



### **Animals in Schools**

Park West School Division recognizes that animals may be used to provide increased safety, independence, social bonding and self-control for individuals requiring support. The division supports the use of animals in schools as long as the appropriate planning and preparation has taken place prior to the implementation of the program.

Animals are permitted to be on school division property for instructional purposes to support educational projects or specific programming. Animals must only be on school premises for the duration of the project or the program. The school principal must ensure that appropriate communication with parents regarding the animal on school premises takes place.

Animals may not be brought onto the school premises without the express permission of the school principal, with the exception of service animals.

#### ***Therapy animals:***

Park West School Division supports the use of therapy dogs or animals in schools. Therapy animals are interactive animals trained to work for a handler to provide service and comfort to people. The presence of a therapy dog can decrease anxiety and provide a level of comfort that enables students to work through a variety of challenging issues. Their responsibilities are to provide psychological or physiological therapy to individuals other than their Handlers. It is important to note that therapy dogs are **not** service dogs. Service dogs are trained to perform tasks to ease their handlers' disabilities, helping them to attain safety and independence.

#### ***Service dogs:***

Park West School Division supports and recognizes that in certain cases, appropriate educational programming may include the services of a certified service dog. A certified service dog means any dog that is individually trained to do work or perform tasks for the benefit of an individual with a disability, specific to that disability

#### **Procedures:**

Once the Principal has been notified of the anticipated integration of a therapy animal or service dog to the school, the following protocol is to be implemented by the School and Division prior to the admittance of the animal to the school. These procedures will be fast-tracked should a student who uses a certified service dog come to a school during the school year.



### **Procedure for Therapy Animals:**

#### *School Principal Responsibility:*

- The Principal, in consultation with the school staff, will initiate the use of therapy animals in schools.
- Principals will request approval from the Superintendent for the use of a therapy animal in their schools to provide service and comfort to its students.
- The Principal, on behalf of the school, shall submit a mutually agreed to implementation plan to the Superintendent/CEO or designate as soon as possible prior to the introduction of the therapy animal to the school setting.
- Prior to permitting an animal on school premises, the Principal will take steps to ensure the animal is free from any disease or parasite and will not present a physical danger to students and staff.
- The Principal shall ensure that the students, school staff, the school community and the Superintendent/CEO or designate are informed of the anticipated presence of the therapy animal in the school.
  - A letter is to be sent home for all students and provided to all staff to inform the school community as to the arrival of a therapy animal to school.
  - A letter is to be sent home to the students in any of the classes where the therapy animal will be present to elicit information concerning allergies, extreme phobias, or religious considerations from the students and/or parents/guardians.
  - An assembly or class visits are to be arranged to explain the role of the therapy animal.
- The Principal shall ensure a sign is placed on the doors of the school alerting visitors/emergency service providers to the therapy animal's presence.
- The Principal will meet with the Handler of the animal to discuss the expectations regarding grooming, hygiene, behaviour and role in the school. In conjunction with the Handler, the Principal must ensure that the personal care and physical needs of the therapy animal are met, including plans for the:
  - Safest and most environmentally sound place for the therapy dog to relieve itself
  - Removal and disposal of animal waste
  - Provision of a suitable container for waste that the dog Handler can access.
- The Principal of the school has the authority to end any arrangement pertaining to the use of therapy animals at any time.



*Handler Responsibility:*

The staff member bringing in an animal onto school premises will be classified as the Handler. The Handler's responsibilities include but are not limited to:

- Ensuring that the animal is under proper control and receives appropriate care.
- Providing instruction to staff and students in the proper care and handling of the animal.
- Maintaining the sanitary condition of the animal enclosure and ensuring that animal waste is sealed and properly disposed.
- In addition to student safety, the Handler agrees that the therapy dog's physical and mental health will be their priority.
- The dog will always be under the direct control and supervision of the Handler.
- The Handler will be aware of the dog's behaviour at all times. If any changes in behaviour occur that may affect the safety of the children, the Handler will immediately remove the dog from the school and notify the Principal.
- The Handler's attention must be dedicated to the dog and their interactions with students and staff.
- The Handler shall assume full responsibility and liability for any damage to school property or injury to staff, students or others in the school caused by the therapy dog while on school property.
- The Handler will be solely responsible for the supervision and humane care of the therapy dog, including any feeding, exercising and cleaning up after the therapy dog while the therapy dog is on school property.
- The Handler will ensure that the therapy dog while on school property is clean, well-groomed, house broken, free of injury or illness, and of the temperament appropriate for working with children and others in the school.
- The Handler will take responsibility for educating staff, students, and the community on the role of the dog.



### **Procedure for Service Dogs:**

#### *Parent/Guardian Responsibility:*

- It is expected that parents will advise the Division as soon as possible that a service dog is required.
- Upon becoming aware of the child's need for a service dog, the parents/guardians shall provide a letter to the Principal from their medical doctor recommending the use of a certified service dog prior to the commencement of the process of Appropriate Educational Programming and Inclusion.
- Parents/guardians shall provide a letter to the Principal outlining what they see as being the benefits of having the service dog attend school with their child.
- A certificate of training for the dog from the service dog organization must be provided. All financial costs to obtain this certificate are the sole responsibility of the family. Service dogs certified by an organization inside or outside of Canada must have the certification standards verified by the Office of the Fire Commissioner. The student handler's ability to control the animal in a school setting must be verified by the Office of the Fire Commissioner.
- It is the responsibility of the parent/guardian to provide the school with proof that the dog has its yearly vaccinations, required licenses, and is in good health.

