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IMG
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Guidelines for Animals in School

The St. James-Assiniboia School Division supports the use animals in schools as a tool for enriching the learning of students, as long as the appropriate planning and preparation have taken place.

Decisions regarding the use of service and non-service animals in the school environment are made on a case-by-case basis. All circumstances of a particular request, including the individual needs of the student being assisted by the animal and the needs of other students and staff, will be considered. Where necessary in the decision-making process, the rights and needs of one person may have to be balanced against the rights and needs of another.

A. Definitions:

1. Service Animals:

- a. Service Animals are recognized working animals that have been trained to assist children and adults who have a physical, developmental or psychiatric disability with their daily living activities. The adult/parent/caregiver and school must follow strict guidelines that apply to their access, handling, and interaction. The use of service animals is an intervention strategy that is recognized as an aid to the learning and social/emotional/behavioural needs of students with additional needs.

The term “service animals” can refer to animals that assist those with a physical disability and includes pulling, bracing, retrieving, and hearing dogs. Service animals may also be trained to alert or protect a person who is having a seizure, remind a person to take their medication, calm or address other disability-related needs of a person with mental health issues, and prevent children from leaving the classroom unsupervised, running into traffic, etc.

It is acknowledged that dogs remain the most common form of service animal, but other animals may be trained to be service animals.

- b. Guide Dogs for the Blind & Visually Impaired focus on increased independent travel for the individual. The guide dog is trained for safe street crossings, using public transportation, and exposure to all environments. Users of guide dogs will have previous mobility training in the school system or adult agencies for blind and visually impaired.
- c. Psychiatric Service Dogs are individually trained for individuals with an emotional or psychiatric disability so severe that it substantially limits their ability to perform at least one major life task.

ADOPTED	REVIEWED	REVISED	PAGE
26/Nov/13	24/June/14	5/Nov/24	1 of 4
Motion 19-02-13	Motion 12-17-14	Motion 11-12-24	

- d. The Human Rights Code does not cover animals whose sole function is to provide comfort or emotional support. Animals in the school for reasons other than those listed under Service Animals are covered under Non-Service Animals. Animals that provide comfort or companionship and that are not trained to assist with a person's disability-related needs are not service animals.

2. Non-Service Animals:

- a. Companion Animals is an emerging support for students. These animals may be present to assist a child in feeling comfortable or less anxious in the school environment. A companion animal is not necessarily professionally trained. Companion animals do not have designated responsibilities and provide companionship only for the designated individual. Companion animals are not considered service animals and are not guaranteed access to public spaces.
- b. Therapy Dogs (Canine Assisted Learning Program) are trained to provide affection and comfort to people in hospitals, retirement homes and schools. The therapy dog and the trained handler have been certified by St. Johns Ambulance or another recognized organization. The dog must be under the direction of an adult who is authorized to be in the school setting. Therapy dogs are not considered service animals and are not guaranteed access to public spaces.

B. Roles and Responsibilities:

Entry of service or non-service animals is decided after extensive consultation and in accordance with the procedures listed below. The request will be reviewed by the Principal, Director, Inclusion Support Services and Accessibility and the Superintendent/CEO.

A request for a service animal cannot be refused unless the proper authorization, planning and preparation have not been completed in advance. On the contrary, a request for a non-service animal can be refused but will be considered if the request is tied to an instructional goal with proof that the animal can be handled safely in a school environment.

1. Parent/Caregiver Responsibilities:

- a. To initiate the process of having a service or non-service animal assist a student in school, speak with the Principal well in advance of the implementation of the service or non-service animal. The principal will provide copies of required documentation for completion.
- b. Complete required documentation.
- c. Provide a letter from a relevant, approved health-care professional (i.e. physician, psychiatrist, or psychologist) confirming the diagnosis and the recommendation for the use of a service animal or non-service animal.

ADOPTED	REVIEWED	REVISED	PAGE
26/Nov/13	24/June/14	5/Nov/24	2 of 4
Motion 19-02-13	Motion 12-17-14	Motion 11-12-24	

- d. Provide a letter from the service that trained the animal stating a service or non-service animal has been placed with the student.
- e. Provide proof that the animal is in good health, properly licensed and has an up-to-date record of all vaccinations.
- f. The employee or parent/caregiver is also informed that the provision of a fully trained animal handler to help with the initial implementation or any re-training sessions (for a defined period) that may be required is the financial responsibility of the employee or parent/caregiver. This also includes students with a service animal already in place who transfers into the division.
- g. The Director, Inclusion Support Services and Accessibility may contact the animal certification agency for further information about placement and information regarding the animal in the school setting.
- h. The parent/caregiver of a student, or the employee, that requires the use of a service or non-service animal assumes custody and control of the care and feeding of the animal and shall be liable for any damage to persons, premises, property, or facilities caused by the animal, including, but not limited to, clean up and stain removal.
- i. Students who are transferring into the division who already have a service or non-service animal in place as part of a Student Specific Plan (SSP), are required to provide advance notice prior to registering in the division.
- j. Transportation of a Service Animal
 - The employee or parent(s)/caregiver(s) is responsible for transporting the animal to and from school or walking with the animal unless it is determined that the division will transport the student and the service animal.
 - If the animal is going to be transported on the bus, a Personal Transportation Plan must be submitted for approval by the Student Services Coordinator and Supervisor, Transportation.
 - A protocol is developed for handling the service animal on the bus and has been collaboratively developed and implemented with the animal's trainer/handler.
 - Appropriate training will then be provided for all St. James-Assiniboia School Division staff involved in the transportation of the student and service animal.
 - The service animal must always be under control when on the bus, including entering and exiting the bus.
 - The other students transported in the bus shall receive training from the dog handler and/or parent/caregiver in collaboration with the school regarding how to interact appropriately with the service dog.
 - An evacuation plan for the bus is developed and practiced.

C. Employees:

Staff who require service animals must meet the requirements as outlined in Regulation IMG-R and provide the necessary documentation to the Human Resources Department.

ADOPTED	REVIEWED	REVISED	PAGE
26/Nov/13	24/June/14	5/Nov/24	3 of 4
Motion 19-02-13	Motion 12-17-14	Motion 11-12-24	

D. Exclusions:

A service animal may be excluded from access to the premises only where:

- Exclusion is required by statute.
- The service animal is of a breed that is prohibited by law or municipal by-law.
- There is a risk to the health, safety and post-trauma of another person as a result of the presence of the service animal. Consideration should be given to options available prior to exclusion of the animal. An example would be a situation where an individual has a severe allergy to the service animal. The situation should be fully analyzed and all measures to eliminate the risk should be considered.

E. References:

These guidelines are developed and consistent with the following legislations:

- The Public Schools Act, Appropriate Educational Programming (Manitoba)
- The Human Rights Code (Manitoba)
- The Canadian Chart of Rights and Freedoms
- The Service Animals Protection Act (Manitoba)

ADOPTED	REVIEWED	REVISED	PAGE
26/Nov/13	24/June/14	5/Nov/24	4 of 4
Motion 19-02-13	Motion 12-17-14	Motion 11-12-24	