

### Background

Animals supporting the learning of students are situationally important in supporting the Division's vision for inclusive education. In some cases, their use is essential in assuring that students have the same opportunities to learn as all other students. Animals dedicated to supporting the learning goals of students will be allowed in schools or on Division property when professional assessments have determined that such a program support will optimize student learning. Animals who are selected for this purpose will have been deemed to be optimal in achieving the goal of serving specific learning needs. At all times, decisions regarding the scope of animal support for educational programs must be balanced against the impact that animals have on the educational environment, and the health and safety of the school community.

### Definitions

#### Service Animal:

This animal is most commonly determined to be a dog trained as a guide for a disabled person and having the qualifications prescribed by a regulatory framework (Service Dogs Act of Alberta, 2009). For the purposes of this administrative procedure, the service animal definition will include animals 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. Service animals are deemed to be essential in assuring the rights of students with disabilities and human rights afforded to all students. Evolving practice suggests that based upon a student's specific medical and cultural need, a service animal could be recommended that is not a dog (i.e. miniature horse).

#### Therapy Dogs:

Therapy Dogs provide educational supports for students by serving as a resource to support psychological or physiological needs. Provisions that apply to protecting people with disabilities and their service animals 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 Animals.

### Procedures

#### 1. Service Animal

1.1 Parents / guardians of students requesting the support and assistance of a service animal while at school shall:

- 1.1.1 provide a letter outlining the benefits of having the service animal attend with their child, descriptions of the animal's activities, and the duration of the support. Parents need to complete the Request for a Certified Service Animal form ([Appendix A](#)) 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 Animal in school is essential and directly related to the learning needs of the student;
  - 1.1.3 provide a copy of the Service Animal 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](mailto:servicedogs@gov.ab.ca) for a service dog license;
  - 1.1.4 provide up-to-date proof of vaccinations, licensing, adequate insurance and ensure the animal is in good health;
  - 1.1.5 work with the school administrator to provide for the responsibility of care of the Service Animal. 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) by the Service Animal organization and to educate the student body in the school and those on the bus on the role of the Service Animal and on the rules of conduct concerning the animal. 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 Animal organization) alerting visitors/emergency service providers to the Service Animal’s presence;
  - 1.1.8 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;
  - 1.1.9 pay for any financial implications regarding the training, use and care of the Service Animal.
- 1.2 When a Principal receives a written request for permission to have a Service Animal accompany a student to school, the administrator will:
- 1.2.1 inform the Associate Superintendent of Learning Services of the request;
  - 1.2.2 arrange a case conference involving: parents, teacher(s), classroom assistants, transportation staff (if appropriate), administration from feeder schools (if appropriate), a representative of the Service Animal organization (if appropriate), and appropriate inclusive learning personnel to:
    - 1.2.2.1 review the purpose and function of the Service Animal in relation to successful learning and/or safety for the student;
    - 1.2.2.2 discuss the notification and involvement of school staff;
    - 1.2.2.3 clarify all responsibilities of the family, school, and division;
    - 1.2.2.3 discuss transportation of the student and Service Animal, if appropriate;
    - 1.2.2.5 discuss 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 animals, and recognition of children with fear of animals.
- 1.3 Development of a comprehensive transition plan for the introduction of the animal which may involve the use of social stories, visits by the animal 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 Animal 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 animal will possibly be present in case of allergies, anxieties, or other concerns;

1.3.3 working with appropriate personnel to revise emergency and safety procedures, as required, to include the Service Animal.

1.4 The approval of the Service Animal 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, the Human Rights Code and the Blind Person's Rights Act establish the right for an authorized Service Animal 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 animal. This includes the school's input with regard to monitoring the service animal's capacity to provide the targeted service. Decisions regarding the appropriate use of the Service Animal, program planning, and training need to be considered. If the Service Animal 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 Animal request documentation 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 animal to the school(s), including feeder schools as required.

1.8 A transition plan for introduction of the animal shall be created which may involve the use of social stories, visits by the animal to the school / classroom, etc. An assembly may be arranged for the student body involving representatives from the Service Animal Association, the parent and possibly the handler to explain the role of the service animal.

