

USE OF SERVICE DOGS

Background

The Holy Spirit Catholic School Division believes in delivering high-quality education programs, supports, and services that allow students with diverse needs that may require accommodations, including the use of service dogs, to maximize their learning and achievement. The division believes that service dogs in school can provide educational value; however, this value must be balanced against the impact the service dog has on the educational environment and the health and safety of the school community.

Service dogs must be certified and registered in Alberta. To be a qualified service dog under the [Alberta Service Dogs Act](#), the dog must be trained through an Assistance Dogs International (ADI) accredited school. The Alberta Service Dogs Act website (through Alberta Human Services - Service Alberta) outlines the specific required information. Although **therapy dogs** are evaluated, trained and registered for their volunteer work, they do not undergo the same extensive specialized and unique training required of guide dogs and service dogs.

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

A service dog and handler must meet all of the requirements set in the [Alberta Service Dogs Act](#) / [Alberta's Blind Persons' Rights Act](#) to be considered to attend a facility of the Holy Spirit Catholic School Division and/or any Holy Spirit Catholic School Division sponsored event.

A certified and registered service dog is a working dog and there are strict guidelines for access, handling and interaction with these dogs. A service dog helps provide safety, independence, dignity, and confidence to the handler.

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(s).

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 service dog and handler return home where only the handler is encouraged to interact with the service dog. Eye contact and direct contact should be avoided by all members of the school community as it takes approximately 6 months for the bonding between the handler and the service dog.

Definitions

A “**service dog**” is “a dog trained as a guide for a disabled person and having the qualifications prescribed by the regulations” (Service Dogs Act of Alberta, 2009). For the purposes of this administrative procedure, the service dog definition would include dogs 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, etc.

A “**handler**” refers to the person for whom the service/guide dog is provided. A handler is not the student's parents.

A “**parent**” is as defined by [Alberta's Education Act](#).

Procedures

1. Parents or guardians wishing to use a service dog to support their child's program while at school shall:
 - a) Provide a written request to the principal for a service dog along with all supporting documentation;
 - i) 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;
 - ii) Complete [Appendix A: Request for a Certified Service Dog](#) and attach it to the aforementioned letter;
 - iii) Provide a letter from a physician confirming the student's requirement for the use of a service dog relating to the learning disability of the student or the person who has reached the age of 18 years provides the school principal with the identification referred to in section 6(2) of the Blinds Person's Act, and directly related to the learning needs of the student;
 - iv) 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; and
 - v) Provide up-to-date proof of vaccinations (as required by the service dog's veterinarian), licensing, insurance and ensure the service dog is in good health. This must be done annually if the service 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 service dog, and must be a minimum of two million dollars general liability coverage.
 - b) Complete [Appendix B: Management Plan for the Care of the Service Dog](#), which provides for the personal care and physical needs of the service dog. This includes the need for “bio-breaks”, including an area for the disposal of animal waste, provision of food, water, and a kennel;

- c) Once the accommodation has been confirmed, work with the school principal to schedule training by the service dog organization for the student's school team, bus driver(s), and educate the student body in the school and those students on the bus, on the role of a service dog and on the rules of conduct concerning the service dog. This training will be ongoing as staff changes, grade changes and other circumstances warrant;
 - d) Provide the school with signage (generally provided by the service dog organization) alerting visitors/emergency service providers to the service dog's presence;
 - e) 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; and
 - f) 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) Inform the Superintendent, Deputy Superintendent, and Director of Support Services of the request;
- b) Review documentation;
- c) Gather all relevant information as required;
- d) Consider the rights of other students and employees;
- e) Arrange a case conference involving parents, teacher(s), educational assistant(s), a representative of the service dog organization, and appropriate Student Services personnel to discuss the following:
 - i) Notification and involvement of classroom staff;
 - ii) Review the purpose and function of the service dog in relation to successful learning and/or safety for the student;
 - iii) Clarify all responsibilities of the family, school, and school division;
 - iv) Transportation of the student and service dog;
 - v) 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;
 - vi) Consider the rights and concerns of other students and employees, such as, but not limited to:
 - 1) Severe allergies to dogs, phobia, recognition of students with fear of dogs or anxiety to dogs, etc.;

