



ASSISTANCE DOGS IN SCHOOLS

Context

The purpose of this Administrative Procedure is to provide direction regarding the use of Assistance Dogs in schools or other district properties. Assistance Dogs are specially trained to assist children and adults with their daily living activities and provide physical safety and emotional support. The use of an Assistance Dog by a student with a BC Ministry of Education Designation, in school, on school district property, or on school district buses, may be approved when it has been determined that the student requires such use in order to have equal access to the services, programs or activities offered by the school district, and when the school district's criteria have been met to the satisfaction of the Central Okanagan Public Schools' (COPS) Board of Education and the BC Ministry of Education.

1. Guiding Principles

The Central Okanagan Public Schools are committed to meeting the educational needs of all students. COPS recognizes and respects that some students have special requirements in relation to the learning environment itself and/or effectively meeting their educational needs.

- 1.1. Access to an effective education program is a basic right of each student that includes respect for the rights of each student, maintaining student dignity, and the safety of all involved. Therefore, COPS upholds the principle of equitable practice to ensure each student receives what they need to be successful.
- 1.2. All students need to receive necessary educational and social emotional support and programming in a safe and least-restrictive environment.
- 1.3. Every effort is made to provide an inclusive and responsive environment for each student to maximize their exposure to the learning community.
- 1.4. Our schools are full of diverse and dynamic students who require creative and varied responses to support learning. No single method will meet the needs of all students.

Within this context, where the need is medically established and criteria has been successfully fulfilled, COPS supports the attendance and use of an Assistance Dog by a student for the purposes of securing a safe environment and/or effectively meeting that student's educational needs, provided such attendance and use does not create undue hardship on others within the school community.

2. Definition of Terms

As used in this Administrative Procedure, an “**Assistance Dog**” means a working dog specifically trained to mitigate an individual’s disabilities or to assist a person with a specific and diagnosed medical condition. Assistance Dogs must have the qualifications prescribed by either or both the International Guide Dog Federation (IGDF) or Assistance Dogs International (ADI), or be certified by the Justice Institute of British Columbia, as per BC Ministry criteria. An Assistance Dog is a working dog, not a pet; and there are strict guidelines for access, handling and interaction with these dogs. In this context, Assistance Dogs include:

- 2.1. “Autism Support Dogs” - Dogs trained and certified as assistants for individuals diagnosed with Autism Spectrum Disorder.
- 2.2. “Guide Dogs” - Dogs trained as a guide for a blind or visually impaired person (as defined in the BC Guide Dog and Service Dog Act).
- 2.3. “Hearing Dogs” - Dogs trained and certified to alert individuals who are deaf or hard of hearing to specific sounds.
- 2.4. “Seizure Response Dogs” - Dogs trained and certified to provide emergency response for individuals with a Seizure Disorder.
- 2.5. “Service Dogs” - Dogs trained to assist individuals who utilize a wheelchair (as defined in the BC Guide Dog and Service Dog Act).

Note: “Wellness and/or Therapy Dogs” for individual purposes are not permitted by COPS at this time and are therefore not included in this Administrative Procedure. Wellness and/or Therapy Dogs may be permitted in group settings or for specific post-incidence response in partnership with approved external service providers and when accompanied by a certified adult trainer.

3. Criteria

A student may be eligible to receive the support of an Assistance Dog if the following criteria have been met:

- 3.1 The student has a low incidence BC Ministry of Education Designation (e.g. Physically Dependent, Physical Chronic Health Condition, Visual/Hearing Impairment, Autism Spectrum Disorder).
- 3.2 The student has an Individual Education Plan that clearly outlines the support needed by an Assistance Dog.
- 3.3 As per BC Ministry criteria, The Assistance Dog must be trained and certified by a training school accredited by either or both the International Guide Dog Federation (IGDF) or Assistance Dogs International (ADI), or certified by the Justice Institute of British Columbia. In any and all cases the dog/team should be able to present the British Columbia Guide Dog and Assistance Dog Provincial ID Card.
- 3.4 The introduction of the Assistance Dog to the school community must not create barriers to other students’ learning.

