

POLICY IHCH– Use of Service Dogs and Education Assistance Animals in Schools

The Board recognizes that animals in school can provide education value; however, this value must be balanced against the impact the animal has on the education environment and the health and safety of the school community.

PURPOSE

To provide guidelines for appropriate circumstances for animals to be present in a school facility.

DEFINITIONS

Service Dog: defined as “a dog trained as a guide for a disabled person and having the qualifications prescribed by the regulations (*Service Dogs Act*) and is not considered an Education Assistance Animal. For the purposes of this policy, the Service Dog definition would include dogs 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.

Education Assistance Animal (EAA): defined as an animal that works with its owner/handlers as a team to improve a student’s physical, social, emotional, or cognitive functioning. An EAA can be useful for educational and motivational effectiveness for participants. An EAA is not a “certified service dog”, however, Peace Wapiti Public School Division requires EAA’s to be certified therapy animals. Provisions that apply to protecting people with disabilities and their service animals do not apply to therapy animals 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 guide dogs, hearing dogs, and service dogs. Examples of EAAs are library dogs and therapy animals.

Classroom Pet: defined as an animal chosen by a teacher to be kept in his/her individual classroom for some type of educational value, such as a means to stimulate learning, and/or teach students about responsibility and compassion through their care and upkeep. The teacher is ultimately responsible for the care and maintenance of the classroom pet within the classroom and to ensure the health and safety of the school community.

GUIDELINES & PROCEDURES

1. Service Dog

- a) Prior to admittance of service dog to a school, parents must provide:
 - i) a letter outlining the benefits of having the service dog attend with their child, descriptions of the service dog’s activities, and the duration of the support. Parents need to complete the Request for a Certified Service Dog form (Appendix A) and attach it to the letter;
 - ii) 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;

- iii) provide a copy of the Service Dog 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;
 - iv) provide up-to-date proof of vaccinations, licensing, adequate insurance and ensure the dog is in good health;
 - v) 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;
 - vi) work with the school administrator to schedule training for the student’s school team and bus driver(s) by the service dog organization and 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;
 - vii) provide the school with signage (generally provided by the service dog organization) alerting visitors/emergency service providers to the service dog’s presence;
 - viii) 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;
 - ix) pay for any financial implications regarding the training, use and care of the service dog.
- b) When an administrator receives a written request for permission to have a service dog accompany a student to school, the administrator will:
- i) inform the Superintendent or designate of the request;
 - ii) arrange a case conference involving:
 - (1) parents,
 - (2) teacher(s),
 - (3) classroom assistants,
 - (4) Director of Transportation, if appropriate,
 - (5) Administration from Feeder Schools, if appropriate,
 - (6) a representative of the service dog organization, and
 - (7) appropriate Student Services personnel to discuss the following:
 - Review the purpose and function of the service dog in relation to successful learning and/or safety for the student;
 - Notification and involvement of classroom staff;
 - Clarify all responsibilities of the family, school, and district;
 - Transportation of the student and service dog;
 - 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, cultural sensitivities to groups that will not share space with an animal;
 - Development of a comprehensive transition plan for the introduction of the dog which may involve the use of social stories, visits by the dog to the school/classroom, etc.

- iii) inform school community of the potential arrival of a service dog to the school;
- iv) send 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;
- v) work with appropriate personnel to revise emergency and safety procedures, as required, to include the service dog;
- vi) upon completion of the above (1 b i-v), the administrator will forward all relevant information to the Superintendent or designate;
- c) If the student is eligible for transportation, the *Human Rights Code* and the *Blind Person's Rights Act* establish the right for the service dog to be allowed to accompany them on the bus.
- d) The admittance of the service dog into the learning environment will be finalized by the Superintendent or designate based upon the recommendation of the school administrator and a review of submitted documentation pertaining to the:
 - student's educational needs,
 - fulfillment of family responsibilities and
 - fulfillment of school and Division responsibilities to all stakeholders, including liability.
- e) At the end of each year, the student's learning team will review the student's program needs related to the service dog. This includes the school's input with regard to monitoring the service dog's capacity to provide the target 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.
- f) A copy of all service dog request documentation will be placed in the cumulative file.
- g) The administrator will inform school community of the arrival of a service dog to the school(s) including feeder schools.
- h) A specific letter will be sent home to the students in any of the classes where the dog will be present in case of allergies or extreme phobias.
- i) A transition plan for introduction of the dog will be created which may involve the use of social stories, visits by the dog to the school / classroom, etc.
- j) 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 dog.
- k) An appropriate fire exit plan must be put into place and the fire department must be alerted as to the existence of a dog in the school.
- l) A sign (generally provided by the service dog organization) will be placed on the doors of the school alerting visitors / emergency service providers to the dog's presence.
- m) The service dog organization will provide training to the student's school team (administrator, teacher, teacher assistance, etc.).

