
SERVICE AND EDUCATIONAL ASSISTANCE (THERAPY) DOGS/ANIMALS IN SCHOOL

Background

St. Thomas Aquinas Catholic Schools is committed to the delivery of high quality education programs, supports and services that allow students with diverse needs to maximize their learning and achievement. The Division recognizes the diverse needs of some students may require unique accommodation(s). These accommodations, linked to the student's learning profile, may include the use of service dogs or therapy animals.

St. Thomas Aquinas Catholic Schools is also committed to ensuring it operates within the legal mandate of all legislation in meeting the needs of its students. This includes the School Act and the Human Rights Act, specifically the Alberta *Service Dogs Act* (January 1, 2009), which legally recognized all service dogs. Albertans with disabilities who use qualified service dogs now have access to all public places in the province. These are the same rights as blind and/or visually impaired persons who use a guide dog.

Procedures

1. A service dog is defined a "dog trained as a guide for a disabled person and having the qualifications prescribed by the regulations. (*Service Dog Act*) For the purposes of this policy, 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.
2. An Educational Assistance Animal (EAA) is defined as an animal that works with its owner/handlers as a team to improve a student's physical, social, emotional, or cognitive functioning. An EAA can be useful for educational and motivational effectiveness for participants. An EAA is not a "certified Therapy animal/dog." Although therapy animals are specially evaluated, trained, and registered for their volunteer work, they do not undergo the same extensive specialized and unique training required of i.e. guide dogs, hearing dogs, and therapy dogs. Examples of EAAs are library dogs and therapy animals.
3. Parent/guardian must request in writing to the School, permission to use a service dog or therapy animal.
4. Prior to the transition of a service dog or a therapy animal into a school, the principal will work with parents/guardians to provide:

- 4.1. 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. Parents can apply to servicedogs@gov.ab.ca for a service dog license. In the case of a therapy animal, provided documentation that the EAA is a certified therapy animal.
 - 4.2. a copy of the Service Dog Identification Card will be placed in the cumulative file;
 - 4.3. a copy of medical certification that the Service Dog or therapy animal is required to assist the student to attend school.
 - 4.4. for the responsibility of care of the service dog or therapy animal. This includes the need for portable kennel, vest, leash, "bio-breaks", disposal of waste, provision of storage food and water;
 - 4.5. training for the student's school team and bus driver(s) by the service dog organization and to educate the student body in the school and those on the bus on the role of the service dog and on the rules of conduct concerning the dog. In the case of a therapy animal the EEA handlers must remain under the direct supervision of a staff member at all times. This process will be ongoing as staff changes, grade changes, and other circumstances warrant it;
 - 4.6. signage (generally provided by the service dog organization) alerting visitors/emergency service providers to the service dogs' or therapy animals' presence; and
 - 4.7. indication of who will accompany and handle the service dog or therapy animal both inside and outside the school and what arrangements have been made with regards to alternate handlers when necessary.
5. When an administrator receives a request to have a service dog or therapy animal accompany a student to school, the administrator will:
 - 5.1. inform the Director of Student Services of the request;
 - 5.2. arrange a case conference involving:
 - 5.2.1. parents/guardians,
 - 5.2.2. teachers
 - 5.2.3. classroom assistants,
 - 5.2.4. Transportation Officer, if appropriate,
 - 5.2.5. Administration from feeder schools, if appropriate
 - 5.2.6. a representative of the service dog organization, if appropriate, and
 - 5.2.7. appropriate Student Services personnel to discuss the following:
 - 5.2.7.1. review the purpose and function of the service dog in relation to successful learning and/or safety for the student;
 - 5.2.7.2. notification and involvement of staff;
 - 5.2.7.3. clarify all responsibilities of the family, school and Division;

5.2.7.4. transportation of the student and service dog or therapy animal, if appropriate.