Procedures

4. Application/Parent/Guardian Responsibilities:

Prior to the admittance of an "Assistance Dog" to a school, a student's parent/guardian must:

- 4.1. Complete an *Application Package* to the school district with the following information and documentation:
 - 4.1.1. An Application Form requesting Assistance Dog admittance. The Application Form must outline the specific benefits of having an Assistance Dog attend school with their child and include their plan for the care and supervision of the Assistance Dog while at school.
 - 4.1.2. A letter of recommendation from an appropriate medical professional (Medical Doctor, Registered Psychologist, Psychiatrist, etc.) confirming the diagnosis. The letter must also include a recommendation for the use of an Assistance Dog for the child and outline how the Assistance Dog will help to improve the student's access to learning.
 - 4.1.3. A Certificate of Training for the Assistance Dog and Handler from an organization accredited by either the International Guide Dog Federation or Assistance Dogs International, or by the Justice Institute of British Columbia, including proof of annual recertification.
 - 4.1.4. An annual certification of up to date vaccinations provided by a Doctor of Veterinary Medicine and a letter confirming that the Assistance Dog is in good health.
 - 4.1.5. An annual copy of a municipal dog license.
- 4.2. Agree to pay for any additional costs incurred by COPS related to the Assistance Dog (e.g., appropriate training for COPS staff members, Transportation, and/or classroom modifications).
- 4.3. Arrange for the personal care and physical needs of the Assistance Dog, including:
 - 4.3.1. water bowl
 - 4.3.2. at least one bio-break procedure per day
 - 4.3.3. suitable container for waste, the removal and disposal of the waste
- 4.4. Provide evidence that the student can maintain appropriate care and control of the Assistance Dog while it is on school property (handler certification).
- 4.5. If necessary, develop a backup Dog Handler for instances when the primary dog handler is absent.
- 4.6. Accept responsibility for the actions of the Assistance Dog by:
 - 4.6.1. Signing a Central Okanagan Public Schools Release of Liability.
 - 4.6.2. Providing proof of General Liability Insurance to a minimum amount of \$2,000,000.

- 4.7. Assist the school Principal with communicating relevant information to the school community, as appropriate and requested by the school Principal.
- 4.8. Agree to assist with in-service training for staff, students and others, if appropriate and requested by the school Principal.
- 4.9. Participate in the development of the “Assistance Dog Management Plan”.
- 4.10. Work cooperatively with school staff to ensure the implementation of the Assistance Dog Management Plan is successful.
- 4.11. Advise the school Principal of any issues related to the dog’s health, behaviour, etc. which may arise from time to time.
- 4.12. Participate in and contribute to the annual review and revision (as appropriate) of the Assistance Dog Management Plan.
- 4.13. If approval is granted, ensure the Assistance Dog, its Handler and the parents/guardians comply with all rules, standards and conditions, understanding that failure to do so may result in the Assistance Dog’s approval being revoked.

5. School District/School Responsibilities:

The School District shall not be responsible for the training, feeding, grooming or care of any Assistance Dog permitted to attend school or ride on school buses under this policy. The School District must approve any person who is authorized to assist in the care and supervision of the Assistance Dog while on school property.

The District shall:

5.1. Review Criteria/Application:

- 5.1.1. Ensure that the use of an Assistance Dog is consistent with the needs and recommendations of the student’s Individual Education Plan (IEP) by way of:
 - a) School Community (staff and parents/guardians at a minimum) consultation.
 - b) Assessment of all information and decision notification to family.
- 5.1.2. Screen and approve any Trainers, Handlers or other personnel required to assist with the care and supervision of the dog while on school property, as well as any in-service necessary. A Criminal Record Check may be required for these non-school district personnel.

