

## SERVICE DOGS FOR STUDENTS WITH DIVERSE NEEDS

### Background

The Division supports the use of service dogs as an intervention strategy recognized as an aid to children with diverse needs.

The Alberta Service Dogs Act defines a service dog as an animal trained by an Assistance Dogs International accredited school and that carries a Government of Alberta identification card as proof of qualification. Service dogs are working animals allowed full public access in Alberta and are trained to meet the specific needs of students with whom they have been partnered. Service dogs may provide services to students diagnosed with disabilities such as physical disabilities, blind or low vision, deaf/hearing impaired, autism spectrum disorder, or a seizure disorder.

### Procedures

1. The following procedures will be followed for admittance of a service dog to a school. The parent(s) will:
  - 1.1 Provide a letter to the principal indicating that the student has been approved for a service dog, include reasons, descriptions of activities, and the benefits of having a service dog attend school with their child.
    - 1.1.1 This letter is to be supplied to the principal as early as possible in the process to allow for sufficient planning and transition of the service dog into the school setting.
    - 1.1.2 If necessary, to supplement the student's Instructional Support Plan (ISP), the parent will provide a letter from a physician or psychologist confirming the diagnosis of a recognized special need and include a recommendation for the use of a service dog.
  - 1.2 Be provided with a copy of Administrative Procedure 256 – Service Dogs for Students with Special Needs, by the principal upon receipt of the letter in clause 1.1.
  - 1.3 Ensure the service dog meets the qualification requirements under the Alberta Service Dogs Qualifications Regulations.
  - 1.4 Provide detailed information and contact information from the agency training and supplying the service dog.
  - 1.5 Work collaboratively with the principal, Division and school staff to ensure successful integration and ongoing support for the service dog.
  - 1.6 Assume all financial obligations regarding the use and care of the service dog (e.g. training of school staff, special accommodation to the building, etc.).
  - 1.7 Annually provide the principal with:
    - 1.7.1 Proof of up-to-date vaccinations,
    - 1.7.2 A municipal service dog license, and

1.7.3 Confirmation the service dog is in good health.

2. The principal will:

- 2.1 Provide a copy of Administration Procedure 256 – Service Dogs for Students with Diverse Needs to the parent of the student.
- 2.2 Inform the Office of the Superintendent that a written request has been made for service dog admittance to the school.
- 2.3 Consult with the Office of the Superintendent and school staff prior to arranging a conference with the parents.
- 2.4 Meet with the parents to review the requirements in Administrative Procedure 256 – Service Dogs for Students with Diverse Needs and the potential transition of the service dog, including reasonable timelines of the service dog entry into the school setting that ensure a safe and caring environment for all students.
- 2.5 Conduct a meeting with the parent, classroom teacher(s), and appropriate support staff to review the provision of a service dog, and to develop a written plan to determine:
  - 2.5.1 The purpose and function of the service dog;
  - 2.5.2 Who will accompany and handle the service dog both inside and outside the school;
  - 2.5.3 Personal care and physical needs of the service dog;
    - 2.5.3.1 The safest and most environmentally sound place for the service dog to relieve itself,
    - 2.5.3.2 Removal and disposal of animal waste (in consultation with the Facilities and Transportation Department),
    - 2.5.3.3 Provision of a suitable container for waste that the dog handler can access,
    - 2.5.3.4 Considerations for seasonal changes and inclement weather, and
    - 2.5.3.5 Considerations and routines necessary for reducing allergens and dander.
    - 2.5.3.6 Classroom considerations such as seating arrangements and changes to class placements;

3. Programming needs are to consider potential re-structuring and preparation of the school environment and classrooms to ensure all students can safely function and learn with the presence of a service dog;

- 3.1 Arrangements for the service dog to visit the school without students present in order to familiarize it with the school site;
- 3.2 A transition plan for the service dog and the student;
- 3.3 A timetable for the introduction of the service dog to the school and classroom(s) and for the training of the student's school team. Arrange for the professional dog handler to train and instruct the support staff and teacher on the proper procedure regarding the service dog (example: specific commands, skills, etc.). Establish an alternative dog handler for instances when the dog handler is absent;

- 3.4 Rules of conduct around the service dog for students, staff and the public; and
  - 3.5 Methods of disseminating and regulating such rules.
4. Communicate in writing to members of the school community that a working service dog will be entering the school setting to elicit information regarding possible issues such as allergies or phobias from students, staff members and parent(s). This communication will be sent early in the process to determine any alternate arrangements that may be necessary to reasonably accommodate students or staff members.
- 4.1 Consult extensively with support staff, custodians, school staff, the School Council and the school community prior to the service dog arriving at school. During the consultation process with the broader school community, the anonymity of the student and the family will be protected.
  - 4.2 Liaise with stakeholders to resolve specific concerns or issues that may arise regarding the presence of a service dog in the school.
  - 4.3 Where two (2) disabilities require conflicting accommodations, the principal must first consider whether alternatives exist that do not pose a conflict. If no such accommodation exists, the conflicting interests must be balanced against one another to determine which accommodation will impose less hardship on the school and the individuals involved.
  - 4.4 Establish rules of conduct around the service dog for students, staff and the public.
  - 4.5 Revise emergency procedures as required to include the service dog, such as fire drills, evacuation, lockdowns and notification of the fire department regarding the existence of the service dog.
  - 4.6 Notify the Transportation Department as required to advise drivers and any students who may be sharing transportation where the service dog will be present.
  - 4.7 Arrange for an assembly or meeting of all students in the school, to provide education, awareness and information about the service dog and its role prior to the service dog's arrival. Once the service dog has arrived, arrange for a Welcome Assembly to introduce the service dog to the school community.
  - 4.8 Arrange for signage alerting school visitors to the service dog's presence and ensure it is placed in a visible location on the doors of the school.

Reference: Section 3,11,31,32,33,52,53,196,197,204,222,225 Education Act  
Alberta Service Dogs Act  
Alberta Service Dogs Qualifications Regulation 197/2008

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