

ASSISTANCE DOGS

Assistance dogs are trained to assist children and adults with their daily living activities and provide physical safety and emotional support. Use of an assistance dog by a student with special needs, in school or on School District No. 71 (Comox Valley) property, may be approved when it has been determined that it helps develop independence or when the student requires such use in order to have equal access to services, programs or activities offered by the school, and when they school district's criteria have been met to the satisfaction of the Comox Valley Board of Education.

1. Definition

As used in this policy & regulations, assistance dogs include:

- 1.1. "Autism Support Dogs" are dogs trained as assistants for persons with autism.
- 1.2. "Hearing Dogs" are dogs that alert individuals who are deaf or hard of hearing to specific sounds.
- 1.3. "Seizure Response Dogs" are dogs trained to provide emergency response for individuals with epilepsy.
- 1.4. "Service Dogs" (as defined in the BC Guide Dog and Service Dog Act) are dogs trained to assist individuals who utilize a wheelchair.
- 1.5. "Guide Dogs" (as defined in the BC Guide Dogs and Service Dog Act) are dogs trained as a guide for a blind or visually impaired person.

2. Criteria

- 2.1. A student may be eligible to receive the support of an assistance dog if the student has a low incidence special need (e.g., Chronic Health Condition, Visual/Hearing Impairment, Autism Spectrum Disorder), as defined by the British Columbia Ministry of Education.
- 2.2. 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.

- 2.3. The introduction of the assistance dog to the school community must not create barriers to other students' learning.

3. Application

Prior to the admittance of an "Assistance Dog" to the school, parents must:

- 3.1. Provide a letter to the school district requesting assistance dog admittance. The letter must outline the 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.
- 3.2. Provide a copy of the letter of recommendation from an appropriate professional confirming the diagnosis of the recognized special need, including a recommendation for the use of an assistance dog.
- 3.3. Provide a Certificate of Training for the assistance dog and the handler from the appropriate agency.
- 3.4. Agree to pay for any additional costs incurred by the school district and/or school related to the assistance dog (e.g., appropriate training for school district staff members, bus and/or classroom modifications).
- 3.5. Arrange for the personal care and physical needs of the assistance dog, including at least one bio-break procedure per day and providing appropriate bedding (e.g., bed or blanket) and water bowl.
- 3.6. Develop an alternative dog handler for instances when the primary dog handler is absent.
- 3.7. Accept responsibility for the actions of the assistance dog by signing a school district release of liability.
- 3.8. Annually, provide the school district with proof of the municipal dog license, proof of annual re-certification from the appropriate agency and proof of up-to-date vaccinations provided by a Doctor of Veterinary Medicine confirming that the assistance dog is in good health.

4. School District/School Responsibilities

- 4.1. Ensure that the use of an assistance dog is consistent with the needs or recommendations of the student's Individual Education Plan (IEP).
 - a) School community (staff and parents minimum) consultation.
 - b) Assessment of all information and decision notification to family.
- 4.2. Arrange a case conference with parents/guardians, the dog handler, classroom teacher(s), appropriate student support staff, a representative from the appropriate agency, the student (when appropriate), other consultants if necessary, and the District Principal of Student Services to discuss:

- a) The purpose and function of the assistance dog.
- b) The role/duties of the assistance dog handler.
- c) The personal care and physical needs of the assistance dog including:
 - The safest and most environmentally sounds 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 and procedure and program changes.
- f) Arrangement for the assistance dog to visit the school without students present in order to familiarize it with the school site prior to commencement of services.
- g) A transition plan for the assistance dog and the student.
- h) A timetable 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.)
- i) Rules of conduct around the assistance dog for students, staff and the public; and
- j) Disseminating and regulating such rules.

5. Familiarization within the School Community

Arrange for demonstrations from the appropriate agency or another certified assistance dog organization for the student body, staff and the community as required to provide education and awareness of assistance dogs in schools.

6. Emergency Procedures

Revise emergency procedure as required to include the assistance dog, such as evacuations, and notify the fire department regarding the existence of the assistance dog.

7. Removing or Excluding Assistant Dogs from School

The school district may remove or exclude from school facilities or property any assistance dog for reasons it deems appropriate.

- 7.1. The assistance dog poses a direct threat to the health or safety of the 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:
- a) The assistance dog does not urinate or defecate in appropriate/designated locations.
 - b) The assistance dog vocalizes unnecessarily (e.g., barking, growling or whining).
 - c) The assistance dog show aggression towards people or other animals.
 - d) The assistance dog solicits or steals food or other items from the student body or school personnel.
 - e) The assistance dog is unable to perform reliably the service for which it has been approved.
 - f) The assistance dog is not under the full control of the student with the disability or the designated employee.
 - g) The assistance dog 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) The assistance dog is unclean and unsanitary.
 - i) The assistance dog's presence significantly impairs the learning of students.
 - j) The student, or the student's parents fail to provide or maintain current documentation required by these regulations; and
 - k) The student, or the student's parents fail to abide by any additional conditions of the terms of an Individual Education Plan regarding their assistance dog.

8. Transportation of the Assistance Dog

When approving an assistance dog for a student with a disability at school, the district may need to provide directions for transporting the student and the assistance dog.

8.1. Familiarization with Student First

- a) The driver and, if applicable, the bus assistant should meet with the assistance dog's owner. The owner is responsible for providing information to the driver and bus assistant regarding critical commands needed for daily interaction and emergency/evacuation.
- b) The assistance dog's owner should provide an orientation to students riding the bus with the assistance dog regarding the dog's functions and how students should interact with the animal; and

c) The assistance dog should practice the bus evacuation drills with the student.

8.2. Loading/Unloading

The assistance dog should board the bus by the steps, not on a lift.

8.3. Seating Location

The assistance dog should be positioned on the floor, at the student's feet.

8.4. Cessation of Transportation

a) Situations that would cause cessation of transportation of the service animal include:

- i. The assistance dog's behavior poses a direct threat to the health or safety of others.
- ii. The assistance dog urinates or defecates on the bus.
- iii. The assistance dog does not remain in the designated area.

b) If transportation 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.

c) Although transportation may be suspended for the assistance dog, the school district maintains the responsibility of transporting the student.

9. Restrictions for Assistance Dog

The school district 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 preparations 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. Conflict Resolution

Employees, students/parents 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/parent of a student will be asked to provide medical documentation that identifies the disability and the need for an accommodation. The school principal, in collaboration with the Director of Instruction – Student Support, 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.

11. Notice of Appeal

Any student/parent 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 to their area Superintendent. That appeal must be in writing and provide detailed information regarding the basis of the appeal.

Reference: Sections 8, 17, 20, 22, 65, 85, 177 School Act

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