

ANIMALS SUPPORTING INCLUSION

Background

High Prairie School Division (HPSD) supports the use of Service Animals deemed necessary as an aid to individuals. The most common animal utilized is a dog.

Service dogs, under the *Alberta Service Dogs Act*, are working animals granted full public access in Alberta. These trained dogs are assigned to address specific needs of individuals with mobility, safety, and independence issues. Generally, these dogs are identified by a Special Skills Dog harness and lease or saddlebag vest.

Therapy animals, most commonly dogs, provide educational supports for individuals by serving as a resource to support psychological or physiological needs.

Definitions

Service Animal - This animal is most commonly a dog. For the purposes of this administrative procedure, the service animal will include animals 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 and staff with disabilities and human rights afforded to all persons.

Service Dog - A dog that has been trained by an Assistance Dogs International accredited school and that carries a Government of Alberta identification card as proof of qualification. This dog is trained as a guide for a person with a disability and meets the qualifications prescribed by a regulatory framework (Service Dogs Act of Alberta, 2009). The service dog must meet the requirements of the Alberta Training Standard. A list of approved service dog organizations can be found at <https://www.alberta.ca/approved-service-dog-organizations.aspx>

Therapy Animal - Provisions that apply to protecting people with disabilities and their Service Dogs 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 Dogs.

Handler – The person who manages the therapy animal and who has been evaluated and certified with the therapy animal to provide animal assisted intervention.

Procedures

1. Service Dog/Animal for a Student

- 1.1. Parents/guardians requesting the support and assistance of a service dog (or service animal) for their child while at school shall:
 - 1.1.1. provide a letter outlining the benefits of having the service dog attend with their child, descriptions of the dog's activities, and the duration of the support;
 - 1.1.1.1. Parents need to complete Form 109A - Request for Inclusion of a Certified Service Dog/Therapy Animal for Student 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 Dog in school is essential and directly related to the learning needs of the student;
 - 1.1.3. provide a copy of the Service Dog Identification Card issued by the Government of Alberta. Any financial costs to obtain this card are the sole responsibility of the family.
 - 1.1.4. provide up-to-date proof of vaccinations, licensing, insurance and ensure the dog is in good health;
 - 1.1.5. work with the school administrator to provide for the responsibility of care of the Service Dog. 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), to educate the student body in the school and those on the bus on the role of the Service Dog and on the rules of conduct concerning the dog. 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 Dog organization) alerting visitors and emergency service providers to the presence of a Service Dog;
- 1.1.8. indicate who will accompany and handle the Service Dog both inside and outside the school and what arrangements have been made regarding alternate handlers when necessary; and
- 1.1.9. pay for any financial implications regarding the training, use and care of the Service Dog.
- 1.2. When a Principal receives a written request for permission to have a Service Dog accompany a student to school, the administrator will:
 - 1.2.1. consult with the Director of Business; and
 - 1.2.2. arrange a case conference involving parents, teacher(s), educational assistants, transportation staff (if appropriate), a representative of the Service Dog organization, and appropriate inclusive learning personnel to discuss the following:
 - 1.2.2.1. Notification and involvement of school staff;
 - 1.2.2.2. Review the purpose and function of the Service Dog in relation to successful learning and/or safety for the student;
 - 1.2.2.3. Notification and involvement of school staff;
 - 1.2.2.4. Clarification of all responsibilities of the family, school, and HPSD;
 - 1.2.2.5. Transportation of the student and Service Dog, if appropriate; and
 - 1.2.2.6. Other concerns including interference with delivery of an educational program, possible changes to in-class routines and procedures, increased demands on staff, other students and staff who are allergic to dogs, and recognition of children with fear of dogs.
- 1.3. Development of a comprehensive transition plan for the introduction of the dog may involve the use of social stories, visits by the Service Dog 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 Dog 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 dog will possibly be present in case of allergies, anxieties, or other concerns; and/or
 - 1.3.3. working with appropriate personnel to revise emergency and safety procedures, as required, to include the Service Dog.
- 1.4. The approval of the Service Dog 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 HPSD 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 Dog 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 Dog. This includes the school's input regarding monitoring the service's capacity to provide the targeted service. Decisions regarding the appropriate use of the Service Dog, program planning, and training need to be considered. If the Service Dog 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 documentation related to the request for a Service Dog 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 Dog to the school(s), including feeder schools as required.

- 1.8. A transition plan for introduction of the dog shall be created which may involve the use of social stories, visits by the dog to the school/classroom, etc. An assembly may be arranged for the student body involving representatives from the Service Dog Association, the parent and possibly the handler to explain the role of the service animal. The Service Dog Provider shall provide training to the student's school team (principal, teacher, teacher assistant, etc.).
- 1.9. An appropriate emergency exit plan shall be put into place and the fire department shall be alerted as to the existence of a Service Dog in the school.
- 1.10. A sign (generally provided by the service dog organization) shall be placed on the doors of the school alerting visitors/emergency service providers to the dog's presence.

