

Background

Animals in school can maximize learning and achievement for students with diverse needs; however, the impact the animal may have on the educational environment and the health and safety of the school community must meet guidelines for appropriate circumstances.

Definitions

Approved Animal: a Service Animal or Education Assistance Animal that has been identified as a reasonable accommodation under this guideline.

Service Animal/Service Dog: by definition, a Service Animal is an approved animal that has been trained to do work or perform tasks that provide a vital service for an individual with a documented disability or medical condition.

Service Animals are working animals, not pets. It is for this reason that Service Dogs are often referred to as Service Animals – a less friendly connotation. Recognized training organizations in Alberta and across Canada certify dogs as Service Animals. Others animals are not typically recognized.

Examples of such work or tasks provided by a Service Animal include guiding individuals who are blind, alerting individuals who are deaf, pulling a wheelchair, fetching dropped items, or other such duties. The work or task a Service Animal has been trained to provide must be directly related to the individual's disability.

For the purposes of this administrative procedure, the Service Dog definition includes 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.

Education Assistance Animal: an animal that works with its owner/handlers as a team to improve a student's physical, social, emotional, or cognitive functioning. 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 guide dogs, hearing dogs, and service dogs. Examples include library dogs and therapy dogs.

There are a number of different certifying agencies, including but not limited to St. John Ambulance and the Pet Therapy Society of Northern Alberta.

Classroom Pet: an animal chosen by a teacher to be kept in their individual classroom for some type of educational value, such as a means to stimulate learning, and/or teach students about responsibility and compassion through their care and upkeep. Principal authorization is required; however, the teacher is ultimately responsible for the care and maintenance of the classroom pet within the classroom, as well ensuring the health and safety of the school community.

Caveat

1. The Division may limit, remove or exclude from school facilities or property any Service Dog, Educational Assistance Animal, or other animal if it poses a direct threat to the health or safety of the school community, causes a significant disruption of school activities or otherwise jeopardizes the safe operation of the school or a school event. Examples of such include, but are not limited to:
 - 1.1. The Service Dog or Educational Assistance Animal or other animal:
 - 1.1.1. Urinates or defecates in inappropriate locations
 - 1.1.2. Solicits attention, visits or annoys a member of the student body or school personnel
 - 1.1.3. Vocalizes unnecessarily (i.e. barking, growling or whining)
 - 1.1.4. Shows aggression towards people or other animals
 - 1.1.5. Solicits or steals food or other items from a student or staff member
 - 1.1.6. Is unable to perform reliably the service for which it was approved
 - 1.1.7. Is not under the full control of the student with the disability or the designated handler
 - 1.1.8. Is a public health threat as a result of being infested with parasites or having a communicable disease of the skin, mouth or eyes
 - 1.1.9. Is unclean or unsanitary
 - 1.2. Trainers/handlers/owners should carry a minimum of \$2,000,000 general liability insurance or proof of equivalent insurance through the handler's organization that provides coverage in case the animal causes property damage or bodily injury to someone.

Service Dog Guidelines and Procedures

1. In accordance with the *Alberta Service Dogs Act*, the use of service dogs in schools and facilities of the Division are permitted when the following conditions are met:
 - 1.1. The family of the dog has received a Service Dog Team Identification Card from the Government of Alberta.
 - 1.2. Generally, the Service Dog will have a Special Skills Dog harness and leash and/or saddlebag or vest.
 - 1.3. All family responsibilities have been fulfilled as outlined in section 2 below.
 - 1.4. All school and Division responsibilities, including liability, as outlined in section 3 below.
2. Family responsibilities:
 - 2.1. Apply in writing to the principal for permission, providing the reasons and benefits of their request, descriptions of the service dog's activities, and the duration of the support required.
 - 2.2. Complete the request for a Certified Service Animal using Form 5-30-A Parent Request: Certified Service Dog.
 - 2.3. Provide a letter from a physician confirming the need for the use of the service animal explaining how the animal's service is essential and directly related to the learning needs of the individual.
 - 2.4. Provide a copy of the Service Dog Team Identification Card issued from the Government of Alberta. All financial costs to obtain this card are the sole

responsibility of the family. Apply to servicedogs@gov.ab.ca for a service dog license.

