

## USE OF SERVICE DOGS, THERAPY ANIMALS AND EDUCATION ASSISTANCE ANIMALS IN SCHOOLS

### Background

The division supports the use of Service Dogs as an intervention strategy recognized as an aid to children with Special Needs. The Superintendent is responsible for the administration of this policy.

The Alberta *Service Dogs Act* defines a service dog as an animal that has been 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 as defined by the Alberta Human Rights Code – Section 10 (1) such as physical disabilities, blind or low vision, deaf/hearing impaired, autism spectrum disorder, or a seizure disorder.

### Procedures

1. **SERVICE DOGS** The following procedures will be followed for admittance of a Service Dog to a school.

- 1.1 Parent/Guardian Responsibilities - The parent/guardian(s) shall:

- 1.1.1 Provide a letter to the school indicating that the student has been approved for a Service Dog, and include reasons, descriptions of activity, and the benefits of having a Service Dog attend school with their child. This letter should be supplied to the school as early as possible in the process to allow for sufficient planning and transition of the Service Dog into the school setting. If necessary to supplement the student's Individual Learning Plan (ILP), the parent/guardian(s) will provide a letter from a physician or psychologist confirming the diagnosis of a recognized special need, and including a recommendation for the use of a Service Dog.
- 1.1.2 Request a copy of the Foothills School Division Service Dog Administrative Procedure (AP).
- 1.1.3 Ensure that the Service Dog meets the qualification requirements under the *Alberta Service Dogs Qualifications Regulations* which reads as follows:

1. A dog that

- (a) has qualifications resulting from the successful completion of a training program delivered by a school or institution approved by Assistance Dogs International, Inc., or

- (b) *the dog has successfully completed*
  - (i) *a training program delivered by an organization identified on the Qualified List referred to in this section, or*
  - (ii) *a test administered by an organization identified on the Qualified List referred to in this section.*

- 1.1.4 Provide detailed information and contact information from the agency training and supplying the Service Dog.
- 1.1.5 Work collaboratively with the Principal, district and school staff to ensure successful integration and on-going support for the Service Dog.
- 1.1.6 Assume all financial obligations regarding the use and care of the Service Dog.
- 1.1.7 Annually provide the school with proof of up-to-date vaccinations, a municipal Service Dog license, and confirmation that the Service Dog is in good health.

1.2 Principal's Responsibilities - The Principal shall:

- 1.2.1 Provide a copy of the Foothills School Division Service Dog AP 314 and AP317 - Severe Allergies to the parent/guardian of the student.
- 1.2.2 Inform the Superintendent that a written request has been made for Service Dog admittance to the school.
- 1.2.3 Ensure that the use of a Service Dog is consistent with the needs or recommendations of the student's ILP.
- 1.2.4 Consult with the Superintendent and school staff prior to arranging a conference with the parents.
- 1.2.5 Meet with the parents to review the requirements in the Service Dog Administrative Procedure and discuss the administrative procedure requirements and the potential transition requirements, including reasonable timelines, of the Service Dog entry into the school setting that ensure a safe and caring environment for all students.
- 1.2.6 Conduct a meeting with the parents/guardians, classroom teacher(s), and appropriate Special Education and support staff to review the provision of a Service Dog, and to develop a written plan to determine:
  - A. the purpose and function of the Service Dog;
  - B. who will accompany and handle the Service Dog outside;
  - C. personal care and physical needs of the Service Dog;
    - the safest and most environmentally sound place for the Service Dog to relieve itself,
    - removal and disposal of animal waste
    - provision of a suitable container for waste that the dog handler can access,

- considerations for seasonal changes, and inclement weather, and
  - considerations and routines necessary for reducing allergens and dander
- D. classroom considerations such as seating arrangements and changes to class placements;
  - E. any necessary changes in routine and procedures, and program changes;
  - F. arrangements for the Service Dog to visit the school without students present in order to familiarize it with the school site;
  - G. a transition plan for the Service Dog and the student;
  - H. 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
  - I. rules of conduct around the Service Dog for students, staff, and the public, and
  - J. methods of disseminating and regulating such rules.
- 1.2.7 Communicate in writing (Appendix A) 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 parents/guardians. 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.
- 1.2.8 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.
- 1.2.9 Liaise with stakeholders to resolve specific concerns or issues that may arise regarding the presence of a Service Dog in the school.

