

## USE OF CERTIFIED SERVICE ANIMALS IN SCHOOLS

The Seven Oaks School Division supports the use of a certified service animal in schools requested by a parent/guardian. The following administrative practice is meant to ensure that the proper process is in place to provide for service and therapy animals on school premises where they are an integral part of a student's specific plan as long as the appropriate planning and preparation have taken place.

### PURPOSE

This administrative practice provides direction to school administrators regarding parent/guardian or employee requests for the use of service/assistance animals, in this case service dogs, in Seven Oaks School Division schools.

These guidelines are developed and consistent with the following legislation:

- Appropriate Educational Programming in Manitoba
- The Education Act (Manitoba)
- The Human Rights Code (Manitoba)
- The Public Schools Act (Manitoba)

### DEFINITIONS

A ***Certified Service/Assistance Dog*** is a recognized working dog that has been trained to assist children and adults who have a physical or developmental disability with their daily living activities. There are strict guidelines that apply to their access, handling and interaction. The use of service dogs is an intervention strategy that is recognized as an aid to children with specific needs.

The term "service dogs" refers to dogs that assist those with a physical disability and include pulling, bracing, retrieving and hearing dogs. Service dogs are also trained to prevent children from leaving the classroom unsupervised, running into traffic, etc.

***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.

***Companion Dogs*** is a newly emerging support to assist the learning behaviour of some students.

***Therapy Dogs*** are trained to provide affection and comfort to people in hospitals, retirement homes and schools.

Companion dogs and therapy dogs **are not considered service dogs** with access for the handlers in places of public accommodation and therefore must be considered differently in the context of entry to schools.

## **ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES**

When Parents/Guardians approach a school Principal requesting the use of a service animal (dog) for their child, the Principal must check to determine if the request is for a service dog, a companion dog or a therapy dog. **These policy guidelines apply only to service dogs.**

Decisions regarding the use of service animals by students 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.

The decision to allow entry of service animals onto school premises is made only after extensive consultation and in accordance with the procedures listed below. The request will be reviewed by the Principal with the Student Services Director and the Superintendent or Designate.

### **Parent and Guardian's Responsibilities**

- To initiate the process of having a service animal assist a student in school, speak with the Principal. The Principal will provide a copy of *Appendix A: Information for Parents Requesting a Service Animal in a School to parents and Appendix B: Request for a Service Animal.*
- Make the request in writing using *Appendix B: Request for a Service Animal.*
- Provide a letter from a relevant approved health care professional i.e., physician, psychiatrist or psychologist, confirming the student's diagnosis as well as a recommendation for a service animal.
- Provide a letter from an accredited dog training program [membership in Assistance Dogs International (ADI) or the International Guide Dog Federation (IGDF)], stating that a service animal has been placed with the child and provide a Certificate of Training for the animal with the services that it has been trained to perform.
- Provide the school with proof of up-to-date vaccinations, a municipal dog license and confirmation the service animal is in good health.
- Assume financial responsibility relating to the use and care of the service animal.
- Arrange for proper training of school personnel and provide updated training as required.

### **Principal's Responsibilities**

- Consult with the Student Services Director and/or the Superintendent or Designate prior to planning the school entry process.

- Upon receipt of *Appendix B: Request for a Service Animal in a School*, inform all school staff members (i.e., teaching staff, educational support staff, secretarial staff, custodial staff, etc.) of the request to have a service animal in the school. Their input and information will assist the Principal in the school entry process.
- Schedule and chair a meeting with the parents, a representative from the animal training facility, the classroom teacher(s), the school support staff, the Student Services Director and the support staff who work with the student. The purpose of the meeting is to review the student's specific plan (SSP) description of strengths, needs and required accommodations including the type of service the service animal will provide. The services provided by the service animal should be, or become, part of the goals of the SSP.
- Discussions will include other relevant information such as:
  - Health and safety considerations (including severe allergies and staff or students with asthma).
  - The potential impact of the involvement of the service animal on the school community.
  - Animal care requirements.
  - Handling routines and responsibilities.
  - Guidelines for staff and students, other student issues.
  - Transportation to and from school.
  - The role of and communication with parents.
  - The designation of a staff dog handler/alternate in the school.

Please refer to and complete Appendix C: Management Plan for the Care of a Service Animal.

