

USE OF SERVICE DOGS BY STUDENTS

Background

The use of specially trained service dogs is an approved accommodation strategy used by some individuals with disabilities to assist in managing their environment. When a parent/guardian requests that a service dog accompany a student in the school in order to provide support for educational achievement and well-being, the Board must give due diligence to all the factors related to the students and staff in a school. This procedure provides direction to school administrators regarding the extensive consultation and processes to be followed with regard to the implementation of service dogs into the school environment.

For the purpose of this administrative procedure (APM), “service dogs” include guide dogs, hearing dogs, autism service dogs and other certified working dogs. A “service dog” is considered to be an accommodation that is required to allow a student to access the Alberta Program of Studies. Examples include guide dogs for blind students and hearing dogs for deaf students. There are also dogs trained to assist students with autism, and medical conditions such as epilepsy. A request for a service dog must be accommodated.

Service dogs and their handlers receive specialized training to work together, and consequently the dogs should present minimal risk to or impact on other people.

Procedure: Individual Consideration for Approval

1. Decisions regarding the admittance and implementation of service dogs into the school environment are made on a case-by-case basis. All circumstances of a particular case, including the individual needs of the student being assisted by the dog, and the needs of other students and staff will be considered. Where necessary in the decision making process, rights and needs of one person may have to be balanced against the rights and needs of another.
2. Entry of service dogs is decided after extensive consultation and is not automatically approved. The school principal reviews the request with the Superintendent of Schools and the Director of Inclusive Education.

Procedures for the Implementation of Service Dogs in the School Environment

1. Parents/guardians usually inform the principal that their child and a service dog are trained to work together, and have graduated from a recognized training centre. To initiate the process of having the dog assist the student in school, the parent(s)/guardian(s) must make the request in writing.
2. In addition to the request form, parent(s)/guardian(s) provide the principal with

- a. A letter from a member of the College of Physicians and Surgeons confirming the diagnosis of an exceptionality, as well as a recommendation for the use of a certified service dog;
 - b. A letter from National Service Dogs Training Centre or equivalent registered organization stating that a certified service dog has been placed with the child, and the date of formal certified service dog team recognition;
 - c. The dog's vaccination record (updates to be provided yearly, at the beginning of each school year);
 - d. Records of retraining, if applicable; and,
 - e. A copy of municipal dog licence, if applicable.
3. The principal will consult with the Director of Inclusive Education and the Superintendent of Schools prior to planning the implementation process.
4. The Principal will schedule a case conference with the parent(s)/guardian(s), a representative from the dog training school, the classroom teacher(s), the Classroom Support Teacher (CST), Director of Inclusive Education, and the Educational Assistant(s) (EA) who work with the student. The purpose of the case conference is to review the Individual Program Plan (IPP) description of the student's needs and the required accommodations including the type of service the dog will provide. The service provided by the dog must be consistent with the needs or recommendations of the IPP. At this case conference the Principal will discuss:
 - a. The type of dog that will support the student.
 - b. The type of service the dog will provide to the student.
 - c. The impact of the introduction and presence of the dog in the school community including: the reaction of peers; the possible impact on the delivery of academic programs; altered and increased demands on school staff; required changes to routines in the school and classroom; students or staff who may have allergies to dogs; recognition that some children have a fear of dogs; recognition of cultural sensitivities including groups who do not share living space with dogs.
 - d. How students and staff in the class/school should respond to the dog to allow it to perform its role.
 - e. Who will take on the role of the dog's handler?
 - f. Transportation of the dog to and from school, if transportation is required. Transportation on school-related trips.
 - g. The following questions will address specific concerns regarding the daily care of the dog:
 - i. Where is the most environmentally safe place for the dog to relieve itself?
 - ii. How will the handler "clean up" after the animal relieves itself?
 - iii. What container will be used for disposal of feces and other biological waste?
 - iv. Who is responsible for filling the water bowl?
 - v. Where will the water bowl be kept?
 - vi. Will the dog require food at school? If so, how will this be brought to school?
 - vii. Will there be any changes to the routine required for winter conditions?
 - viii. What is the protocol in the event that the handler is absent?
 - ix. What exercise is required for the dog each day?

5. The principal advises the parent that all costs related to the provision of the service dog are the financial responsibility of the parent.
6. After the case conference, the principal will:
 - a. Check to ensure that no student and/or staff member has an anaphylactic allergy to dogs. If an allergy exists, the principal will consult the appropriate Administrative Procedure on Allergies
 - b. Communicate the request with all school staff.
7. After receiving feedback from the school staff, the principal shall develop an implementation plan that addresses the following:
 - a. The responsibilities of the handler include:
 - i. Walking the dog.
 - ii. Providing water and cleaning up the drinking area as required.
 - iii. Allowing the dog to access the designated area for relieving itself and cleaning up the feces in a safe manner. Feces and other biological waste must not be disposed of in any play area in the school.
 - iv. A plan for the Care of the Service Dog will be developed.
 - b. Establishment of emergency procedures including a fire safety plan, evacuation plan and lockdown plan. Personnel from the local fire/police departments may be available to assist with these plans. Contact numbers for the parent(s)/guardian(s) must also be obtained for other possible emergencies.
 - c. Training for the school team, including the Principal, the Classroom teacher(s), the Classroom Support Teacher (CST) and EA(s) must be arranged. This training should be provided by the service dog organization. Consideration should also be given to the need for follow up training in the future to address staff and class changes.
 - d. Training or information must be provided to the driver of a school transportation vehicle if the dog is to ride with the student to and from school. Consideration should be given to such factors as the need for the student and the dog to ride closely together and the reduction or elimination of food on the bus or van.
 - e. Communication to the whole school community regarding the introduction of the dog can be made through the school newsletter or through a letter to each family. Letters are to be sent to the parents of students in the same class as the student who has the dog and to the parents of students who share transportation, if applicable.
8. Communication with the school community. The principal shall communicate to the staff, students and school community once the implementation and management plan is developed.
 - a. The School Council advises the principal on matters pertaining to the school community. An information session for the council and other interested community members will be held to inform them, and to receive feedback or relevant information. The principal will invite the parent(s)/guardian(s) of the student needing the dog to participate in the information session.
 - b. All school staff members, teaching and non-teaching, must be informed early in the process of the request to have a service dog in the school. Their input and information will assist the principal in the implementation process.
 - c. Prior to the introduction of the dog into the school, signs must be placed on the entrance doors of the school to inform visitors of the dog's presence.