### 1.3 IMPLEMENTATION PROCEDURES AND TRANSITION PLAN

The Principal, Parent/Guardian(s), Teacher(s) and other staff members as required will work collaboratively to create a transition plan to assist in the integration of the Service Dog into the school environment. This transition plan will:

- 1.3.1 Communicate in writing to families in classes where the Service Dog will be present with the student they are supporting (Appendix B)
- 1.3.2 Provide for the Service Dog to visit the school without students present in order to familiarize it with the school site
- 1.3.3 Establish who will accompany and handle the Service Dog with the student.
- 1.3.4 Establish considerations and protocols for seasonal changes and inclement weather.
- 1.3.5 Establish the safest and most environmentally sound place for the Service Dog to relieve itself and who will be responsible for removal and disposal of animal waste
- 1.3.6 Determine parent/guardians or a staff member who will be responsible for the provision of a suitable container for the animal's waste.

- 1.3.7 Ensure that the Parent/Guardian is informed that the provision of a certified Service Dog and any objects/care it requires is the financial responsibility of the parent/Guardian or adult student.
- 1.3.8 Arrange for the Parent 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.
- 1.3.9 Establish any necessary changes to routine, procedures, or programming needs to be made prior to the Service Dog's entry. Programming needs should 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. AP317 – Severe Allergies should be consulted in this process.
- 1.3.10 Establish rules of conduct around the Service Dog for students, staff, and the public.
- 1.3.11 Revise emergency procedures as required to include the Service Dog, such as fire drills, evacuations, lock-downs, and notification of the fire department regarding the existence of the Service Dog.
- 1.3.12 Notify the Transportation department as required to advise drivers and any students who may be sharing transportation where the Service Dog will be present.
- 1.3.13 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.
- 1.3.14 Arrange for signage alerting school visitors to the Service Dog's presence must be placed in a visible location on the doors of the school.
- 1.3.15 Ensure that the Service Dog is incorporated into the ILP of the student as appropriate

## **2. THERAPY ANIMALS & EDUCATION ASSISTANCE ANIMALS / ANIMALS IN CLASSROOMS**

- 2.1 The Division recognizes that animals in school can provide educational value; however, this value must be balanced against the impact the animal has on the educational environment and the health and safety of members of the school community. The Division understands and supports the presence of animals in schools provided their presence is consistent with the following purposes:
- 2.2 **Therapy dogs** - people wishing to use a Therapy Dog to support student programming must:
  - 2.2.1 provide a letter outlining the benefits of having the Therapy Dog attend with children, descriptions of the Therapy Dog's activities, and the duration of the support.

- 2.2.2 Provide documentation indicating who the handler is and that the animal is a certified therapy animal. There are a number of certifying agencies, including, but not limited to, St. John's Ambulance.
- 2.2.3 Provide up to date proof of vaccinations and ensure the Therapy Dog is in good health;
- 2.2.4 Provide for the responsibility of care of the Therapy Dog. This includes the need for "bio- breaks", disposal of waste, provision of food and water.
- 2.2.5 Provide the school with signage (generally provided by the Therapy Animal assistance organization) alerting visitors/emergency service providers to the Animal's presence.
- 2.2.6 Understand that the handler is expected to be with the Therapy Dog at all times but in the rare situation where the handler cannot be with the animal, ensure arrangements are made where it is kenneled or equivalent.
- 2.2.7 Ensure the Therapy Dog is appropriately leashed, caged or harnessed while on school property.
- 2.2.8 Trainer/Handlers should carry a minimum of \$2,000,000 general liability insurance or proof of equivalent insurance through the organization the handler is representing.
- 2.2.9 When an administrator receives a written request for permission to have a Therapy Dog in the school, the administrator will:
- 2.2.10 Arrange a conference involving staff to discuss the following:
  - A. Notification and involvement of classroom staff
  - B. Review of the purpose and function of the Therapy Animal in relation to successful learning and/or safety for the students.
  - C. Clarification of review of all responsibilities of the trainer/handler with the school and Division; and
  - D. 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 Therapy Dogs, recognition of children with fear of Dogs, cultural sensitivities to groups that will not share space with an animal
- 2.2.11 Inform school community of potential arrival of a Therapy Dog to the school;
- 2.2.12 Send a specific letter home to the parents/guardians 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 should a conflict arise, priority will be given to the health and safety of the school community and the animal will be excluded from that area;
- 2.2.13 Work with appropriate personnel to revise emergency and safety procedures, as required, to include the Therapy Dog; and
- 2.2.14 Upon completion of the above (2.1-2.3.4), the administrator will forward their

decisions and all relevant information to the Director of Inclusive Learning.