- If a decision to approve the request is made, attention to awareness, consistency, routines, communication, staff training, school assemblies and community notification are required.
- An information session for interested school community members may be held to inform them and to receive feedback or relevant information. The Principal may invite the parents of the student requiring the service animal to participate in the information session.
- Prior to any information session, Appendix D: Sample Letter to School Community and Appendix E: Sample Letter to Families with Children in the Classroom/on the School Bus should be shared with parents of the student requiring the use of a service animal.
- School division administration may inform relevant employee groups and/or the Workplace Safety & Health Committee that a service animal will be in the school.
- Contact the school division Transportation Department (if applicable) regarding transportation. A personalized transportation plan should be developed for the SSP.
- Place signs on entrance doors to inform school visitors of the presence of a service animal.
- Review the school Emergency Response Plan. Notify the local fire department of the existence of a service animal.
- Arrange for training of staff by the dog training facility.

- Arrange for demonstrations from the dog training facility and/or parents on the rules of conduct around service dogs.
- Monitor the entry of the service animal regularly and review on an annual basis.

## LIST OF APPENDICES

**Appendix A** *Information for Parents Requesting a Service Animal in a School*

**Appendix B** *Request for Approval of Service Animals*

**Appendix C** *Management Plan for the Care of a Service Animal*

**Appendix D** *Sample Letter to School Community*

**Appendix E** *Sample Letter to Families with Children in the Classroom/on the School Bus*

## Appendix A

### Information for Parents Requesting a Service Dog

---

1. The success of the entry of a service animal into a school setting depends on clear communication, a well-informed school community and careful planning. The information you provide will assist the Seven Oaks School Division Board and school team to make the best possible decisions for your child and other students as well as for the staff, volunteers and visitors in the school.
2. The use of a service animal is considered to be an accommodation to help your child learn and to develop the necessary skills to achieve success at school. If your child already has a Student Specific Plan, it will be reviewed or one will be developed in consultation with you. The Principal will invite you, your child's teacher, a representative from the training facility, the school support staff in the school and the Student Services Director to a meeting to discuss your child's strengths, needs, the accommodations that are already in place for your child, as well as the additional assistance that a service animal may provide.
3. The information you provide will help the Seven Oaks School Division Board to consider your request. The Principal will investigate as to whether any student or member of staff has severe medical or psychological reactions to animals that may prevent or restrict the involvement of the service animal at the school.
4. The well-being of the service animal is also very important. Its care, handling and training needs will be addressed and your input is valuable. The Principal needs to know what other resources are available to facilitate school entry and the implementation of a plan. Strategies for becoming familiar with the building and school grounds, introduction to assemblies/ concerts, recess and informing the staff about interacting with the service animal will need to be included in the planning to be as consistent and fair to the service animal as possible.
5. It is imperative that the service animal be ready for school. If the service animal exhibits any behaviours (i.e. growling, scratching, nipping, biting, etc.) or health issues (i.e. vomiting, diarrhea, open wounds, fleas, ticks, etc.) at school it will be removed until the plan is re-evaluated to ensure the safety of staff, students and visitors.
6. An information session may be held for interested school community parents. Important information shared in this way facilitates understanding and acceptance of new practices at the school. You will be invited to participate in any information sessions.
7. Parents' responsibilities include but are not limited to:
  - Provide the Principal with all required documentation, reports, certificates and arrangement for staff training in a timely fashion.
  - Transport or walk the service animal to and from school if needed or request

- handi-van transportation if your child is eligible.
- Assume financial responsibility for the service animal's training, veterinary care, municipal license and other related costs.
  - Participate in a school meeting to inform the Principal of all relevant information that may affect your child, other students, staff and/or Visitors to the school.
  - Assist the Principal to communicate relevant information to the school community.
  - Work co-operatively with the school staff to make this accommodation a success.
  - Provide the required food, equipment and service animal care items.
  - Inform the Principal of the service animal's food, water and "bio-breaks" needs.
  - Advise the Principal on the removal and disposal of animal waste in a safe and environmentally friendly manner.
8. Once the necessary information has been discussed, the Principal will consult with the Student Services Director.
  9. If the request is approved, a series of steps must take place to ensure a smooth transition for the entry of the service animal in a timely manner.
  10. The right of entry of the service animal will be monitored regularly and reviewed on an annual basis.
  11. A Certificate of Training from an accredited training program, i.e. Membership in Assistance Dogs International (ADI) or the International Guide Dog Federation (IGDF) is required.