9. Once a decision to approve the request is made, careful consideration of all the factors will facilitate the transition of the dog into the school environment. Attention to consistency, routines, communication, staff in-service, school assemblies, and community notification are required.

10. Field Trips – As per Administrative Procedure #260 Field Trips, field trips offer significant educational value that enhances the curriculum. Schools should make arrangements for service dogs to accompany student(s) on a field trip where a service dog has been approved as an accommodation strategy to assist in managing a student’s environment.
 - a. When planning for the field trip that includes a service dog, schools should take into consideration the following factors:
 - i. Does the field trip location/type approve service dogs to accompany students?
 - ii. How will the dog be transported to, from and during the field trip?
 - iii. Is there an environmentally safe place for the dog to relieve itself during the field trip?
 - iv. How and who will “clean up” after the dog?
 - v. Who is responsible for providing food and/or water to the dog while on the field trip?
 - vi. How will the changes in the dog’s and/or student’s routine be affected by the field trip?
 - vii. Who will take on the role of the dog handler during the field trip?

INFORMATION FOR PARENTS/GUARDIANS REQUESTING A SERVICE DOG IN THE SCHOOL

1. The success of the implementation of a service dog into a school setting depends on clear communication, a well-informed school community and careful planning. The information you provide will assist the principal to make the best possible decisions for your child and other students as well as for the staff, volunteers and visitors in the school. The information will be filed in the Student Record.
2. Individuals requesting a Service Dog's involvement with a Student will need to make a request in writing to the school principal.
3. In addition to the request, parent(s)/guardian(s) must also provide:
 - A letter from a member of the College of Physicians and Surgeons confirming the diagnosis of an exceptionality, as well as a recommendation for the use of a certified service dog;
 - A letter from National Service Dogs Training Centre or equivalent registered organization stating that a certified service dog has been placed with the child, and the date of formal certified service dog team recognition;
 - The dog's vaccination record (updates to be provided yearly, at the beginning of each school year);
 - Records of retraining, if applicable; and,
 - A copy of municipal dog licence, if applicable.
4. The use of a service dog is considered to be an accommodation to help your child learn and to develop the necessary skills to achieve success at school. The principal will invite you, your child's classroom teacher, a representative from the dog training centre, the Classroom Support Teacher), the Director of Inclusive Education, and the Education Assistant(s) who work with the student to a case conference. The purpose of the case conference is to discuss your child's needs, the accommodations that are already in place for your child, as well as the additional assistance provided by a service dog. Your child's IPP will be reviewed at the case conference.
5. The information you provide will help the principal to implement your request. It is important that you provide the information that addresses the safety of the students and staff. For example, the principal needs to know that the dog has no history of nipping, biting or growling at children or adults, nor exhibits aggressive protective behaviours. The principal also needs to know if any student or member of staff has severe medical or psychological reactions to dogs that may prevent or restrict the involvement of the dog at the school.
6. The well-being of the dog is also very important. Its care, handling and training needs will be addressed, and your input as a trained handler is valuable. The principal also needs to know what other resources are available to facilitate the transition to school and the implementation of the plan. Strategies for becoming familiar with the building and school grounds, introduction to assemblies/concerts, recess, and informing the staff about interacting with the dog will need to be included in the planning to be as consistent and fair to the dog as possible.
7. The School Council advises the principal on matters pertaining to the school community. It is customary to provide an information session for the council and other interested parents. It is our experience that important information shared in this way facilitates understanding and

acceptance of new practices at the school. You will be asked to participate in the information session.

8. After all the discussion and planning is in place, the goal will be to implement the plan as soon as possible.

9. Your responsibilities include:

- Transporting or walking the dog to and from school, or facilitating the use of bus transportation;
- Providing the required equipment and dog care items;
- Assuming financial responsibility for the dog's training, veterinary care, and other related costs;
- Working co-operatively with the school staff to make this accommodation a success;
- Assisting the principal to communicate relevant information to the school community;
- Providing the principal with required documentation in a timely fashion; and,
- Informing the principal of all relevant information that may affect the students and staff.

10. Once the necessary information has been discussed, the principal will consult with the superintendent of education and the principal of special education prior to the admittance and implementation of the service dog into the school.

11. If your request is approved a series of planning steps must take place to ensure a smooth transition for the entry of the service dog.