### 2.3 Education Assistance Animals/Animals in Classrooms

- 2.3.1 Principals must approve in writing any animal introduced into the school or classroom environment using the request form included in this Administrative Procedure (Appendix C).
- 2.3.2 Animals/classroom pets approved to be in schools by a Principal should demonstrably provide a direct educationally or culturally valuable experience for students, such as a means to stimulate learning, and/or teach students about responsibility and compassion through their care and upkeep.
- 2.3.3 Teachers who have approved classroom pets/animals are ultimately responsible for the care, maintenance and wellbeing of the animal and to ensure the health and safety of the students and school community in presence of the animal.
- 2.3.4 The Division supports the use of animals for educational purposes provided the principal has provided approval, communicated to all members of the school community who may come in contact with the animal, and determined if the presence of an animal will affect other students and staff with medical restrictions.
- 2.3.5 All approved animals must be caged, enclosed or harnessed while on school property at all times.
- 2.3.6 Individuals wishing to bring an animal to school shall seek the permission of the teacher. (i.e. show and tell).
- 2.3.7 Teachers must have administrator's approval and ensure that the health and safety of their students is considered prior to approving one-time animal visits, such as show and tell, or selecting a classroom pet.

### 3. GENERAL

- 3.1 Animals should not be present in schools if their presence is not consistent with the above purposes or those purposes. Principals should limit, remove or exclude from school facilities or property any 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 and effective operation of the school or a school event. At all times the presence of animals in the school for the above purposes must be communicated to the school community.

## Administrative Procedure 314 – Appendix A

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### **SAMPLE LETTER TO THE SCHOOL COMMUNITY (SCHOOL LETTERHEAD)**

*Date*

Dear Parent / Guardian:

I am writing to advise that there will be a Service Dog arriving in our school to assist one of our students.

This Service Dog is a highly trained companion and is able to assist in many of the daily school routines and activities which may pose challenges for this student. Service Dogs are comparable to Guide Service Dogs and are included in aspects of the student's life at home and at school. The child's right to have a Service Dog is protected under Alberta Human Rights legislation and the *Service Dogs Act*, and implementation is defined by Foothills School Division policy.

There will be information sessions for all school staff and students to ensure a smooth integration of the Service Dog into our daily routines. All of our students and staff will be instructed as to the proper procedure regarding interactions with this dog as it is a working Service Dog and not a pet while at school. The provision of a Service Dog will be a significant benefit to the student, and we look forward to a lot of growth and learning together.

Thank you for your understanding, support, and interest. Should you have any questions please review the Foothills School Division Service Dog Administrative Procedure 314 online at [www.fsd38.ab.ca](http://www.fsd38.ab.ca) or contact me directly.

Sincerely,

Principal

cc: Superintendent, Classroom Teacher, Learning Coach

## Administrative Procedure 314 – Appendix B

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### **SAMPLE LETTER TO THE FAMILIES OF CHILDREN IN THE CLASS(ES) (SCHOOL LETTERHEAD)**

*Date*

Dear Parent / Guardian:

I am writing to advise that there will be a Service Dog coming into our school to assist one of our students, and that this student and the Service Dog will be a part of your child's class. This Service Dog is a highly trained companion and is able to assist in many of the routine activities which may pose some challenges for this student. Service Dogs are comparable to a Guide Service Dog and are included in every aspect of the student's life. The child's right to have a Service Dog is protected under Alberta Human Rights legislation and the *Service Dogs Act*. Implementation is defined by Foothills School Division policy.

There will be information sessions to integrate the Service Dog into the classroom and school routines, and all of our students will be instructed as to the proper procedure around the Service Dog. They will be informed that the Service Dog is a working Service Dog and not a pet while at school.

If you have any questions or specific concerns regarding the presence of the Service Dog in your child's class, please review the Foothills School Division Service Dog Administrative Procedure 314 online at [www.fsd38.ab.ca](http://www.fsd38.ab.ca) or contact me directly.

Thank you for your understanding, support, and interest.