## Appendix B Request for Approval of Service Animal

---

*This information is being collected pursuant to the provisions of the Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act and the Personal Health Information Act. Questions about this collection should be directed to the Superintendent of the Seven Oaks School Division.*

Date of Request: \_\_\_\_\_

Receiving School: \_\_\_\_\_

Administrator: \_\_\_\_\_

Student: \_\_\_\_\_

Parent/Guardian: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

Phone: \_\_\_\_\_

Identify and describe the need for the service animal as it relates to the student's disability and describe the manner in which the service animal will meet the individual's particular need(s). If more space is required, please add additional pages.

Type of Service Animal:       Dog       Other \_\_\_\_\_

Name of Animal: \_\_\_\_\_

- Letter from physician attached
- Service Animal Document: Animal is properly trained
- Animal Licensed
- Vaccinations Record
- Institute where the Animal was Trained / Name of Handler: \_\_\_\_\_
- Liability Insurance

Request submitted by School Principal to the Student Services Director in preparation for approval.

## Appendix C

### Management Plan for the Care of the Service Animal

---

*This information is being collected pursuant to the provisions of the Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act and the Personal Health Information Act. Questions about this collection should be directed to the Superintendent of the Seven Oaks School Division.*

1. Where possible and feasible, these responsibilities should be handled by the student in the same manner as at home.
2. Water needs: (e.g., provision of water bowl, procedures for use, cleaning, etc.).
3. Bladder/Bowel Needs of Dog (e.g. - frequency, designated location, disposal, etc.).
4. Other considerations:
  - Rest periods away from "work" (if needed).
  - Special considerations due to weather (if needed).
  - Transportation (if applicable).
  - Other.
5. Formal documentation has been provided that the service animal:
  - Has annual vaccines.
  - Has municipal license.
  - Is in good health to attend school.

This information must be updated on a yearly basis.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of Principal

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of Parent/Guardian

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date



## Appendix D

### Sample Letter to School Community

---

*Insert School Letterhead*

*Date*

Dear Parents/Guardians:

This letter is to inform you that there will be a service animal in our school helping one of our students.

Service animals are trained and recognized by an accredited training facility and are able to assist with many of the routine activities which pose challenges for some students. The student's right to have a service animal is protected under The Human Rights Code of Manitoba.

There will be an upcoming information session or letter for parents/guardians at the school on *(insert date)* to assist with your understanding of how the service animal will be integrated into the school. As well, a school-wide assembly will be held for all students to help them identify with the service animal and how it will fit into the daily routines of all students. They will be instructed as to the proper procedure regarding the animal and that the animal is a "working" service animal and not a pet while at school.

We anticipate the service animal being of benefit to the student's learning and we look forward to this new addition to our school and school community.

Thank you for your understanding and support. Should you have any questions or concerns, please contact me at *(insert school phone number)*.

Sincerely,

*Principal*

## Appendix E

### Sample Letter to Families with Children in the Classroom/on the School Bus

---

*Insert School Letterhead*

*Date*

Dear Parents/Guardians:

This letter is to inform you that there will be a service animal in our school helping one of our students. The service animal will be in your child's classroom effective *(insert date)*.

Service animals are trained and recognized by an accredited training facility and are able to assist with many of the routine activities which pose challenges for some students. The student's right to have a service animal is protected under The Human Rights Code of Manitoba.

An upcoming information session or letter for parents/guardians on *(insert date)* will offer more information on how the animal will be integrated into the school setting.

Students will participate in a school-wide assembly on *(insert date)* to assist with the integration of the service animal and how the animal will fit into the daily routines of all students.

The students in the classroom will also receive more direct instruction and training as to the proper procedure and conduct when around the service animal. They will be informed that the service animal is a working animal and not a pet while at school.

We anticipate the service animal being of benefit to the student's learning and we look forward to this new addition to our school and school community.

Thank you for your understanding and support. Should you have any questions or concerns, please contact me at *(insert school phone number)*.

Sincerely,

*Principal*