5.2. Host a Conference/Team Meeting:

The Case Manager and Principal will arrange a case conference with parents/guardians, the dog Handler, Case Manager, Principal, classroom teachers(s), appropriate student support staff, an Inclusive Education Consultant, a representative from Assistance Dogs International or other accredited agency,

the student (when appropriate), other consultants if necessary, and the District Principal - Inclusive Education to discuss and develop a plan including:

- a) The purpose and function of the Assistance Dog;
- b) The role/duties of the Assistance Dog Handler - who will accompany and handle the Assistance Dog outside during lunch, recess and breaks;
- c) The personal care and physical needs of the assistance dog including:
 - The safest and most environmentally sound place for the assistance dog to relieve itself
 - Removal and disposal of animal waste
 - Provision of a suitable container for waste, and
 - Considerations for seasonal changes and inclement weather
- d) Classroom considerations such as seating arrangements;
- e) Any necessary changes in routine, procedures, and program;
- f) Arrangement for the Assistance Dog to visit the school without student body present in order to familiarize it with the school site prior to commencement of services;
- g) A timetable and Transition Plan for the introduction of the Assistance Dog to the school and class and for the training of the student's school team (Principal, Teacher(s), Education Assistant(s), etc.);
- h) Arrangements for a school wide assembly and/or appropriate introductions to the school community.
- i) The Assistance Dog's inclusion in relevant school safety procedures;
- j) Rules of conduct around the Assistance Dog for students, staff and the public; and
- k) Disseminating and regulating such rules.

5.3. Notifications:

5.3.1. The following letters shall be forwarded by the District to all staff and students attending the school, to inform:

- a) The school community of the arrival of the working Assistance Dog, its purpose, rules and regulations regarding the existence of the Assistance Dog at the school.
- b) The parents/guardians of students in any of the classes and the school community where the Assistance Dog will be present to elicit information concerning allergies, health conditions, extreme phobias, or other concerns from the students or parents/guardians; and
- c) The students who will be sharing transportation where the Assistance Dog will be present.

- 5.3.2. The District shall retain all letters regarding the Assistance Dog in the student's confidential Permanent Record file.
- 5.3.3. Inform all staff including teachers, educational assistants, custodians, support staff, volunteers, and health and safety representatives of the presence of the Assistance Dog(s).
- 5.3.4. Contact the School District Transportation Department regarding any transportation requirements.
- 5.3.5. Ensure that a sign(s) is placed at the entrance of the school advising visitors of the presence of an Assistance Dog.

6. Transition Visit/Training:

If all of the above procedures have been completed to the satisfaction of the COPS, the school shall arrange for demonstrations from a representative from Assistance Dogs International or other accredited agency for the student body and staff, as required, to provide education and awareness of Assistance Dogs in schools.

7. Emergency Procedures:

The school Principal will collaborate with the local Fire Department to co-create emergency procedures to include the Assistance Dog, such as evacuations, and notify the school community of the revised procedures.

8. Limiting, Removing or Excluding Assistance Dogs from School:

COPS may remove or exclude from school facilities or property any Assistance Dog for reasons it deems appropriate.

- 8.1. The Assistance Dog poses a direct threat to the health or safety of an employee, or student or others at school, 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:

The Assistance Dog:

- a) urinates or defecates on the bus;
- b) vocalizes unnecessarily (e.g., barking, growling or whining);
- c) shows aggression towards people or other animals;
- d) solicits or steals food or other items from the student body or school personnel;
- e) is unable to perform reliably the service for which it has been approved;
- f) is not under the full control of the student or the designated Handler;
- g) is a public health threat as a result of being infested with parasites or having a communicable disease of the skin, mouth or eyes;
- h) is unclean and unsanitary;
- i) presence impairs the learning of students;
- j) solicits attention, visits or annoys any member of the student body or school personnel;
- k) fundamentally alters the nature of any school program;

The student or parents/guardians:

- l) fail to provide or maintain current documentation or other materials required by these regulations; and
- m) fail to abide by any additional conditions of the terms of an Individual Education Plan regarding their Assistance Dog.

9. Restrictions and Off-Limits:

COPS imposes some restrictions on Assistance Dogs for safety reasons. Assistance Dogs may be excluded from or have limited access to certain areas of school facilities or certain programs for safety reasons. Areas or programs that may be considered off-limits for Assistance Dogs include, but are not limited to:

- 9.1. Laboratories, mechanical rooms, custodial closets, food preparation areas, areas where protective clothing is necessary, areas which have exposed sharp metal cutting or other sharp objects which may pose a threat to the Assistance Dog's safety, areas with high levels of dust, and areas where there is moving machinery.
- 9.2. The determination to restrict the access of an Assistance Dog to specific programs or areas of that school facility will be on a case-by-case basis.