Sincerely,

Principal

cc: Superintendent, Classroom Teacher, Learning Coach



## **REQUEST TO INTRODUCE A CLASSROOM PET**

1. A full-time classroom-based employee seeking to introduce a classroom pet is required to make a request to the school principal in writing to introduce a classroom pet for curricular purposes.
2. When requesting to introduce a classroom pet, the employee must consider and meet the following requirements:
  - 2.1 Provide of a plan and description of the educational outcomes, student interactions, and duration the animal will be present at the school. This request will only be considered for, and should not exceed, one school year. Permission for classroom pets for longer than one school year must be applied for annually and is at the sole discretion of the Principal.
  - 2.2 Confirm of ownership of the animal(s) by a full-time staff member working in the room where the animal may be housed.
  - 2.3 Confirm the animal is in good health, free of infection or infestation, and lacks aggression. The Principal may request a current veterinarian's note confirming the animal's health at any time if there is cause to question it.
  - 2.4 Submit plans for the animal's care, veterinary care, and ensure that enclosure size meets the standards for safety, design and location.
  - 2.5 Provide animal care plans to ensure the appropriate care of the animal over school calendar breaks and weekends. Management of care plans is the sole responsibility of the employee owner.
  - 2.6 Affirm that you are responsible for all costs associated with procuring the animal(s), related equipment, and veterinary care. Discuss food and supply costs with the Principal as a principal may accept or decline to pay food and supply costs via school funds, in which case, these are also the sole responsibility of the employee owner.
  - 2.7 Confirm the animal will be in an enclosure or otherwise will not be free-roaming in the classroom.
  - 2.8 Confirm the employee will appropriately manage the clean-up and dispose of all waste and may participate in this and similar case tasks.
  - 2.9 Confirm which, if any students, staff, or divisional staff who may be visiting the school, have known allergies to the animal and describe the strategies being proposed to reduce exposure to such students. Note that students with significant health issues will typically cause the request to be denied.
  - 2.10 Seek in writing permission from and notify parents of students within the classroom, classes, or school (as relevant) of the introduction of a classroom pet. (Important: Parent permission or notifications must not be distributed or completed until after the Principal is provided information on the request and conditionally granted approval). The Principal's final approval of the classroom pet will be contingent on the completion of the parent permission/notification process.

3. Notwithstanding the above, the Principal may deny the employee's request based on the presence of concerns over allergies and allergens, fear, health or safety issues, or logistical issues including space, load on school administration, concerns from parents or other staff, or other issues that may be raised by the presence of the pet(s) in the classroom. Similarly, the Principal may revoke their approval should issues arise after the animal(s) is introduced to the classroom.
4. The following guidance is provided to employees considering applying to introduce a classroom pet:
  - 4.1 classroom pet is not a disposable commodity, but a long-term commitment by the employee owner who, with permission, temporarily shares their pet(s) with students in the classroom for curricular purposes.
  - 4.2 A classroom pet must not be included in the Prohibited Animals (see Procedure #5 below).
  - 4.3 Appropriate species for classroom pets may include the following domestic animals:
  - 4.4 Guinea pigs can be well socialized when handled appropriately and regularly; they require room for exercise and ample housing. Average life expectancy is 5 to 7 years.
  - 4.5 Gerbils are sociable and curious but may be difficult for children to handle because of their small size. Typical life expectancy is 2 to 4 years.
  - 4.6 Domestic Rats are sociable if handled regularly and are very intelligent. Typical life expectancy is 2 to 3 years.
  - 4.7 Domestic fish are a good choice if a robust freshwater species but are not generally interactive. Typical life expectancy: 5 to 10 years (goldfish).
  - 4.8 Domestic ant farm (without a queen) can be educational, however, they are not generally interactive. Typical life expectancy of workers is 1-3 years, but with a queen a colony can live up to 30 years.
  - 4.9 Reptiles should be introduced with caution - Reptiles require very consistent tank heating which cannot be provided in a classroom. Typical lifespan can be over 30 years.
  - 4.10 Hamsters are nocturnal and, therefore, naturally sleep through the day and are awake at night. Hamsters are more likely to bite than other small rodents.
5. Prohibited Animals - All animals prohibited by the municipal, [provincial](#) (controlled animals) and/or federal legislation.
  - 4.11 Venomous animals, where the venom is known to be harmful to humans and deliverable to humans via contact with, or the natural behavior of, the animal.
  - 4.12 Constricting animals.
  - 4.13 Innately dangerous or aggressive animals.
  - 4.14 Wild animals (animals indigenous to Canada and captured from the wild).
  - 4.15 Exotic animals which are privately owned (animals indigenous to other countries and either captured in the wild or bred from wild animals and sold internationally.)

- 4.16 Nocturnal animals and any diurnal animals which would be unduly stressed by classroom noise and stimulation.
- 4.17 Domestic cats and dogs. (With the exceptions outlined in the Administrative Procedure for Service Dogs and Therapeutic Dogs.)
- 4.18 Domestic farm animals and livestock.
- 4.19 Animals known to commonly vector-borne communicable diseases transmissible to humans. Examples include, but are not limited to: salmonella, rabies, West Nile virus, avian infectious diseases, etc. Example of animals which can be vectors for transmissible diseases include, but are not limited to: some reptiles, amphibians, bats, birds, racoons; etc.
- 4.20 Animals being kept as a classroom, team, program, or school “mascot”.