

SERVICE / COMFORT DOGS IN SCHOOL

Background

Service Dogs: The Division supports the use of service dogs in school for the academic, social and emotional benefit of its students and staff. The presence of a service dog can decrease anxiety and provide a level of service that enables students to work through a variety of challenging issues. Their presence can have ancillary benefits and may even provide support to individuals other than their handler. It is important to note that comfort dogs are not service dogs. Service dogs are trained to perform tasks to ease their handlers' disabilities, helping them to attain safety and independence and are legally entitled to attend schools in accordance with the *Service Dogs Act*.

Comfort Dogs: Like service dogs, the Division accepts that comfort dogs may also provide benefits to staff and students academically, socially and emotionally. The presence of a comfort dog can decrease anxiety and provide a level of service/comfort that enables students to work through a variety of challenging issues. However, unlike service dogs, comfort dogs are not mandated or subject to certified qualifications under the *Service Dogs Act*. As a result, the attendance of comfort dogs is discretionary except where the *Alberta Human Rights Act* otherwise requires.

Research into the effects of service dogs in schools demonstrates a range of potential benefits to students including:

- increase in school attendance,
- gains in confidence,
- decreases in learner anxiety behaviours resulting in improved learning outcomes, such as increases in reading and writing levels,
- positive changes in individual students' engagement with school,
- enhanced relationships with peers and staff members,
- increase in a student's ability to express feelings and ability to regulate emotions.

Procedures for Students Seeking to Bring a Service/Comfort Dog

1. The following minimum standards shall be in effect for all service/comfort dogs approved to serve in a school:
 - 1.1 must be clean, well-groomed, and not have an offensive odour;
 - 1.2 must not annoy any member of the student body or school personnel by seeking attention;
 - 1.3 must not urinate or defecate in inappropriate locations;
 - 1.4 must not vocalize unnecessarily;
 - 1.5 must show no aggression towards people or other animals;
 - 1.6 must not solicit or steal food or other items from the student body or school personnel; and
 - 1.7 must not pose a health or safety threat to any student, personnel or other persons.
2. Service/comfort dogs are independently owned and must meet standards of health as prescribed by veterinarians at the owner's expense. The Division bears no financial responsibility for the care or feeding of the animal.

3. Approval by the Principal must be obtained:
 - 3.1 each school year;
 - 3.2 whenever the dog owner wishes to use a different service dog; and
 - 3.3 in the case of a service dog, whenever the Service Dog Identification Card or Assistance Dogs International School Card expires.

4. The dog handler shall provide to the Principal the following documentation regarding the potential service dog:
 - 4.1 in the case of a comfort dog, proof of certification from certifying agency such as Community Therapy Dogs Society or St. John's Ambulance;
 - 4.2 in the case of a service dog recognized under the Service Dogs Act (ie. the Service Dog Identification Card issued by the Government of Alberta or by an Assistance Dogs International School operating outside of Alberta - which contains the name of the handler and dog, a photo of the handler and dog a validation number, and a date of expiration);
 - 4.3 in the case of a comfort dog, where the handler is claiming a disability for which a comfort dog provides an ameliorating benefit, a valid recent medical information from a health care practitioner providing confirmation as to the nature of the medical condition, the symptoms of that condition that are relevant to the school environment, the triggers of that condition relevant to the school environment, the benefits provided by a comfort animal to those triggers or symptoms;
 - 4.4 proof of dog's current vaccination;
 - 4.5 proof of health, such as a current health certificate from a veterinarian;
 - 4.6 visible cleanliness of dog with no sign of ticks/fleas;
 - 4.7 a visually healthy, alert and not over or underweight dog;
 - 4.8 in the case of non-independent student, a completed copy of the letter in the form identified in Form 191-1; and
 - 4.9 a copy of the dog owner/handler's minimum of \$2,000,000 general liability insurance or proof of equivalent insurance through the organization the handler and service/comfort dog are representing in the form of a certificate of insurance with The Battle River School Division named as an additional insured.

5. Where the Principal receives the information required under paragraph 4, the Principal shall grant approval for a service dog to attend the school. In the case of a comfort animal, the Principal retains discretion to permit or deny the attendance of the comfort animal unless otherwise required by human rights legislation. If approved and prior to the service/comfort dog starting at the school, the Principal must ensure the following:
 - 5.1 A letter has been provided to staff and sent to parents/guardians in any of the classes where the service/comfort dog will be present to elicit information concerning allergies, phobias or religious considerations from the staff member, student and/or parents/guardians. Should a conflict arise, priority will be given to the health and safety of the school community and the service/comfort dog will be excluded from that specific area and/or entire school.
 - 5.2 The handler has provided in writing to the Principal a detailed schedule outlining the location, times and details of when and how the dog will be used in the school.
 - 5.3 The Principal has met with the handler to discuss the expectations of the dog's grooming, hygiene, behaviour and role in the school.
 - 5.4 In conjunction with the handler, the Principal must ensure that the personal care and physical needs of the service/comfort dog are met including plans for the:
 - 5.4.1 safest and most environmentally sound place for the service/comfort dog to relieve itself;

- 5.4.2 removal and disposal of animal waste; and
 - 5.4.3 provision of a suitable container for waste that the handler can access.
 - 5.4 Careful consideration has been given to which students and staff may be exposed to the service/comfort dog.
 - 5.5 Inform parents in situations such as when the service/comfort dog will be working in a class or has scheduled visit with an individual student.
 - 5.6 Arrangements have been made to inform the school community of the presence of the service/comfort dog including signage placed on each entry door of the school.
6. The Principal has the authority to end any arrangement pertaining to the use of service/comfort dogs at any time as permitted by legislation.