6. Development of a comprehensive transition plan for the introduction of the service dog or therapy animal which may involve the use of social stories, visits by the service dog or therapy animal to the school/classroom including:
 - 6.1. inform school staff, school council representatives and parents of the arrival of a service dog or therapy animal to the school;
 - 6.2. send a specific letter home to the parents of students who will be in any of the classes where the service dog or therapy animal will possibly be present in case of allergies, anxieties or other concerns;
 - 6.3. may arrange an assembly for the student body involving representatives from the service dog or therapy animal organization, the parent and possibly the handler to explain the role of the service dog;
 - 6.4. explore 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 dogs or therapy animals, recognition of children with fear of dogs and other animals, cultural sensitivities to groups that will not share space with a dog or animal;
7. The service dog or therapy animal transition into the school will be finalized by the Director of Student Services based upon the recommendation of the school administrator and a review of the documentation pertaining to the:
 - 7.1. student's educational needs;
 - 7.2. fulfillment of family responsibilities;
 - 7.3. fulfillment of school and Division responsibilities to all stakeholders, including liability; and
 - 7.4. eligibility for transportation, the Human Rights Code and the Blind Person's Rights Act establish the right for the service dog to be allowed to accompany the student on the bus. The same duty to accommodate can be applied to a therapy animal.
8. Staff, students/parents of a student with medical issues that are impacted by dogs or other animals (such as respiratory diseases) should contact the principal if they have a concern about exposure to a service dog or therapy animal. The staff member, student/parents of student will be asked to provide medical documentation that identifies the disability and the need for an accommodation. The principal, in consultation with the Director of Student Services, will facilitate a process to resolve the conflict that considers the conflicting needs/accommodations of all persons involved.
9. Any student/parent of a student with a service dog (or therapy animal) or staff or parent/guardian of a student who is aggrieved by the principal's decision may appeal

that decision to the Superintendent or designate. That appeal must be in writing and provide detailed information regarding the basis of the appeal.

10. At the end of each year a comprehensive transition plan will be communicated to those who need to know.

APPENDIX A: Sample Letter of Parent/Guardian Understanding

APPENDIX B: Sample Letter to the School Community

APPENDIX C: Sample Letter to Families with Children in the Classroom

APPENDIX D: Principal Checklist

APPENDIX E: Transportation Protocol

Reference: Section 45, School Act
 Section 33, Education Act (New 2012)
 Alberta Service Dogs Act
 Alberta Service Dog Qualification Regulation
 Alberta Blind Persons' Rights Act
 Alberta Human Rights Act

Administrative Procedure 327 Appendix A

LETTER OF PARENT/GUARDIAN UNDERSTANDING

Name of Student: _____ D.O.B. _____

Address: _____

School: _____

Name(s) of Parent(s)/Guardian(s): _____

Telephone Number: _____

1. I/We understand that it is our responsibility to:
 - 1.1. Provide the principal with a copy of the Service Dog Team Identification Card;
 - 1.2. Provide a copy of medical certification that the service dog or therapy animal is required to assist the student to attend school.
 - 1.3. Participate in a school case conference to inform the principal of all relevant information that may affect our child, other students, staff, and/or visitors to the school;
 - 1.4. Work cooperatively with the principal to train school staff, bus driver(s) and students;
 - 1.5. Assist the principal to communicate relevant information to the school community;
 - 1.6. Work cooperatively with the school staff to ensure the transition of the service dog or therapy animal into the school environment is successful;
 - 1.7. Work cooperatively with the Transportation Department to ensure successful transportation of your child and the service dog to school every day;
 - 1.8. Provide the required food, equipment and dog/therapy animal care items;
 - 1.9. Work cooperatively with the principal to ensure food, water and bio-breaks to the service dog/therapy animal as required and;
 - 1.10. Work cooperatively with the principal to ensure removal and disposal of dog waste in a safe and environmentally friendly manner.
2. I/We understand that if the service dog/therapy animal exhibits any unprovoked behaviours (i.e. growling, scratching, nipping, biting, etc.) at school it will be removed until the plan is re-evaluated to ensure the safety of staff, students, and visitors.
3. I/We are responsible to address the damages caused by the service dog/therapy animal.

4. I/We have been informed by the principal that I/we should consider obtaining adequate insurance for general liability for the service dog or therapy animal.
5. I/We give permission for this information to be shared with the school community and agree to the notification of students through letters (Appendices B & C).
6. I/We understand that the principal shall preserve the confidentiality of all information received and shall not disclose the information except as provided for in the Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act, the School Act or as otherwise required by law. The principal shall use and disclose information with Board personnel as may be required for the performance of their duties including sharing information concerning the service dog with the school community.
7. I/We acknowledge having received and read **Administrative Procedure 327, SERVICE AND EDUCATIONAL ASSISTANCE (THERAPY) DOGS/ANIMALS IN SCHOOL**
8. We agree to the above conditions.