2. Educational Assistance Animals:

- a) People wishing to use an EAA need to provide a letter outlining the benefits of having the EAA attend with children, descriptions of the EAA's activities, and the duration of the support.

- b) Additionally, people wishing to use a EAA to support student programming must:
 - i) provide documentation indicating who the handler is and that with the handler, the EAA is a certified therapy animal. There are a number of different certifying agencies, including but not limited to St. John's Ambulance and the Pet Therapy Society of Northern Alberta. All financial costs to obtain this card are the sole responsibility of the trainer/handler.
 - ii) provide up-to-date proof of vaccinations, and ensure the EAA is in good health.
 - iii) provide for the responsibility of care of the EAA. This includes the need for "bio-breaks", disposal of waste, provision of food and water.
 - iv) provide the school with signage (generally provided by the EAA organization) alerting visitors/emergency service providers to the EAA's presence.
 - v) understand that the handler is expected to be with the EAA at all times but in the rare situation where the handler cannot be with the EAA, ensure arrangements are made where the EAA is kenneled or equivalent..
 - vi) pay for any financial implications regarding the training, use and care of the EAA.
 - vii) ensure the EAA is appropriately leashed, caged or harnessed while on school property.
- c) When an administrator receives a written request for permission to have an EAA brought to the school, the administrator will:
 - i) arrange a conference involving staff to discuss the following:
 - notification and involvement of classroom staff.
 - review the purpose and function of the EAA in relation to successful learning and/or safety for the student.
 - clarify all responsibilities of the trainer/handler with the school, and district.
 - 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 EAA, recognition of children with fear of EAAs, cultural sensitivities to groups that will not share space with an animal.
 - ii) inform school community of the potential arrival of an EAA to the school.
 - iii) send a specific letter home to the parents of students who will be in any of the classes where the EAA 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 EAA will be excluded from that area.
 - iv) work with appropriate personnel to revise emergency and safety procedures, as required, to include the EAA.
- d) A written request for permission to have an EAA brought to the school may be denied by a principal.
- e) Upon completion of the above (2 c i-iv.), the administrator will forward all relevant information to the Superintendent or designate.

3. Animals in the Classroom

- a) Classroom pets chosen by a teacher should be kept in his/her individual classroom and have some type of educational value, such as a means to stimulate learning, and/or teach students about responsibility and compassion through their care and upkeep. The teacher

is ultimately responsible for the care and maintenance of the classroom pet within the classroom and to ensure the health and safety of the school community.

- b) Individuals wishing to bring an animal to school shall seek the permission of the teacher. (i.e. show and tell)
- c) Teachers should have administrator's approval and ensure that the health and safety of their students is considered prior to approving one-time animal visits, such as show and tell, or selecting a classroom pet.

4. General:

- a) The School Division may limit, remove or exclude from school facilities or property any Service Dog, EAA 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 Dog or EAA or other animal:

- i) urinates or defecates in inappropriate locations;
 - ii) solicits attention, visits or annoys any member of the student body or school personnel;
 - iii) vocalizes unnecessarily, (i.e., barking, growling or whining);
 - iv) shows aggression towards people or other animals;
 - v) solicits or steals food or other items from the student body or school personnel;
 - vi) is unable to perform reliably the service for which it has been approved;
 - vii) is not under the full control of the student with the disability or the designated handler;
 - viii) 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.
- b) Trainer/handlers should carry a minimum of \$2,000,0000 general liability insurance or proof of equivalent insurance through the organization the handler and EAA are representing.

REFERENCES

Cross References:

[Exhibit 1 –Parent Request Form](#)
[Exhibit 2 – Administrator Checklist](#)

Legal References:

[*Service Dogs Act*](#)
[*Service Dog Qualification Regulation*](#)
[*Blind Persons' Rights Act*](#)
[*Alberta Human Rights Act*](#)

BM#: 20120112.1007; 20150528.1009; 20181129.1009; BM20220526.1005,
BM20250417.1013

Next Review: 2027/2028