



### SERVICE DOGS IN SCHOOLS

#### Background

Service dogs assist children and adults who have a physical or developmental disability with their daily living activities. The use of service dogs is an intervention strategy that is recognized as an aid to children with special needs in an inclusive education environment. Use of a service dog by a student with a disability will be allowed in school or on Division property when it has been determined that the student's disability requires such use for the student to have equal access to the services, programs, or activities offered by the school, and when Division requirements have been met to the satisfaction of the Superintendent.

The Division is committed to ensuring it operates within the legal mandate of all legislation in meeting the needs of its students. This includes the Education Act and the Human Rights Act, specifically the Alberta Service Dogs Act (January 1, 2009), which legally recognized all service dogs. Albertans with disabilities who use qualified service dogs now have access to all public places in the province. Service dogs in schools can provide educational value. However, this value must be balanced against the impact the service dog has on the education environment and the health and safety of the school community.

#### Definition

**Service Dog:** is “a dog trained as a guide for a disabled person and having the qualifications prescribed by the regulations.” (Service Dogs Act of Alberta, 2009). For the purposes of this administrative procedure, 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, etc.

#### Procedures

##### 1. Service Dogs

- 1.1 Parents/guardians of students requesting the support and assistance of a service dog while at school shall:
  - 1.1.1 Provide a letter outlining the benefits of having the service dog attend school 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 256-1) 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 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 Alberta Human Services for a service dog license.
  - 1.1.4 Provide up-to-date (annual) proof of vaccinations, licensing, and adequate insurance, and ensure the dog is in good health.
  - 1.1.5 Work with the Principal to develop a mutually agreed upon plan that addresses the handling of the dog (both inside and outside the school) and the personal care and physical needs of the service dog.
  - 1.1.6 Work with the Principal to schedule training, as required, for the student's school team and transportation provider, 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.
  - 1.1.7 Provide the school with signage (generally provided by the service dog organization) alerting visitors/emergency service providers to the service dog's presence.
  - 1.1.8 Be responsible 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 principal shall:
- 1.2.1 refer to Principal Checklist (Form 256-2).
  - 1.2.2 inform the Director of Student Services of the request.
  - 1.2.3 arrange a case conference involving parents, teacher(s), classroom assistants, transportation staff (if appropriate), a representative of the service dog organization (if appropriate), and appropriate inclusive learning personnel to:
    - 1.2.3.1 review the purpose and function of the service dog in relation to successful learning and/or safety for the student.
    - 1.2.3.2 discuss the notification and involvement of school staff;
    - 1.2.3.3 clarify all responsibilities of the family, the school and the Division;
    - 1.2.3.4 discuss transportation of the student and service dog, if appropriate and



1.2.3.5 discuss other concerns, including potential 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 to groups that will not share space with a dog.

1.3 Development of a comprehensive transition plan for the introduction of the dog may involve visits by the 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 using the Sample Letter to the School Community re: service dog in School (Form 256-4).

1.3.2 sending a specific letter home using the Sample Letter to Classroom Families re: service dog in school (Form 256-3) 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

1.3.3 working with appropriate personnel to revise emergency and safety procedures as required to include the service dog.

Upon completion of the above (1.3.1 – 1.3.3), the principal will forward a copy of all relevant information to the Director of Student Services.

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 Division responsibilities to all stakeholders, including liability, and

1.4.4 eligibility for transportation, which is determined by the *Alberta Human Rights Act* and the *Blind Person's Rights Act* establishing the right for the service dog to be allowed to accompany the student 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.



- 1.5.1 The review shall include the school's input with regard to monitoring the service dog's capacity to provide the target service.
    - 1.5.2 Decisions regarding the appropriate use of the service dog, program planning, and training need to be considered.
    - 1.5.3 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 service dog request documentation shall be placed in the cumulative file.
  - 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 An assembly may be arranged for the student body involving representatives from the service dog organization, the parent, and possibly the handler to explain the role of the service dog.
  - 1.9 An appropriate emergency exit plan shall be put into place and the fire department shall be alerted as to the presence of a 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.
  - 1.11 The service dog organization shall provide training to the student's school team (Principal, teacher(s), educational assistant(s), etc.).
2. The Division may limit, remove, or exclude from school facilities or property any service dog, 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, situations where the service dog:
- 2.1 urinates or defecates in inappropriate locations;
  - 2.2 solicits attention, visits, or annoys any member of the student body or school personnel.
  - 2.3 vocalizes unnecessarily (i.e. barking, growling, or whining)
  - 2.4 shows aggression towards people or other dogs.
  - 2.5 solicits or steals food or other items from the student body or school personnel.
  - 2.6 is unable to perform reliably the service for which it has been approved.
  - 2.7 is not under the full control of the student with the disability or the designated handler; or



- 2.8 is a public health threat as a result of being infested with parasites; has a communicable disease of the skin, mouth, or eyes; is unclean; or is unsanitary.
3. The Principal may impose some restrictions on the service dog for safety reasons. The service dog may be excluded or have limited access to certain areas of the school facilities or certain programs for safety reasons. Areas or programs which may be considered off limits for service dogs include but are not limited to laboratories, mechanical closets, custodial closets, food preparation areas, areas where protective clothing is required, areas that have exposed sharp metal cuttings or other sharp objects, areas with high levels of dust, and areas where there is moving machinery.
  4. Trainers/handlers, where necessary, are to carry a minimum of two million dollars general liability insurance.
  5. Staff, students, or parents of a student with medical issues that are impacted by dogs (such as respiratory diseases) are to contact the Principal if they have a concern about exposure to a service dog.
    - 5.1 The staff member, student, or parents of a student shall be asked to provide medical documentation that identifies the disability and the need for an accommodation.
    - 5.2 The principal shall facilitate a process to resolve the conflict that considers the conflicting needs/accommodations of all persons involved.
  6. Any student/parent of a student with a service dog or a staff member, student, or parent of a student who is aggrieved by the Principal's decision may appeal that decision to the Superintendent. The appeal must be in writing and provide detailed information regarding the basis of the appeal.
  7. The Division reserves the right to deny school access to a service dog where circumstances warrant. According to the Alberta School Act, Section 2, "The exercise of any right or the receipt of any benefit under this Act is subject to those limitations that are reasonable in each circumstance under which the right is being exercised or the benefit is being received."

Reference: Section 3, 11, 31, 32, 33, 52, 53, 196, 197, 204, 222, 225 Education Act  
Alberta Human Rights Act  
Alberta Service Dogs Act  
Blind Persons' Rights Act  
Alberta Service dogs Qualifications Regulation 197/2008 (consolidated up to 34/2015)