Procedures for Staff Seeking to Bring a Service/Comfort Dog to a School

7. The following minimum standards shall be in effect for all service/comfort dogs approved to serve in a school:
- 7.1 must be clean, well-groomed, and not have an offensive odour;
 - 7.2 must not annoy any member of the student body or school personnel by seeking attention;
 - 7.3 must not urinate or defecate in inappropriate locations;
 - 7.4 must not vocalize unnecessarily;
 - 7.5 must show no aggression towards people or other animals;
 - 7.6 must not solicit or steal food or other items from the student body or school personnel; and
 - 7.7 must not pose a health or safety threat to any student, personnel or other persons.
8. Service/comfort dogs are independently owned and must meet standards of health as prescribed by veterinarians at the owner's expense. The Division bears no financial responsibility for the care or feeding of the animal.
9. Approval by the Secretary-Treasurer must be obtained:
- 9.1 each school year,
 - 9.2 whenever the dog owner wishes to use a different service dog, and
 - 9.3 in the case of a service dog, whenever the Service Dog Identification Card or Assistance Dogs International School Card expires.
10. To obtain such approval the staff person shall provide to the Secretary-Treasurer the following documentation:
- 10.1 in the case of a comfort dog, proof of certification from certifying agency such as Community Therapy Dogs Society or St. John's Ambulance;
 - 10.2 in the case of a service dog recognized under the Service Dogs Act (ie. the Service Dog Identification Card issued by the Government of Alberta or by an Assistance Dogs International School operating outside of Alberta – which contains the name of the handler and dog, a photo of the handler and dog a validation number, and a date of expiration);
 - 10.3 a valid recent medical information from a health care practitioner providing confirmation as to the nature of the medical condition requiring or supporting the use of the service/comfort dog, the symptoms of that condition that are relevant to the work environment, the triggers of that condition relevant to the school environment, the benefits provided by a comfort animal to those triggers or symptoms;
 - 10.4 proof of dog's current vaccination;

- 10.5 proof of health, such as a current health certificate from a veterinarian;
- 10.6 visible cleanliness of dog with no sign of ticks/fleas;
- 10.7 a visually healthy, alert and not over or underweight dog; and
- 10.8 a copy of the dog owner/handler's minimum of \$2,000,000 general liability insurance or proof of equivalent insurance through the organization the handler and service/comfort dog are representing in the form of a certificate of insurance with The Battle River School Division named as an additional insured.

11. Where the Secretary-Treasurer receives the information required under paragraph 10, then the Division shall determine its ability and obligation permit or deny the attendance of the comfort animal under human rights legislation – considering the impact on the applicant and on others in the working environment. The Secretary-Treasurer may also consider other means of accommodating an underlying disability that would reasonably address the condition, disability, symptoms and limitations. If approved and prior to the service/comfort dog starting at the school, the Secretary-Treasurer must ensure the following:

- 11.1 A letter has been provided to staff and sent to parents/guardians in any of the classes where the service/comfort dog will be present to elicit information concerning allergies, phobias or religious considerations from the staff member, student and/or parents/guardians. Should a conflict arise, priority will be given to the health and safety of the school community and the service/comfort dog will be excluded from that specific area and/or entire school.
- 11.2 The handler has provided in writing to the Principal a detailed schedule outlining the location, times and details of when and how the dog will be used in the school.
- 11.3 The Principal has met with the handler to discuss the expectations of the dog's grooming, hygiene, behaviour and role in the school.
- 11.4 In conjunction with the handler, the Principal must ensure that the personal care and physical needs of the service/comfort dog are met including plans for the:
 - 11.4.1 safest and most environmentally sound place for the service/comfort dog to relieve itself;
 - 11.4.2 removal and disposal of animal waste; and
 - 11.4.3 provision of a suitable container for waste that the handler can access.
- 11.5 Careful consideration has been given to which students and staff may be exposed to the service/comfort dog.
- 11.6 Inform parents in situations such as when the service/comfort dog will be working in a class or has scheduled visit with an individual student.
- 11.7 Arrangements have been made to inform the school community of the presence of the service/comfort dog including signage placed on each entry door of the school.

12. The Division has the authority to end any arrangement pertaining to the use of service/comfort dogs at any time as permitted by legislation.

References: Section 11,33,52,53,196,197,222 Education Act;
Service Dogs Act; Service Dog Qualification Regulation; Blind Persons' Rights Act; Alberta Human Rights Act

Appendix: Service Dog - Transportation Protocol

Forms: Service/Comfort Dog - Letter of Parent/Guardian Understanding (191-1)
Service/Comfort Dog - Principal Checklist (191-2)

Samples Letters: Service Dog - Sample Letter - Employees re: Dog on School Grounds
Service Dog - Sample Letter - Parents re: School
Service Dog - Sample Letter - Parents of Students in Classes
Service Dog - Sample Letter - Parents of Students on School Bus