Signature of Parent(s)/Guardian(s): _____

Date: _____

Administrative Procedure 327 Appendix B

SAMPLE LETTER TO THE SCHOOL COMMUNITY

Date

Dear Parents/Guardians,

This letter is to inform you that there will be a service dog or therapy animal in our school assisting one of our students. This service dog or therapy animal is a trained companion for the student and is able to assist him/her in many of the daily routines while learning at school.

This certified service dog or therapy animal is highly trained and recognized by an accredited Canadian training facility. The student's right to have a certified service dog is protected under Human Rights legislation and the School Act and therefore can be with the handler in all aspects of his/her education.

There will be an information assembly at the school to help students identify with the service dog or therapy animal and how it will fit into daily school routines. All students will be informed as to proper procedures around the animal because the animal is not a pet but a certified working service dog or therapy animal while at school.

We anticipate the service dog or therapy animal will be a benefit to the student's learning and we look forward to this new addition to our school community.

Thank you for your understanding and support. Should you have any questions or concerns, please contact the school office.

Sincerely,

Principal

Administrative Procedure 327 Appendix C

SAMPLE LETTER TO FAMILIES WITH CHILDREN IN THE CLASSROOM

Date

Dear Parents/Guardians,

This letter is to inform you that there will be a service dog or therapy animal in our school assisting one of our students. This service dog or therapy animal is a trained companion for a student and will be in your child's classroom effective (date).

This certified service dog or therapy animal is highly trained and recognized by an accredited Canadian training facility. The student's right to have a certified service dog or therapy animal is protected under Human Rights legislation and the School Act and therefore can be with the handler in all aspect of his/her education. An upcoming information session for parents/guardians will offer more information on how the service dog or therapy animal will be integrated into the school setting.

There will be an information assembly at the school to help students identify with the service dog or therapy animal and how it will fit into daily school routines. All students will be informed as to proper procedures around the animal because the animal is not a pet but a certified working service dog or therapy animal while at school.

We anticipate the service dog or therapy animal will be a benefit to the student's learning and we look forward to this new addition to our school community.

Thank you for your understanding and support. Should you have any questions or concerns, please contact the school office.

Sincerely,

Principal

Administrative Procedure 327 Appendix D

PRINCIPAL CHECKLIST

This guideline is to assist school administration in preparing for a service dog or therapy animal to accompany a student at school.

- ___ The parents/guardians have provided a Service Dog Identification Card

- ___ The parents/guardians have provided a copy of medical certification that the service dog or therapy animal is required to assist the student to attend school.

- ___ The parents/guardians have signed the Letter of Parent/Guardian Understanding

- ___ The parents/guardians have been informed that the provision of the service dog or therapy animal is the financial responsibility of the parent/guardian.

- ___ The parent/guardian has been informed that the maintenance of the service dog or therapy animal, including bio-breaks, clean-up and other care, as required, is the responsibility of the parent or mutually agreed upon arrangements.

- ___ The parent/guardian has met with the principal to discuss the potential impact of the service dog or therapy animal on the school community.

- ___ The principal has consulted with the Superintendent and the Director of Student Services prior to transitioning the Service Dog or therapy animal into the school.

- ___ The principal has communicated with the school community to ensure that parents/guardians know a Service Dog or therapy animal will be present in the school.

- ___ A specific letter has been sent to the parents/guardians of students who will be in any of the classes that the animal will possibly be present in case of allergies, anxieties or other concerns.

Administrative Procedure 327 Appendix E

TRANSPORTATION PROTOCOL

The following protocol is suggested for a safe ride with the service dog or therapy animal

1. A student that is eligible to bring a service dog or therapy animal to school is allowed by law to have the animal transported on the school bus.
2. The Transportation Department should be assured by the principal that the animal is a licensed, trained animal.
3. The animal should not sit in the aisle of the bus. Whenever possible, they should be in the seat compartment and/or on the floor away from the aisle to prevent it from becoming a projectile or a tripping hazard.
4. The handler or school must provide basic training for the driver and other students on the bus to ensure all parties have an understanding of what is allowed and what is not allowed.
5. The animal is a highly trained and should not be touched or fed by anyone but the handler. The animal is working while on the bus and therefore should be quiet, still, and attentive to the handler.
6. The Director of Student Services may determine the need for another person to assist the student and animal on the bus.