- 2.5. Provide up-to-date proof of vaccinations, proof of municipal dog license, adequate insurance and liability coverage, and ensure the animal is in good health.
- 2.6. Indicate how and when initial and ongoing training will be provided for current and new staff.
- 2.7. Indicate when and how frequently any required ongoing training of the service animal will be undertaken.
- 2.8. Pay for any financial implications regarding the training, use and care of the service animal.
- 2.9. Indicate who will accompany and handle the service animal both inside and outside the school and what arrangements have been made with regard to alternate handlers when necessary.
- 2.10. Provide information from the service agency indicating details around the personal care and physical needs of the service animal, including the safest and most environmentally sound place for the animal to relieve itself, removal and disposal of animal waste and considerations for seasonal changes and inclement weather.
- 2.11. Make arrangements for the service animal to visit the school/site to familiarize it with the school/site.
- 2.12. Complete Form 5-30-A Parent Request: Certified Service Dog as an agreement to:
 - 2.12.1. Accept all liability that might be incurred as a result of the behavior of the service animal while being present at a Division school or during Division sponsored events and activities
 - 2.12.2. Have appropriate insurance coverage
 - 2.12.3. Reasonable conditions that may be imposed for the transportation of the service animal to and from school/site
 - 2.12.4. Have the presence of the service animal be reviewed on an annual basis
 - 2.12.5. Support transitions between schools/sites when necessary as the student progresses through the grades

3. School and Division responsibilities:

When a principal receives a written request for permission to have a service animal accompany a student to school the following process will be used:

- 3.1. The principal will inform the Superintendent, Assistant Superintendent of Education Services and the Director of Student Services about the request.
- 3.2. Prior to approval, the principal will arrange a case conference involving:
 - 3.2.1. Parents
 - 3.2.2. Teacher(s)
 - 3.2.3. Classroom program assistants
 - 3.2.4. Director of Transportation, if appropriate
 - 3.2.5. A representative of the service dog organization
 - 3.2.6. Appropriate Student Services personnel
- 3.3. The following will be discussed at the case conference:
 - 3.3.1. Review the purpose and function of the service animal in relation to successful learning and/or safety for the student
 - 3.3.2. Notification and involvement of classroom staff
 - 3.3.3. Clarify all responsibilities of the family, school and Division
 - 3.3.4. Transportation of the student and service animal. Note: If the student is eligible for transportation, the service dog is allowed to accompany them on the bus in accordance with the *Alberta Human Rights Act* and the

Alberta Blind Persons' Rights Act

- 3.3.5. Other concerns including interference with delivery of an educational program, program adaptations, possible changes to in-class routines and procedures, seating arrangements, increased demands on staff, other children and staff who are allergic to dogs, recognition of children with fear of dogs, cultural sensitivities to groups that will not share space with an animal
- 3.3.6. Development of a comprehensive transition plan for the introduction of the service animal, which may involve the use of social stories, visits by the dog to the school/classroom, etc.
- 3.4. After the case conference, the principal shall:
 - 3.4.1. Inform school community of the potential arrival of a service dog to the school
 - 3.4.2. Send a specific letter home to the parents of students who will be in any of the classes where the dog will possibly be present in case of allergies, anxieties or other concerns
 - 3.4.3. Work with appropriate personnel to revise emergency and safety procedures, as required, to include the service animal
- 3.5. Upon completion of the above (3.2 to 3.4), the principal will forward all relevant information to the Assistant Superintendent of Education Services.
- 3.6. Admittance of the service dog into the learning environment will be finalized by the Assistant Superintendent of Education Services based upon the recommendation of the principal and a review of submitted documentation pertaining to the:
 - 3.6.1. Student's educational needs
 - 3.6.2. Fulfilment of family responsibilities
 - 3.6.3. Fulfillment of school and Division responsibilities to all stakeholders, including liability
- 3.7. Upon authorization from the Assistant Superintendent, the principal will inform the school community (including feeder schools) of the arrival and presence of a service dog to the school(s).
 - 3.7.1. A specific letter will be sent home to the students in any of the classes where the dog will be present in case of allergies or extreme phobias
 - 3.7.2. An assembly may be arranged for the student body involving representatives from the service dog association, the parent and possibly the handler to explain the role of the service dog
 - 3.7.3. A transition plan for introduction of the dog will be created which may involve the use of social stories, visits by the dog to the school/classroom, etc.
 - 3.7.4. A sign (generally provided by the service dog organization) will be placed on the doors of the school alerting visitors/emergency service providers to the dog's presence
- 3.8. The principal will ensure other adjustments to site management are made, including but not limited to:
 - 3.8.1. An appropriate fire exit and lockdown plan must be put into place and the fire and police departments notified as to the existence of the dog in the school
 - 3.8.2. The service dog organization will provide training to the student's school team (principal, teacher, program assistant, etc.)
 - 3.8.3. The school may impose some restrictions on the service dog for safety reasons. The service dog may be excluded or have limited access to certain areas of the school facilities or certain programs. Areas or

programs which may be considered off limits for service dogs include, but are not limited to:

- 3.8.3.1. Laboratories, mechanical closets, custodial closets, food preparation areas, areas where protective clothing is required, areas that have exposed sharp metal cuttings or other sharp objects, areas with high levels of dust and areas where there is moving machinery
- 3.9. A copy of all service dog request documentation will be placed in the student's cumulative file.
- 3.10. At the end of each school year, the student's learning team will review the student's program needs related to the service dog. This includes input from the school with regard to monitoring the service dog's capacity to provide the target service. Decisions regarding the appropriate use of the service dog, program planning, and training need to be considered. If the service dog is deemed essential, comprehensive transition planning for future teachers, staff, students, transportation providers and the wider community needs to occur.

