

## USE OF SERVICE DOGS IN SCHOOLS

### Background

Service dogs must be certified and registered in Alberta. To be a qualified service dog under Service Dogs Act, the dog must be trained through an Assistance Dogs International (ADI) accredited school. The Service Dog Act website (through Alberta Human Services - Service Alberta) website outlines the specific required information.

All accredited schools are listed on the Assistance Dogs International ADI website. The Special Skills Dog (SSD) or National Service Dogs (NSD) will have a distinctive harness/saddlebag or vest and will always be on a leash. Some technical skills for a service dog can be, but not limited to: operating light switches, opening and closing doors and drawers, retrieving items from floor, pulling wheelchairs, etc.

A service dog helps provide safety, independence, dignity, and confidence to the handler. These dogs become part of the family. Praise and reward is given by the client to establish a loving working relationship.

Once the parent has been informed that their child has been offered the opportunity to have a service dog, they are to inform the Principal of the school who will notify the Superintendent or designate.

It should be noted that not all clients are successful with the training and so although the school should be alerted, the actual process should not begin until the candidate has graduated from the program. After the candidate has been successful and graduates from the program, the dog and handler return home where only the handler is encouraged to interact with the dog. Eye contact and direct contact should be avoided by all their members of the house and then of the school as it takes approximately 6 months for the bonding between the handler and the dog.

### Procedures

1. Parents or guardians wishing to use a service dog to support their child's program must:
  - a) Provide a letter outlining the benefits of having the service dog attend with their child, descriptions of the service dog's intended activities, and the duration of the support.
  - b) Complete the *Request for a Certified Service Dog* form and attach it to the aforementioned letter.
  - c) Provide a letter from a physician confirming 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.
  - d) 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.
  - e) Provide up-to-date proof of vaccinations, licensing, insurance and ensure the dog is in good health. This must be done annually if the dog is accepted into the school to ensure continued eligibility. Parents are required to provide proof that their Home Insurance policy states that coverage is extended to include the actions of the dog, and must be a minimum of two million dollars general liability coverage.
  - f) Complete the attached Management Plan for the Care of the Service Dog form that provides for the personal care and physical needs of the service dog. This includes the need for "bio-breaks", disposal of waste, provision of food, water, and a kennel.

- g) Work with the school Principal to schedule training for the student's school team by the service dog organization in order to educate the student body in the school about the role of the service dog and the rules of conduct concerning the dog. This process will be ongoing as staff changes, grade changes, and other circumstances warrant additional training.
  - h) Provide the school with signage (generally provided by the service dog organization) alerting visitors and emergency service providers to the service dog's presence.
  - i) Pay for any financial implications regarding the training, use and care of the service dog.
2. When a Principal receives a written request for permission to have a service dog accompany a student to school, the Principal can authorize such a request, upon consultation with the Superintendent or designate. The Principal will:
- a) Consult with the Superintendent, or designate
  - b) Arrange a case conference involving parents, teacher(s), educational assistants, a representative of the service dog organization, and appropriate Student Services personnel to discuss the following:
    - ⇒ Notification and involvement of classroom staff.
    - ⇒ Review the purpose and function of the service dog in relation to successful learning and/or safety for the student.
    - ⇒ Clarify all responsibilities of the family, school, and district.
    - ⇒ Transportation of the student and service dog.
    - ⇒ 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.
    - ⇒ Other concerns including, but not limited to: interference with delivery of an educational program, possible changes to in-class routines and procedures, increased demands on staff, other children 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 and classroom, etc.
  - c) Inform school staff, school council representatives and parents of the potential arrival of a service dog to the school.
  - d) Send a specific letter home to the parents of students who will be in any of the classes or classrooms where the dog will possibly be present in case of allergies, anxieties or other concerns.
  - e) Work with appropriate personnel to revise emergency and safety procedures, as required, to include the service dog.

Upon completion of 2(a) up to and including 2(e) above, the Principal will forward all relevant information to the Superintendent, or designate.

- 3. Parents or guardians of students eligible for transportation services must contact the transportation coordinator to ensure all bus policies are followed when transporting the student and dog to and from school on the school bus.

4. A decision on the admittance of the service dog into the learning environment will be made by Principal after consulting with the Superintendent, or designate, based upon the review of submitted documentation pertaining to the:
  - a) student's educational needs,
  - b) fulfillment of family responsibilities, and
  - c) Fulfillment of school and District responsibilities to all stakeholders, including liability.
5. 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 will be considered. If the service dog is deemed essential, comprehensive transition planning for future teachers, staff, students, transportation providers and the wider community will occur.
6. On occasion, circumstances of possible conflicting rights may occur (refer to 2b above.) Employees, students or parents/guardians of students with medical issues that are impacted by animals (such as respiratory diseases) should contact the school Principal if they have a concern about exposure to a service dog. That individual will be asked to provide medical documentation that identifies the disability and the need for an accommodation. The school Principal will facilitate a process to resolve the conflict that considers the conflicting needs/accommodation of all persons involved.
7. Any student or parent/guardian of a student with a service dog who is aggrieved by the school Principal's decision to remove, limit or exclude a service dog may appeal that decision to the Superintendent of the District. The appeal must be in writing and must provide detailed information regarding the basis of the appeal.
8. A copy of all service dog request documentation will be placed in the cumulative file of the student requiring the service dog.

## Forms

Appendix A Parent / Guardian Request for a Service Dog  
Appendix B Management Plan for the Care of the Service Dog

**Reference:** School Act, Section 47  
Human Rights Act: [http://www.qp.alberta.ca/570.cfm?frm\\_isbn=9780779752904&search\\_by=link](http://www.qp.alberta.ca/570.cfm?frm_isbn=9780779752904&search_by=link)  
Alberta Service Dogs Act: <http://humanservices.alberta.ca/disability-services/service-dogs.html>  
Administrative Procedure 160: Inclusive Catholic Communities Providing Safe and Caring Learning Environments