

Administrative Procedure 325

Students

DOGS AND SERVICE DOGS IN SCHOOL

BACKGROUND

Westmount Charter School (WCS) recognizes that dogs may provide valuable instructional, motivational, and learning opportunities when appropriately included in the school environment. At the same time, WCS has a responsibility to ensure the health, safety, dignity, and rights of students, staff, visitors, and animals.

This Administrative Procedure distinguishes between:

- **Instructional or visiting dogs**, which are not protected under service dog legislation and may be permitted only under specific conditions; and
- **Service dogs**, which are protected under provincial legislation and human rights law.

Service dogs are governed by the *Service Dogs Act*, *Blind Persons' Rights Act*, and *the Alberta Human Rights Act*. Service dogs are working animals and are not considered pets, therapy animals, emotional support animals, or classroom animals.

In Alberta, service dogs must be certified and registered under the *Service Dogs Act*. To qualify as a service dog, the dog must be trained through a school accredited by *Assistance Dogs International (ADI)*. Information regarding certification and registration requirements is available through *Alberta Human Services (Service Alberta)*, and accredited training organizations are listed on the ADI website.

Qualified service dogs are identifiable by a distinctive harness, vest, or saddlebag. They must remain under the direct control of the handler at all times, typically by means of a leash or tether, unless the use of a leash interferes with the dog's ability to perform required tasks. Service dogs are individually trained to perform specific tasks that mitigate a disability, which may include, but are not limited to, tethering, safety tracking, behavior redirection, operating light switches, opening and closing doors or drawers, retrieving dropped items, providing balance or mobility support, or pulling wheelchairs.

Service dogs support their handlers by promoting safety, independence, dignity, and confidence. They are working animals, and interaction with others must be limited, as unnecessary attention may disrupt the dog's training and focus.

When a parent/guardian is informed that their child has been offered a service dog, they must notify the Principal, who will advise the Superintendent. While schools may be notified that a student is in training, formal planning and implementation will not begin until the student and service dog have completed the training program.

DEFINITIONS

1. For the purposes of this Administrative Procedure:

Instructional / Visiting Dog A dog brought into the school for short-term instructional purposes that is not a service dog and does not have public access rights under provincial legislation.

Service Dog A dog that meets the requirements of the *Service Dogs Act* and *Service Dogs Qualifications Regulation*, or the *Blind Persons' Rights Act* and *Guide Dogs Qualifications Regulation*. A service dog is trained through an ADI-accredited organization to perform specific tasks that assist a person with a disability. A service dog is not a pet, a

	therapy dog, an emotional support animal, or a classroom animal.
Therapy Animal / Emotional Support Animal	An animal that provides comfort, companionship, or emotional support, including those recommended or prescribed by a health or mental health professional. Therapy animals and emotional support animals do not have public access rights under Alberta legislation and are not considered service dogs under this Administrative Procedure. Such animals may only be considered under the provisions for instructional or visiting dogs, at the discretion of the Principal.
Handler	The student or adult responsible for the service dog's care, supervision, and control while on school property or at school-sponsored activities.

PROCEDURES

1. Instructional or Visiting Dogs (Non-Service Dogs)

- 1.1 Approval
 - 1.1.1 With the Principal's prior approval, teachers may bring a dog into the school for one day or for short-term instructional purposes only.
 - 1.1.2 Therapy animals or emotional support animals, including those recommended by a health or mental health professional, are not granted automatic access to school buildings and may only be permitted as instructional or visiting dogs at the discretion of the Principal.
- 1.2 Instructional purposes may include:
 - 1.2.1 Observation and data gathering related to body characteristics, habits, movement, and instincts;
 - 1.2.2 Talking and writing activities to support language development;
 - 1.2.3 Supporting the development of responsibility, kindness, and concern for living beings; and
 - 1.2.4 Learning safe and respectful interactions with dogs in the local environment.
- 1.3 Before introducing a dog into the school, the teacher must ensure that:
 - 1.3.1 Reasonable accommodations have been identified and implemented to address allergies, phobias, or health concerns among students and staff;
 - 1.3.2 Parents/guardians are informed in advance;
 - 1.3.3 The dog is in good health, licensed, vaccinated, and free of aggressive tendencies;
 - 1.3.4 The teacher knows the dog's history; and