2. Service Dog for Staff Member

2.1. The staff member shall:

- 2.1.1. provide a written request to the principal for the use of a Service Dog within the school setting. This letter should be supplied to the school as early as possible to allow for sufficient planning and transition of the Service Dog into the school setting;
 - 2.1.1.1. The staff member needs to complete Form 109B - Request for Inclusion of a Certified Service Dog/Therapy Animal for Staff and attach it to the letter.
- 2.1.2. provide a letter from a physician or psychologist confirming the diagnosis of a recognized special need and including a recommendation for the use of a Service Dog;
- 2.1.3. ensure that the Service Dog meets the qualification requirements under the Alberta Service Dogs Qualifications Regulations which reads as follows:
A dog that has qualifications resulting from the successful completion of a training program delivered by a school or institution approved by Assistance Dogs international, Inc., or has passes a challenge test established or approved by the Minister, has the qualifications of a service dog for the purposes of the Act.
- 2.1.4. provide a copy of the Service Dog Identification Card from the Government of Alberta;
- 2.1.5. provide detailed information and contact information from the agency training and supplying the Service Dog;
- 2.1.6. work collaboratively with the principal, division and school staff to ensure successful integration and on-going support for the Service Dog;
- 2.1.7. assume all financial obligations regarding the use and care of the Service Dog; and
- 2.1.8. annually provide the school with proof of up-to-date vaccinations, licensing, insurance and liability coverage (minimum \$2, 000, 000).

2.2. The Principal shall:

- 2.2.1. provide a copy of this Administrative Procedure to the staff member;
- 2.2.2. inform the Director of Business that a written request has been made for Service Dog admittance to the school;
- 2.2.3. ensure that the use of a Service Dog is consistent with the needs or recommendations for the staff member;
- 2.2.4. consult with the Director of Business prior to arranging a conference with the staff member;
- 2.2.5. meet with the staff member to review the requirements in this Administrative Procedure and the potential transition requirements, including reasonable timelines, of the Service Dog entry into the school setting that ensures a welcoming, caring, respectful and safe learning environment for all students and staff;
- 2.2.6. conduct a meeting with the staff member to review the provision of a Service Dog, and to develop a written plan to determine:
 - 2.2.6.1. The purpose and function of the Service Dog.
 - 2.2.6.2. Personal care and physical needs of the Service Dog, including but not limited to:
 - 2.2.6.2.1. The safest and most environmentally sound place for the Service Dog to relieve itself, with considerations for seasonal changes and inclement weather;
 - 2.2.6.2.2. Provision of a suitable container for waste that the staff member can access and removal and disposal of animal waste; and

- 2.2.6.2.3. Considerations and routines necessary for reducing allergens and dander;
- 2.2.6.3. Classroom considerations such as seating arrangements, changes to class placements, changes in routine and procedures, and program changes;
- 2.2.6.4. Arrangements for the Service Dog to visit the school without students present to familiarize it with the school site;
- 2.2.6.5. A transition plan for the Service Dog and the staff member to be introduced to the school and classroom(s); and
- 2.2.6.6. Rules of conduct around the Service Dog for students, staff, and the public, and methods of disseminating and regulating such rules.
- 2.2.7. communicate in writing to members of the school community that a working Service Dog will be entering the school setting to elicit information regarding possible issues such as allergies or phobias from students, staff members and parents/guardians. This communication will be sent early in the process to determine any alternate arrangements that may be necessary to reasonably accommodate students or staff members;
- 2.2.8. consult with staff, school council and community prior to the Service Dog arriving at school; and
- 2.2.9. liaise with stakeholders to resolve specific concerns or issues that may arise regarding the presence of a Service Dog in the school.

3. Implementation Procedures and Transition Plan

- 3.1. The Principal and staff member will work collaboratively to create a transition plan to assist in the integration of the Service Dog into the school environment. The transition plan will:
 - 3.1.1. include the provisions discussed in step 2.2.6 above;
 - 3.1.2. ensure the staff member is informed that the provision of a Service Dog and any objects/care it requires is the financial responsibility of the staff member;
 - 3.1.3. arrange for the staff member to train and instruct the school staff and students on the proper procedures regarding the Service Dog;
 - 3.1.4. establish any necessary changes to routine, procedures or programming needs are made prior to the Service Dog's entry. Taking into consideration:
 - 3.1.4.1. Potential re-structuring and preparation of the school environment and classroom(s) to ensure all students can safely function and learn in the presence of the Service Dog, and
 - 3.1.4.2. Severe allergies and/or phobias.
 - 3.1.5. establish rules of conduct around the Service Dog for students, staff, and the public;
 - 3.1.6. revise emergency procedures as required to include the Service Dog, such as: evacuations, lockdowns, fire drills, and notification of the fire department regarding the existence of the Service Dog;
 - 3.1.7. notify the Transportation Department, as required, to advise the drivers and any students who may be sharing transportation where the Service Dog will be present;
 - 3.1.8. arrange for an assembly or meeting of all students in the school, to provide education, awareness and information about the Service Dog and its role prior to the Service Dog's arrival. Once the Service Dog has arrived, arrange for a "Welcome Assembly or meeting" to introduce the Service Dog to the school community; and
 - 3.1.9. arrange for signage alerting school visitors to the Service Dog's presence to be placed in a visible location on the doors to the school.