- 2) Interference with the delivery of an educational program, possible changes to in-class routines and procedures, increased demands on staff;
 - 3) Cultural sensitivities to groups that will not share space with an animal; and
- vii) Develop a comprehensive transition plan for the introduction of the service dog which may involve the use of social stories, visits by the service dog to the school and classroom, etc.
 - f) Send a specific letter home to the parents of students who will be in any of the classes, classrooms or on a school bus where the service dog will possibly be present in case of allergies, anxieties or other concerns;
 - g) Work with appropriate personnel to revise emergency and safety procedures, as required, to include the service dog; and
 - h) Ensure that appropriate signage identifying the presence of a service/guide dog is posted at the school
3. Upon completion of the 2(a) - 2(h), the principal will forward all relevant information to the Superintendent, or designate(s).
 4. Students who are eligible for transportation services and require the use of a service dog are permitted to have the service dog accompany them on the bus with the following criteria:
 - a) Parents or guardians of students eligible for transportation services must contact the Transportation Coordinator or designate to ensure all bus policies are followed when transporting the student and the service dog to and from school on the school bus.
 - b) The Transportation Coordinator or designate must be provided with a copy of the Service Dog Team Identification Card.
 - c) The Transportation Coordinator or designate will ensure the provision of basic service dog training procedures for the drivers, substitute drivers, and passengers have occurred prior to the student and service dog riding the bus.
 - d) Parents will work with the Transportation Coordinator or designate, principal, and bus driver to develop an implementation plan, appropriate to the level of need for the student, to ensure the student can manage the service dog during the transportation process. If the student is not able to successfully manage the service dog on the bus, other plans may need to be made to have the service dog transported to and from school. The service dog should not sit in the aisle of the bus. The service dog should be in the seat compartment and/or on the floor away from the aisle on the bus to prevent the service dog from becoming a projectile or tripping hazard.
 5. A decision on the admittance of the service dog into the learning environment will be finalized by the Superintendent or designate(s), based upon the recommendation of the school principal and a review of submitted documentation pertaining to the:
 - student's educational needs,
 - fulfillment of family responsibilities, and
 - fulfillment of school and Division responsibilities to all stakeholders, including liability.

6. An agreement to accommodate a service dog may be terminated by Holy Spirit Catholic School Division if the service dog does not have up-to-date Assistance Dogs International accreditation documentation or licensing.
7. 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.
8. On occasion, circumstances of possible conflicting rights may occur (e.g. other individuals in the class may have allergies or fear of dogs). 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.
9. 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 Schools. The appeal must be in writing and must provide detailed information regarding the basis of the appeal.
10. A copy of all service dog request documentation will be placed in the student record file of the student requiring the service dog.

Additional Considerations/Requirements

1. An applicant requesting a service dog must communicate regularly with the school principal throughout the entire application and accommodation process.
2. An applicant requesting a service dog must, in consultation, with the school principal, arrange for the personal care and physical needs of the service dog when the dog is present;
3. A service dog will not be approved to be in the school if the individual cannot control the dog's behaviour;
4. If the student moves to a different school, the written request for a service/guide dog must be resubmitted and initiated in advance, at the new school with the school principal;
5. A service dog may be excluded from access to specific areas where required by other laws (i.e. food preparation areas)
6. Volunteers or guests requiring service dogs must also meet Holy Spirit Catholic School Division's security clearance requirements.

Legal References: **Section 11, 52, 53, 196, 197, 222, Education Act**
Alberta Human Rights Act
Alberta Service Dogs Act
Alberta Occupational Health and Safety Act, Regulations and Code
Alberta Public Health Act and Regulations
Blind Persons' Rights Act
Alberta Service Dogs Qualifications Regulation 197/2008 (consolidated up to 34/2015)
Administrative Procedure 212: Inclusive Education