1.9 An appropriate emergency exit plan shall be put into place and the fire department shall be alerted as to the existence of an animal in the school.

1.10 A sign (generally provided by the service animal organization) shall be placed on the doors of the school alerting visitors / emergency service providers to the animal's presence.) The Service Animal Provider shall provide training to the student's school team (principal, teacher, teacher assistance, etc.).

## 2. Therapy Dog

2.1 Anyone 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. Parents




need to complete the request for a Service Animal / Therapy Dog Form ([Appendix A](#)) and attach it to the letter.

- 2.2 Additionally, those wishing to use a Therapy Dog to support children’s programs shall:
  - 2.2.1 provide documentation indicating who the handler is, certification of authenticity, and that the Therapy Dog is in good health (retired certified service animals may qualify as therapy animals). There are a number of different certifying agencies for this purpose including but not limited to St. John’s Ambulance and the Pet Therapy Society of Northern Alberta. All financial costs to obtain this certification are the sole responsibility of the trainer/handler;
  - 2.2.2 provide up-to-date proof of vaccinations, and ensure the Therapy Dog is in good health;
  - 2.2.3 provide for the responsibility of care of the Therapy Dog including the need for “biobreaks,” disposal of waste and provision of food and water;
  - 2.2.4 provide the school with signage (generally provided by the Therapy Dog organization) alerting visitors / emergency service providers to the Therapy Dog’s presence;
  - 2.2.5 indicate who will accompany and handle the therapy dog both inside and outside the school and what arrangements have been made with regard to alternate handlers when necessary;
  - 2.2.6 pay for any financial implications regarding the training use, and care of the Therapy Dog; and
  - 2.2.7 ensure the Therapy Dog has appropriate controls in place (leashed, caged, or harnessed) while on school property.
- 2.3 When an administrator receives a written request for permission to have a therapy dog brought to the school, the principal shall:
  - 2.3.1 arrange a meeting involving staff to discuss:
    - 2.3.1.1 notification and involvement of school staff;
    - 2.3.1.2 the purpose and function of the Therapy Dog in relation to optimizing student learning / and or safety for the student;
    - 2.3.1.3 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 the therapy dog, recognition of children with fear of Therapy Dogs, and cultural sensitivities of those who will not share space with a specific animal;
  - 2.3.2 inform school community of the potential arrival of a Therapy Dog to the school using the Sample Letter to the School Community re: Service / Therapy Dog in School ([Appendix B](#));
  - 2.3.3 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
  - 2.3.4 work with appropriate personnel to revise emergency and safety procedures, as required, to include the therapy animal.
- 2.4 whether or not to approve of the plan, and if approved, forward all relevant information to the Associate Superintendent - Learning Services.

## General



1. The Division may limit, remove or exclude from school facilities or property any Service Animal, 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: The Service Animal or Therapy Dog or other animal:
  - 1.1 urinates or defecates in inappropriate locations;
  - 1.2 annoys any member of the student body or school personnel;
  - 1.3 vocalizes unnecessarily (i.e. barking, growling or whining);
  - 1.4 shows aggression towards people or other animals;
  - 1.5 solicits or steals food or other items from the student body or school personnel;
  - 1.6 is unable to perform reliably the service for which it has been approved;
  - 1.7 is not under the full control of the student with the disability or the designated handler;
  - 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 is unclean and unsanitary.
  
2. Trainer/handlers of any Service Animal or Therapy Dog are expected to carry a minimum of \$2,000,0000 general liability insurance or proof of equivalent insurance through the organization the handler and Service Animal / therapy dog are representing.

<b>Reference:</b>  Service Dogs Act of Alberta 2009  Greater St. Albert Roman Catholic Separate School Division Administrative Procedures Manual	<b>Approved:</b> 
	<b>Date Approved:</b> February 11, 2022
	<b>Reviewed or Revised:</b>

*Note: References shall be updated as required and do not require additional approval*

