
SERVICE DOGS IN SCHOOLS

Background

St. Thomas Aquinas Catholic Schools recognizes that the diverse needs of some students or staff may require unique accommodations. These accommodations, linked to the student's learning profile, or the staff's medical needs, may include the use of Service Dogs.

St. Thomas Aquinas Catholic Schools is committed to ensuring it operates within the legal mandate of all legislation in meeting the needs of its students and staff. This includes the Education Act and the Human Rights Act, specifically the Alberta *Service Dogs Act* (January 1, 2009), which legally recognizes all legally qualified Service Dogs. Albertans with disabilities who use qualified Service Dogs have access to all public places in the province.

Definitions:

Accommodation: Refers to a means through reasonable efforts, such as the prevention or removal of barriers that impede applicants with disabilities, from participating reasonably in the educational services provided by the Division.

Handler: Refers to the individual who directs the use and attention of the Service Dog. In instances where the Service Dog accommodates a specific student or staff member, the handler shall be:

- the student or staff member requiring accommodation, or
- the Educational Assistant assigned to work with the student, if appropriate after review and consideration by the Superintendent or designate, in consultation with the Principal

Service Dog: A Service Dog is defined as “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.
- Service dogs must be registered in Canada. The Government of Alberta developed provincial standards and a qualified list of animal training schools to support the safety and inclusion of Albertans who rely on Service Dogs. (See Alberta Training Standard of Organizations to be Eligible for the Qualification List pursuant to the Service Dogs Qualification Regulation A/R 59/2017 as amended from time to time.)

- The use and access of Service Dogs are protected under the Alberta Service Dogs Act.
- Emotional support or comfort dogs and therapy dogs are not considered Service Dogs under Alberta's Service Dogs Act and Service Dogs Qualifications Regulations.
 - Emotional support dogs provide comfort and companionship to the dog owner, but are not trained to do specific tasks that assist a disability.
 - A therapy dog is brought by the owner on visits to people in institutions or in their homes, providing others with an opportunity to interact with a dog.(See AP 326 Animals in Schools)

Procedures:

1. A Parent/guardian or staff member must request in writing, permission to use a Service Dog.
2. The Principal or Designate shall review the request, including meeting with the applicant, to ensure the proper, prudent, and timely determination of the accommodation request for use of a Service Dog within the school.
3. Prior to the transition of a Service Dog into a school, the Principal or designate will work with parents/guardians or staff member to review the following:
 - 3.1. a copy of medical documentation that the Service Dog is required to assist the student or staff member to attend school;
 - 3.2. a copy of the Service Dog Team Identification Card issued by the Government of Alberta. A copy of the Alberta Service Dog Identification Card will be placed in the cumulative file;
 - 3.3. the plan for the responsibility of care of the Service Dog, which includes the need for portable kennel, vest, leash, "bio-breaks", disposal of waste, provision of storage food and water;
 - 3.4. training for the student's school team and bus driver(s) by the Service Dog organization and to educate the student body and staff in the school and those on the bus on the role of the Service Dog and on the rules of conduct concerning the dog. This process will be ongoing as staff changes, grade changes, and other circumstances warrant it;
 - 3.5. assigning of who will accompany and handle the Service Dog both inside and outside the school and what arrangements have been made with regards to alternate handlers when necessary.
4. After reviewing the above procedures with the parent/guardian, the Principal or designate will:
 - 4.1. Inform the Director of Student Services of the request;
 - 4.2. Arrange a case conference involving:
 - parents/guardians,

- teachers
- classroom assistants,
- Safety and Transportation Officer, if appropriate,
- a representative of the Service Dog organization, if appropriate, and
- Student Services personnel

At the case conference, the following will be discussed and documented:

- 4.2.1. review the purpose and function of the Service Dog in relation to successful learning and/or safety for the student or staff member;
 - 4.2.2. notification and involvement of staff;
 - 4.2.3. clarify all responsibilities of the family, school and Division;
 - 4.2.4. transportation of the student and Service Dog, if appropriate.
 - 4.2.5. Signage (generally provided by the Service Dog organization) will be posted, alerting visitors/emergency service providers to the service dogs' or presence
- 4.3 Copies of the student or staff's medical documentation, official Alberta Service Dog Certification Card, letters home to families, plan for responsibility, care and handling of the Service Dog, will be submitted and approved to the Assistant Superintendent of Learning Services before the dog is allowed to provide services at the school.
5. After the case conference, the school will work with the Director of Student Services in the development of a comprehensive transition plan for the introduction of the service dog which may include, depending on the circumstances:
- 5.1. Inform school staff, School Council representatives and parents of the arrival of a Service Dog to the school;
 - 5.2. Send a letter home to the parents of students who will be in any of the classes where the Service Dog will possibly be present in case of allergies, anxieties or other concerns;
 - 5.3. Hold an assembly for the student body involving representatives from the Service Dog organization, if needed, the parent and possibly the handler to explain the role of the Service Dog;
 - 5.4. Exploration of 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, recognition of children with fear of dogs and other animals, cultural sensitivities to groups that will not share space with a dog or animal;
6. 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. 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.

7. Any student/parent of a student with a Service Dog 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.
8. At the end of each year a comprehensive transition plan will be communicated.

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