10. Transportation of an Assistance Dog:

When approving an Assistance Dog for a student at school, COPS may need to provide directions for transporting the student and the Assistance Dog.

- 10.1. Initial Training and Information:
 - 10.1.1. The Manager of Transportation, the bus driver and a representative from Assistance Dogs International or other accredited agency shall meet with the Assistance Dog, student, and parents/guardians. The owner is responsible for providing information to the bus driver regarding critical commands needed for daily interaction and emergency/evacuation;
 - 10.1.2. The Manager of Transportation, the bus driver and a representative from Assistance Dogs International or other accredited agency shall provide an orientation to students riding the bus with the Assistance Dog regarding the dog's responsibilities and how students should interact with the animal; and
 - 10.1.3. The Assistance Dog should practice the bus evacuation drills with the student.
- 10.2. Loading/Unloading:
 - 10.2.1. The Assistance Dog should board the bus by the steps, not on a lift.
- 10.3. Seating Location:
 - 10.3.1. The Assistance Dog should be positioned on the floor, at the student's feet.
 - 10.3.2. A representative of the Transportation Department will meet with the Assistance Dog's owner to determine whether the Assistance Dog should be secured on the bus with a tether or harness.

10.4. Cessation of Transportation:

10.4.1. The Assistance Dog poses a direct threat to the health or safety of an employee, or student or others on the bus, or otherwise jeopardizes the safe operation of the vehicle. Examples of such include, but are not limited to:

The Assistance Dog:

- a) urinates or defecates on the bus;
- b) vocalizes unnecessarily (e.g., barking, growling or whining);
- c) shows aggression towards people or other animals;
- d) solicits or steals food or other items from the student body or school personnel;
- e) is unable to perform reliably the service for which it has been approved;
- f) is not under the full control of the student or the designated Handler;
- g) is a public health threat as a result of being infested with parasites or having a communicable disease of the skin, mouth or eyes;
- h) is unclean and unsanitary; and/or
- i) solicits attention, visits or annoys the driver or bus riders.

10.4.2. If the transportation of the Assistance Dog is suspended due to any of the above reasons, transportation may be reinstated after additional training or medical issues are resolved. Parents should be informed of these consequences prior to the first day of transportation.

10.4.3. Although transportation may be suspended for the Assistance Dog, COPS maintains the responsibility of transporting the student.

11. Conflict Resolution:

Employees, students/parents/guardians of a student with medical issues that are impacted by dogs (such as respiratory diseases) should contact the school Principal if they have a concern about exposure to an Assistance Dog. The employee, student/parents/guardians of a student will be asked to provide medical documentation that identifies the medical concern and the need for an accommodation. The school Principal, in collaboration with the Director of Instruction - Inclusive Education Services, and if necessary, a representative from the accredited organization, will facilitate a process to resolve the conflict that considers the needs / accommodations of all persons involved.

12. Notice of Appeal:

Any student/parent/guardian of a student with an Assistance Dog who is aggrieved by the School Principal's decision to remove, impose restrictions on, or exclude an Assistance Dog may appeal that decision, as per the COPS' Appeals Process.

References:

Autism Support Dogs: <https://bcandalbertaguidedogs.com/our-dogs/autism-support-dogs/>

Assistance Dogs International, Inc.: <http://www.assistancedogsinternational.org>

BC and Alberta Guide Dog Services: <https://bcandalbertaguidedogs.com/>

BC Government Guide Dog & Service Dog Certification:

<https://www2.gov.bc.ca/gov/content/justice/human-rights/guide-and-service-dog>

Guide Dog Foundation for the Blind: <http://www.guidedog.org>

Guide Animal Act of BC:

https://www.bclaws.gov.bc.ca/civix/document/id/consol2/consol2/96177_01

International Guide Dog Federation: <https://www.igdf.org.uk/>

Justice Institute of BC: <https://www.jibc.ca/>

Pacific Assistance Dogs Society: <https://pads.ca/>

Relevant Board Policy:

Developed by: Director of Instruction – Inclusive Education

Date Agreed: April 18, 2023

Date Amended:

Related Documents: Assistance Dogs in Schools - Appendices