

SERVICE DOGS FOR STUDENTS WITH SPECIAL NEEDS

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

The following procedures will be followed for admittance of a Service Dog to a school.

A. Parent/Guardian Responsibilities

The parent/guardian(s) shall:

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.
2. Request a copy of the Foothills School Division Service Dog Administrative Procedure (AP).
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.*
- 4. Provide detailed information and contact information from the agency training and supplying the Service Dog.
- 5. Work collaboratively with the Principal, district and school staff to ensure successful integration and on-going support for the Service Dog.
- 6. Assume all financial obligations regarding the use and care of the Service Dog.
- 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.

B. Principal's Responsibilities

The Principal shall:

1. Provide a copy of the Foothills School Division Service Dog AP 314 and AP317 -Severe Allergies to the parent/guardian of the student.
2. Inform the Superintendent that a written request has been made for Service Dog admittance to the school.
3. Ensure that the use of a Service Dog is consistent with the needs or recommendations of the student's ILP.
4. Consult with the Superintendent and school staff prior to arranging a conference with the parents.
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.
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:
 - 6.1 the purpose and function of the Service Dog;
 - 6.2 who will accompany and handle the Service Dog outside;
 - 6.3 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, and
 - considerations for seasonal changes, and inclement weather;
 - considerations and routines necessary for reducing allergens and dander
- 6.4 classroom considerations such as seating arrangements and changes to class placements;
 - 6.5 any necessary changes in routine and procedures, and program changes;
 - 6.6 arrangements for the Service Dog to visit the school without students present in order to familiarize it with the school site;
 - 6.7 a transition plan for the Service Dog and the student;
 - 6.8 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
 - 6.9 rules of conduct around the Service Dog for students, staff, and the public, and
 - 6.10 methods of disseminating and regulating such rules.
7. 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 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.
 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.
 9. Liaise with stakeholders to resolve specific concerns or issues that may arise regarding the presence of a Service Dog in the school.

C. 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. Provide for the Service Dog to visit the school without students present in order to familiarize it with the school site.
2. Establish who will accompany and handle the Service Dog with the student.
3. Establish considerations and protocols for seasonal changes and inclement weather.
4. 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.
5. Determine parent/guardians or a staff member who will be responsible for the provision of a suitable container for the animal's waste.
6. 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.

7. 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.
8. 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 restructuring 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.
9. Establish rules of conduct around the Service Dog for students, staff, and the public.
10. 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.
11. Notify the Transportation department as required to advise drivers and any students who may be sharing transportation where the Service Dog will be present.
12. 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.
13. 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.
14. Ensure that the Service Dog is incorporated into the ILP of the student as appropriate

Administrative Procedure 314 – Appendix A

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 or contact me directly.

Sincerely,

Principal

cc: Superintendent, Classroom Teacher, Learning Coach

Administrative Procedure 314 – Appendix B

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.

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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 or contact me directly.

Thank you for your understanding, support, and interest.

Sincerely,

Principal

cc: Superintendent, Classroom Teacher, Learning Coach