4. Request to use a Therapy Dog

- 4.1. Individuals 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.
 - 4.1.1. Parents need to complete Form 109A - Request for Inclusion of a Certified Service Dog/Therapy Animal for Students and attach it to the letter.
 - 4.1.2. Staff need to complete Form 109B - Request for Inclusion of a Certified Service Dog/Therapy Animal for Staff and attach it to the letter.

- 4.2. Additionally, those wishing to use a Therapy Dog shall:
 - 4.2.1. provide documentation indicating who the handler is and certification of authenticity that can be obtained through organizations such as (but not limited to) St John's Ambulance and the Pet Therapy Society of Northern Alberta;
 - 4.2.1.1. All financial costs to obtain certification are the sole responsibility of the trainer/handler.
 - 4.2.2. provide up-to-date proof of vaccinations and ensure the Therapy Dog is in good health;
 - 4.2.3. provide for the responsibility of care of the Therapy Dog including the need for "bio-breaks," disposal of waste and provision of food and water;
 - 4.2.4. provide the school with signage (generally provided by the Therapy Dog organization) alerting visitors / emergency service providers to the Therapy Dog's presence;
 - 4.2.5. indicate who will accompany and handle the Therapy Dog both inside and outside the school and what arrangements have been made regarding alternate handlers when necessary;
 - 4.2.6. pay for any financial implications regarding the training use, and care of the Therapy Dog; and
 - 4.2.7. ensure the Therapy Dog has appropriate controls in place (leashed, caged, or harnessed) while on school property.
- 4.3. When an administrator receives a written request for permission to have a Therapy Dog brought to the school, the principal shall:
 - 4.3.1. arrange a meeting involving staff to discuss:
 - 4.3.1.1. Notification and involvement of school staff;
 - 4.3.1.2. The purpose and function of the Therapy Dog in relation to optimizing student learning and/or safety for the student;
 - 4.3.1.3. 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 dogs, recognition of children with fear of dogs, and cultural sensitivities of those who will not share space with a specific animal.
 - 4.3.2. inform the school community of the potential arrival of a Therapy Dog to the school using the sample letter to the school community in Form 109C - Information to Parents Regarding Service Dog/Therapy Dog;
 - 4.3.3. 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
 - 4.3.4. work with appropriate personnel to revise emergency and safety procedures, as required, to include the Therapy Dog.
- 4.4. Upon completion of the above (4.3.1 - 4.3.4), the principal will determine whether or not to approve the plan, and if approved, forward all relevant information to the Superintendent.

5. General

- 5.1. The school may limit, remove, or exclude from school facilities or property any Service Dog or 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, if the Service Dog or Therapy Dog or other animal:
 - 5.1.1. urinates or defecates in inappropriate locations;
 - 5.1.2. disrupts any member of the student body or school personnel;
 - 5.1.3. vocalizes unnecessarily (i.e., barking, growling or whining);
 - 5.1.4. shows aggression towards people or other animals;
 - 5.1.5. solicits or steals food or other items from the student body or school personnel;
 - 5.1.6. is unable to perform reliably the service for which it has been approved;
 - 5.1.7. is not under the full control of the student with the disability or the designated handler;
 - 5.1.8. is a public health threat as a result of being infested with parasites or having a communicable disease of the skin, mouth or eyes; or

- 5.1.9. is unclean and unsanitary.
- 5.2. Trainers/handlers of any Service Animal or Therapy Dog are expected to carry a minimum of \$2,000,000 general liability insurance or proof of equivalent insurance through the organization the handler and Service Animal/Therapy Dog are representing.
- 5.3. No other animals, other than a Therapy Dog, will be considered by HPSD to provide support to students.

Forms

Form 109A - Request for Inclusion of Certified Service Dog / Therapy Dog for Students

Form 109B - Request for Inclusion of Certified Service Dog / Therapy Dog for Staff

Form 109C - Service/Therapy Animal – Parent Letter

References

Education Act Sections 3, 11, 33, 40(1), 52, 53, 222

Alberta Human Rights Act

Service Dogs Act, 2009

Cross References

Administrative Procedure 209 - Welcoming, Caring, Respectful and Safe Learning Environments

Administrative Procedure 212 - Inclusive Education

Administrative Procedure 242 - Student Wellness

Administrative Procedure 250 - Animals in the Classroom