- 1.3.5 The dog must be under the direct control of a responsible adult at all times (e.g., leashed, kenneled, or contained in a secure, designated area).
- 1.4 Restrictions
 - 1.4.1 Dogs may not roam freely within the school or on school grounds.
 - 1.4.2 Dogs may not remain in the school building beyond regular school hours.
 - 1.4.3 If conditions change (dog, student, or environment), the Principal may require immediate withdrawal of the dog.
- 1.5 Municipal Bylaw Compliance
 - 1.5.1 Dogs are not permitted on school grounds in accordance with the City of Calgary Bylaw 47M2021, with the exception of accredited service dogs.

2. Service Dogs in School

- 2.1 Right of Access
 - 2.1.1 Service dogs are permitted in school buildings, on school grounds, and at school-sponsored activities as required to accommodate a disability, in accordance with provincial legislation and the *Alberta Human Rights Act*.
 - 2.1.2 A parent/guardian must submit a written request to the Principal once the service dog has successfully completed a recognized service dog training program and been matched with the student.
- 2.2 The parent/guardian must submit copies of the following documentation for preliminary review:
 - 2.2.1 A valid identification card issued under the *Service Dogs Act* or the *Blind Persons' Rights Act*;
 - 2.2.2 Current municipal licensing;
 - 2.2.3 Up-to-date vaccination records; and
 - 2.2.4 Proof of liability insurance, including coverage for any act of the service dog on school property or at school- or district-sponsored events
- 2.3 Upon receipt of complete documentation, the Principal shall consult with the Student Services Coordinator and Superintendent to determine whether the student may be responsible for the service dog at school, considering:
 - 2.3.1 The student's reasonable need for the service dog to support educational access;
 - 2.3.2 Whether reasonable alternatives could meet the student's needs;
 - 2.3.3 Whether any student or employee would reasonably experience an adverse physical or psychological reaction; and

2.3.4 Whether the presence of the service dog would reasonably interfere with classroom management.

2.4 If the request is not approved, the Principal shall notify the parent/guardian in writing, including the reason for the decision.

2.5 If approved, the Principal shall convene a service dog planning meeting with the student, parent/guardian, and Student Services to develop or update the student's Individualized Programming Plan (IPP) and Safety Plan, addressing:

- 2.5.1 Responsibilities of the student and parent/guardian; and
- 2.5.2 School-based supports required for the student to manage the service dog.

2.6 The Principal shall organize a service dog orientation meeting, held when no students are present, to orient the student, the student's parent, the teachers, school administration, Student Services, and the service dog to the school environment.

2.7 In addition to the service dog planning and school orientation meetings, the Principal shall ensure that the following measures are in place before the service dog attends school during a regular instructional day:

- 2.7.1 Staff training regarding the service dog;
- 2.7.2 Teacher classroom management adjustments as required;
- 2.7.3 Age-appropriate education for students;
- 2.7.4 Reasonable accommodations for allergies, phobias, or health concerns;
- 2.7.5 Appropriate signage for visitors;
- 2.7.6 Emergency procedure updates; and
- 2.7.7 Notification to relevant stakeholders, including the School Council, families, and transportation providers.

2.8 The handler is responsible for:

- 2.8.1 Maintaining control of the service dog at all times;
- 2.8.2 Ensuring appropriate behavior of the service dog that does not disrupt learning; and
- 2.8.3 Cleaning up after the dog and attending to its care needs.

2.9 Interaction with Service Dogs

- 2.9.1 Staff, students, and visitors must not distract, pet, or interact with a service dog unless explicitly permitted by the handler.

Legal Reference:	<i>Alberta Human Rights Act</i> <i>Education Act</i> <i>Service Dogs Act</i> <i>Service Dogs Qualifications Regulation</i> <i>Blind Persons' Rights Act</i> <i>Guide Dogs Qualifications Regulation</i>
Cross Reference:	<i>City of Calgary Bylaw 47M2021</i> <i>AP-336 Student Health and Safety</i>
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