#### *Principal Responsibility:*

- The Principal is responsible to facilitate with the parents arrangements and communication of such together with the anticipated timeline for introduction of a service dog to the school.
- The Principal shall ensure that the students, school staff, the school community and the Superintendent/CEO or designate are informed of the anticipated presence of the certified service dog in the school.
  - A letter is to be sent home for all students and provided to all staff to inform the school community as to the arrival of a service dog to school.
  - If transportation of the student requiring the services of the dog is required the Principal shall inform the Transportation Supervisor of the presence of the dog on the bus and that the driver will receive appropriate training.
  - An assembly or class visits are to be arranged to explain the role of the service dog.
- The Principal shall ensure a sign is placed on the doors of the school alerting visitors/emergency service providers to the dog's presence.
- The Principal shall ensure that the service dog organization provides training to the student's school team (Principal, Teacher/s, Educational Assistants, and transportation personnel) prior to the dog commencing work in the school. Training will be provided at the Division's expense.
- The Principal, on behalf of the school and parents, shall submit a mutually agreed to implementation plan to the Superintendent/CEO or designate as soon as possible prior to the introduction of the service dog to the school setting.



*School Resource Team Responsibility:*

- A case conference is set up involving the Parents/Guardians, Principal, Teacher(s), Educational Assistant(s), a representative from the service dog organization, the student when appropriate, the Director of Student Services to discuss the following:
  - Ensure classroom staff are informed and involved.
  - Discuss the purpose/function of the service dog.
  - Advising school team of who is responsible for the care of the dog. This rests 100% with the handler/family. An adult from the family (or designate) must be available to take the service dog for a “bio-break” one time per day, preferably “midday,” (or as agreed upon by the school team).
  - Establish the safest and most environmentally sound place for the dog to relieve itself.
  - The dog should be offered water at mid-day; no water bowl should be left down at any time. Water should be offered, then the bowl removed (determine where the dog’s water bowl is to be kept and who will fill the water bowl).
  - Examine the physical arrangements in the classroom(s).
  - Examine transportation arrangements, i.e., all relevant bus procedures.
  - Discuss other issues including: Interference with delivery of academic program, possible changes to in-class routines and procedures, increased demands on resource staff and teachers, provision of an assistant(s) to assist the student with the dog, other children who are allergic to dogs, recognition of children with a fear of dogs.
  - Review cultural sensitivity for groups who will not share space with an animal.
  - Identify a date for a follow-up meeting to discuss dog handling issues/concerns.
  - Identify a process to have questions answered as they arise.
- The use of a service dog should be incorporated into the Student Specific Plan.
- A copy of the parent letter and the medical diagnosis is placed in the Pupil File. A transition-in plan is created which may involve the use of Social Stories, visits of the dog to the school/classroom, etc.
- The performance of the service dog is to be reviewed frequently during the phase-in process and after four weeks of full integration into the student’s school.
- An appropriate emergency exit plan must be put into place and the Fire Department alerted as to the existence of the dog in the school.



*Supervisor of Transportation's Responsibility:*

The Transportation Supervisor shall:

- Inform the driver of the presence of a certified service dog on the bus; and ensure that appropriate training will be provided.
  - As part of the training procedure, the protocol for handling the certified service dog on the bus will be developed and implemented in conjunction with the dog trainer/handler that will include:
    - Location of dog during transport (should not be blocking aisles) i.e. under seat or in the seat compartment.
    - The other students should receive training from the driver and/or parent or service provider to ensure the understanding of the role and function of the certified service dog as well as the procedures for handling the dog in the bus.
    - A bus evacuation plan for the dog is developed and practiced.
- The Transportation Supervisor shall ensure that there is sufficient documentation and procedural instruction available on the bus for spare bus drivers.
- As per provincial requirements, a Personal Transportation Plan is required for a student with a service animal if that student is using divisional busing. Information related to Personal Transportation Plans may be found in divisional AP806.



### **Sample Letters to Parents/Guardians for Therapy Animals**

(Date)

Dear Parents/Guardian,

This letter is to inform you that, effective (*date*), there will be a therapy animal in our school. The therapy will be in the school (times/days). Dates and times may change as required without further notice.

Therapy animals are interactive animals used to provide service and comfort to people. The presence of a therapy animal can decrease anxiety and provide a level of comfort that enables students to work through a variety of challenging issues.

We will be having an assembly to introduce "*Name of Therapy Animal*" to the rest of the students in our school and to educate them so they respond appropriately when they see "*Name of Therapy Animal*".

We have checked all of our students' medical status and do not have any students in our school who have indicated a severe allergy to these animals. Students, parents, and other school visitors who feel that they may be allergic to this animal, are asked to notify the Principal immediately.

We are excited to be able to have "*Name of Therapy Animal*" as an additional resource for our student(s) and are looking forward to having him as part of our school community.

If you have questions or concerns please do not hesitate to contact me.

Respectfully,

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Principal



### **Sample Letters to Parents/Guardians for Service Dogs**

(Date)

Dear Parents/Guardian,

This letter is to inform you that (one/two) of our students have/has received a service dog from National Service Dogs of Canada. "Name of Service Dog" is a (description of dog, i.e. three year old Golden Retriever), that will be accompanying the students to and from school and working with the two students throughout the school day.

We will be having an assembly to introduce "Name of Service Dog" to the rest of the students in our school and to educate them so they respond appropriately when they see "Name of Service Dog" (i.e. do not pet him when they see that he is wearing his purple vest because he is working).

We have checked all of our students' medical forms and do not have any students in our school who have indicated a severe allergy to dogs. \_\_\_\_\_, of National Service Dogs of Canada, has instructed us to tell students and parents that if they feel they may be allergic to dogs, to notify the Principal, and not touch the dog.

We are excited to be able to have "Name of Service Dog" as an additional resource for our student(s) and are looking forward to having him as part of our school community.

If you have questions or concerns please do not hesitate to contact me.

Respectfully,

\_\_\_\_\_  
Principal