapy Dog will possibly be present in case of allergies, anxieties or other concerns. Should a conflict arise, priority will be given to the health and safety of the school community and the Therapy Dog will be excluded from that area, and
 - 2.3.4 work with appropriate personnel to revise emergency and safety procedures, as required, to include the therapy animal.
- 2.4 Upon completion of the above (2.3.1 – 2.3.4), the Principal will determine whether or not to approve of the plan, and if approved, forward all relevant information to the Assistant Superintendent, Learning Services.

General

1. The School Division may limit, remove or exclude from school facilities or property any Service Animal, Therapy Dog or other animal if it poses a direct threat to the health or safety of the school community, causes a significant disruption of school activities or otherwise jeopardizes the safe operation of the school or a school event. Examples of such include, but are not limited to: The Service Animal or Therapy Dog or other animal:
 - 1.1 urinates or defecates in inappropriate locations;
 - 1.2 annoys any member of the student body or school personnel;
 - 1.3 vocalizes unnecessarily, (i.e., barking, growling or whining);
 - 1.4 shows aggression towards people or other animals;
 - 1.5 solicits or steals food or other items from the student body or school personnel;
 - 1.6 is unable to perform reliably the service for which it has been approved;
 - 1.7 is not under the full control of the student with the disability or the designated handler;
 - 1.8 is a public health threat as a result of being infested with parasites or having a communicable disease of the skin, mouth or eyes; ix) is unclean and unsanitary.
2. Trainer/handlers of any Service Animal or Therapy Dog are expected to carry a minimum of \$2,000,0000 general liability insurance or proof of equivalent insurance through the organization the handler and Service Animal / therapy dog are representing.

Implemented: March 16, 2018

REQUEST FOR CERTIFIED SERVICE ANIMAL / THERAPY DOG

STUDENT INFORMATION

Current Student Mailing Address

Student's Last Name:

Student's Date of Birth:

Street Address:

City/Town:

Prov:

PC:

School:

Parent/Guardian Contact Information

Parent/Guardian Name(s):

Home phone:

Cell phone:

Please answer the following questions.

1. Reason for a Certified Service Animal / Therapy Dog:

2. Length of Time the student and Certified Animal / Therapy Dog have worked together:

3. I / We understand that it is our responsibility to:

- 3.1. Provide the principal with all required documentation, reports, and certificates in a timely manner including:
 - 3.1.1. physician letter confirming need for a Service Animal / Therapy Dog;
 - 3.1.2. copy of Service Animal Team Identification Card;
 - 3.1.3. up-to-date proof of vaccinations, licensing and insurance;
 - 3.1.4. proof of adequate insurance;
 - 3.1.5. work with the school administrator to train school staff, bus driver(s) and students.
- 3.2. Assume financial responsibility for the Certified Service Animal's training, veterinary care, city license and other related costs;
- 3.3. Participate in a school case conference to inform the principal of all relevant information that

- may affect our child, other students, staff, and/or visitors to the school;
- 3.4. Assist the principal to communicate relevant information to the school community;
 - 3.5. Work cooperatively with the school staff to ensure the accommodation of the Service Animal is successful;
 - 3.6. Work with the Student Transportation department to ensure successful transportation of your child and the Service Animal to school every day;
 - 3.7. Provide the required equipment and animal care items;
 - 3.8. Provide food, water and bio-breaks to the Service Animal as required and;
 - 3.9. Remove and dispose of animal waste in a safe and environmentally friendly manner.
4. I / We understand that if the Certified Service Animal / Therapy Dog exhibits any unprovoked behaviours (i.e. growling, scratching, nipping, biting, etc.) at school it will be removed until the plan is re-evaluated to ensure the safety of staff, students, and visitors.
 5. I / We give permission for this information to be shared with the school community and agree to the notification of students and their families through letters.
 6. I / We understand that the principal shall preserve the confidentiality of all information received and shall not disclose the information except as provided for in the *Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act*, the *Education Act* or as otherwise required by law. The principal shall use and disclose information with Board personnel as may be required for the performance of their duties including sharing information concerning the Service Animal / therapy dog with the school community.
 7. I / We acknowledge having received and read Administrative Procedure 202, Animals Supporting Inclusive Education.

Signature of Parent/ Legal Guardian	Date

FOR OFFICE USE ONLY:

Request for Certified Service Animal / Therapy Dog

Approved:

Denied:

Signature of Principal:	Date

SERVICE DOG / THERAPY DOG SAMPLE LETTER TO THE SCHOOL COMMUNITY

Date

Dear Parents/Guardians,

This letter is to inform you that there will be a Service Dog in our school assisting one of our students. This dog is a trained companion for the student and is able to assist him/her in many of the daily routines while learning at school.

This certified Service Dog is highly trained and recognized by an accredited Canadian training facility. The student's right to have certified Service Dog is protected under Human Rights legislation and the *Education Act* and therefore can be with the handler in all aspects of his/her education.

There will be an information assembly at the school to help students identify with the Service Dog and how it will fit into daily school routines. All students will be informed as to proper procedures around the dog because the dog is not a pet but a certified working service animal while at school.

We anticipate the Service Dog to be a benefit to the student's learning and we look forward to this new addition to our school community.

Thank you for your understanding and support. Should you have any questions or concerns, please contact the school office.

Sincerely,

Principal