Educational Assistance Animals (EAA)

1. A staff member or volunteer wishing to use an EAA in the presence of students is the handler.
2. All financial costs to obtain certification of the EAA are the sole responsibility of the handler.
3. Prior to the handler introducing the EAA to the school environment, the handler must:
 - 3.1. Provide a letter of request to the principal:
 - 3.1.1. Describing the credentials of the handler
 - 3.1.2. Including proof of vaccinations and proof of EAA health
 - 3.1.3. Outlining the benefits of having the EAA attend with children, as well as descriptions of the EAA's purpose and activities, and the duration of the support
4. Upon approval, the handler:
 - 4.1. Will ensure the safety and well-being of students and other staff in the proximity of the EAA.
 - 4.2. Will provide and post signage (generally provided by the EAA certifying organization) alerting visitors/ emergency service providers to the EAA's presence.
 - 4.3. Will assume full responsibility for the animal's well-being.
 - 4.3.1. This includes managing the EAA's bio-breaks, disposal of waste, and the provision of food and water and ensuring that the EAA is clean and appropriately groomed
 - 4.4. Will maintain continuous proximity with the EAA while on school property.
 - 4.4.1. The handler must remain with the EAA at all times
 - 4.4.2. The handler must maintain continuous attention to the EAA and ensure it is properly leashed, caged or harnessed at all times
 - 4.4.3. In the rare situation where the handler cannot be with the EAA, the handler must ensure arrangements are in place to have the EAA kenneled (or equivalent)
5. School responsibilities:

When a principal receives a written request for permission to have an EAA brought to the

school, the principal will:

- 5.1. Arrange a meeting involving all staff to discuss the following:
 - 5.1.1. The purpose and function of the EAA in relation to successful learning and/or safety for the student(s)
 - 5.1.2. Responsibilities of the trainer/handler with the school, and Division
 - 5.1.3. Other concerns including but not limited to:
 - 5.1.3.1. Interference with delivery of an educational program
 - 5.1.3.2. Possible changes to in-class routines and procedures
 - 5.1.3.3. Increased demands on staff
 - 5.1.3.4. Other children and staff who are allergic to the EAA
 - 5.1.3.5. Recognition of children with fear of EAAs
 - 5.1.3.6. Cultural sensitivities to groups that will not share space with the animal
 - 5.1.4. Inform the school community of the potential arrival of an EAA to the school:
 - 5.1.4.1. Send a specific letter home to the parents of students who will be in any of the classes where the EAA will possibly be present in case of allergies, anxieties or other concerns
 - 5.1.4.2. Should a conflict arise, priority will be given to the health and safety of the school community and the EAA will be excluded from that area
 - 5.1.5. Work with appropriate personnel to revise emergency and safety procedures, as required, to include the EAA

Animals in the Classroom: Temporary Visits (Show & Tell), Permanent Classroom Pets

1. The principal must approve the entry of **all** animals on either a temporary or a permanent basis into the school.
 - 1.1. The health and safety of students must be considered prior to approving animals' temporary or permanent presence.
2. Temporary visits: Individuals wishing to bring an animal to school for a brief period (i.e. show and tell) shall first seek the permission of the teacher, who shall subsequently seek the approval of the principal.
 - 2.1. All animals are to be in good health, show no evidence of disease and be friendly towards students and staff.
3. Permanent Classroom Pets: The reasons for keeping animals in the school needs to be intentionally supportive of student learning, preferably connected to outcomes described in the Alberta Program of Studies.
 - 3.1. Pets include animals that can be purchased in a typical pet store (birds, hamsters, gerbils, fish, some reptiles, etc.). Exotic animals (anything other than pet store animals) or wild animals such as bats and skunks are not permitted.
 - 3.2. Keeping animals is governed by various pieces of legislation including: Alberta Wildlife Act, Alberta Animal Protection Act, and the Criminal Code of Canada. It is against the law to hold indigenous wild animals captive (e.g. gophers, crows).
 - 3.3. The humane and proper care of animals is the legal obligation and moral responsibility of those who have assumed stewardship of the animal.
 - 3.4. Teachers wishing to maintain a permanent classroom pet shall first seek the approval of the principal.
 - 3.5. Considerations:

- 3.5.1. Animals may cause allergic or asthmatic reactions
- 3.5.2. Animals can carry and pass harmful organisms via touching or biting, which may cause illness to humans
- 3.5.3. Animals may have an adverse effect on indoor air quality and possibly impact school resources due to required veterinary care due to illness
- 3.5.4. Animals may not be appropriate for all learning environments
- 3.5.5. Animals shall not be allowed in classrooms that have individuals with compromised health status, asthma or students with allergies to the animals
- 3.5.6. Animals need to be contained in safe environments: safe for the students and safe for the animal
- 3.5.7. Animals are not allowed to roam free in the classroom
- 3.5.8. The life expectancy of an animal is to be considered before committing to long-term care of an animal
- 3.5.9. Reptiles and amphibians can carry salmonella bacteria. Therefore, animals such as turtles, iguanas, salamanders and frogs are not appropriate for primary grades
- 3.6. Upon the principal's approval of a permanent classroom pet, the teacher will accept full responsibility for and must closely supervise and monitor care and use of animals in the classroom.
 - 3.6.1. The teacher must connect with parents to inquire about students' allergies, fears and other concerns related to the animal
 - 3.6.2. The teacher must communicate the purpose and educational value of the classroom pet to students and parents. (Such as a means to stimulate learning, and/or teach students about responsibility and compassion through their care and upkeep)
 - 3.6.3. The teacher must ensure that the pet remains in the designated classroom only, housed in appropriate cages or aquariums, etc.
 - 3.6.4. The teacher must ensure that the animal's environment is clean and sanitary:
 - 3.6.4.1. Keep a tray or drop sheet under animal cages to capture animal wastes and material to prevent these materials from spilling onto floors or furnishings
 - 3.6.4.2. Animal living areas are to be cleaned at least once a week or as required to minimize odor and ensure appropriate sanitation
 - 3.6.4.3. Wear non-latex gloves when cleaning aquariums or animal cages and thoroughly wash hands when finished
 - 3.6.4.4. All animal waste is to be disposed of immediately. Animal waste boxes are not to be accessible to students. Use a plastic bag for feces and waste and then dispose in the outside trash bin
 - 3.6.4.5. Never clean cages in kitchens or anywhere food is prepared or eaten
 - 3.6.4.6. Thoroughly disinfect sinks, bathtubs or shower stalls used for cleaning animal cages after use
 - 3.6.5. The teacher must ensure supervision of student caregivers
 - 3.6.6. The teacher must teach student caregivers proper methods of animals' care and handling
 - 3.6.6.1. Staff and students are to wash hands thoroughly with soap and water after handling animals or animal items and before eating
 - 3.6.6.2. The teacher must teach students to keep their faces away from

- an animal's mouth, beak or claws and never to kiss an animal
- 3.6.6.3. The teacher must teach students how to behave around an animal. Animals are not to be provoked or teased
 - 3.6.6.4. Unsupervised handling of animals by any students is not permitted
 - 3.6.6.5. Persons with open cuts or sores are not to handle animals. If a person is scratched or bitten, immediately wash the wounds well with soap and water

In the event of an Animal Bite

1. Isolate the animal that has bitten the person.
2. Inform the principal of the incident.
3. Complete an Accident/Injury/Illness report using Public School Works.
4. The principal must inform Alberta Health Services and Animal Control if a bite from a canine, feline or ferret breaks the skin. If the principal contacts Alberta Health Services, the principal must contact the Assistant Superintendent of Education Services.

Animal Illness

1. If possible, identify the cause of animal illness.
2. Do not allow individuals, other than the primary care teacher, to handle the animal.
3. If possible, remove from classroom to a quiet secure area.
4. If an animal has an apparent health issue or if an animal is in distress, contact a veterinarian for diagnosis and treatment.

Death of an Animal

1. In the event of the death of an animal kept in the classroom, the animal must be disposed of safely and in a manner that is sensitive to student and staff emotions and as per local bylaws.

Reference

[Education Act](#)

[Guide to Education ECS to Grade 12](#)

[Alberta Blind Persons' Rights Act](#)

[Alberta Human Rights Act](#)

[Alberta Service Dogs Act](#)

[Alberta Animal Protection Act](#)

[Alberta Wildlife Act](#)

[Criminal Code of Canada](#)

[Form 5-30-A Parent Request: Certified Service Dog](#)

[Form 5-30-B Transportation Protocol: Certified Service Dog](#)

[Form 5-30-C Certified Service Dog – Sample Letter from School to Parents and School Community](#)