

ASSISTANCE DOGS

Background

The Vancouver School District acknowledges that guide dogs and service dogs (“Assistance Dogs”) which assist a student with a medical accommodation provide known benefits. The District supports the use of dogs as Assistance Dogs in alignment with the BC Guide Dog and Service Dog Act. The District does not approve other animal species as guide, service, or assistance animals.

Assistance Dogs are welcome in schools in alignment with the BC Guide Dog and Service Dog Act, when the health and safety of students and employees is addressed as a priority, the responsible use and care of the Assistance Dog is provided for, the Assistance Dog is not an impediment to learning or working, and District procedures have been followed regarding the presence or use of the Assistance Dog.

Assistance Dogs are trained to assist older children with disabilities with their daily living activities and provide physical safety. Use of an Assistance Dog by a student with special needs while attending school may be approved when it has been determined that it: aligns with the BC Guide and Service Dog Act; helps develop independence; is required in order to provide equal access to the services, programs or activities offered by the District; is meaningfully necessary for the student’s education; and when the District’s criteria have been met to the satisfaction of the Director of Instruction, Learning Services.

Definitions

Assistance Dogs are limited to and include:

Service Dogs

As defined in the *BC Guide Dog and Service Dog Act*) are dogs trained and certified to perform specific daily living tasks to assist a person with a disability.

Seizure Response Dogs are dogs trained to provide emergency response for individuals with epilepsy.

Autism Support Dogs are dogs trained as assistants for persons with autism.

Hearing Dogs are dogs that alert individuals who are deaf or hard of hearing to specific sounds.

Guide Dogs (as defined in the *BC Guide Dog and Service Dog Act*) are dogs trained and certified as a guide for a blind or visually impaired person.

Assistance Dog Handler (or “Handler”) is defined as the student whose personal medical condition requires the support of an Assistance Dog. No other persons may serve as an Assistance Dog Handler or be part of an Assistance Dog and Handler team at school or work.

Procedures

1. Assistance Dogs differ significantly from “assistance animals in training” and dogs often referred to as therapeutic, emotional support, or companion dogs. (Refer to AP 254 Appendix A — Therapeutic Use of Dogs for information and procedures).
 - 1.1 Assistance Animals in Training are animals, typically dogs, which are being trained to be an Assistance Animal or Assistance Dog, such as by the Pacific Assistance Dogs Society (PADS) Puppy in Training Program and others, require considerable commitment, care, and attention by volunteer trainers. Volunteering is a personal endeavor which divides the trainer’s time and attention. The District does not support animals being trained as Assistance Dogs/animals within schools or programs by either students or employees.
2. Criteria
 - 2.1 A student may be eligible to have the support of an Assistance Dog while at school if they qualify as a Handler of an Assistance Dog, creating a student Handler and Assistance Dog team, in alignment with the BC Guide and Service Dog Act. The student Handler must be competent in the independent care and management of the Assistance Dog during the entire school day in order to have the Assistance Dog at school.
 - 2.2 The Assistance Dog must be trained and certified by a training agency accredited by the International Guide Dog Federation (IGDF), Assistance Dogs International (ADI), or certified in accordance with the British Columbia’s Guide Dog and Service Dog Act. In any and all cases, the Assistance Dog and Handler team should be able to present a current and valid certificate from IGDF or ADI or a British Columbia Guide Dog and Service Dog Certificate issued by the Province of British Columbia as an identification card.
 - 2.3 The introduction of the Assistance Dog to the school community must not create barriers to other students’ learning or the learning of the dog’s student Handler.
 - 2.4 The addition of the Assistance Dog with the student Handler must be meaningfully necessary for the student’s education. To this end, the District must determine that the addition of an Assistance Dog contributes to educational successes of the student, including those in the District’s Individual Education Plan (IEP) for the student. This determination will be completed by the Director of Instruction, Student Services.
 - 2.5 A visitor or a student’s parent/guardian who themselves requires a certified Assistance Dog for their own disability, is welcome with their Assistance Dog in a school or workplace on a temporary basis to attend to school or school district business if it has appropriate certification/identification as per this procedures and this identification is readily available. To avoid unnecessary confusion or conflict among others, it is appreciated that they advise the Principal or workplace manager in advance of the visit.

3. Application and Parent Responsibilities

- 3.1 Prior to the admittance of an Assistance Dog for a student in a school setting, parents/guardians must meet all criteria below:
 - 3.1.1 Provide a letter to the District requesting Assistance Dog admittance. The letter must outline the benefits of having an Assistance Dog attend school with their child and include the plan for the care and supervision of the Assistance Dog while at school;
 - 3.1.2 Provide a copy of the letter of recommendation from an appropriate medical professional confirming the student diagnosis of a recognized disability or special need, including a recommendation for the use of an Assistance Dog by the student;
 - 3.1.3 Provide a Certificate of Training for the Assistance Dog and the student Handler as a team from ADF or IGDF or provide a *British Columbia Guide Dog and Service Dog Certificate* issued by the Province of British Columbia;
 - 3.1.4 Arrange for the personal care and physical needs of the Assistance Dog, including providing appropriate harness/collar, lead, bedding (e.g., bed or blanket) and water bowl. Note: Assistance Dogs are not to be fed while at school;
 - 3.1.5 Accept responsibility for the actions of the Assistance Dog by signing a District Release of Liability form; and,
 - 3.1.6 Annually, provide the District with proof of a municipal dog license, proof of annual or required re-certification from the appropriate agency, and proof from a doctor of veterinary medicine of up to date vaccinations, and confirmation that the Assistance Dog is in good health.

4. District and School Responsibilities

- 4.1 The District shall not be responsible for the training, handling, toileting, feeding, grooming or care of any Assistance Dog permitted to attend school or ride on school buses under this procedure. If and when the District deems it required and appropriate, the District may assign and approve an employee(s) who is authorized to assist in the care and supervision of the Assistance Dog while on school property. This would not negate a student Handler's requirement to independently care for and supervise their Assistance Dog.
- 4.2 The District will ensure that the use of an Assistance Dog is consistent with the needs or recommendations of the student's Individual Education Plan (IEP) and the District will arrange for:
 - 4.2.1 Notification and consultation of the school community, including school and other parents/guardian at a school;
 - 4.2.2 Assessment of all information and documentation submitted by parent(s)/guardian(s) regarding the Assistance Dog and student Handler; and,

- 4.2.3 Review by the Director of Instruction, Learning Services (Special Education).
- 4.3 The District will arrange a case conference with parents/guardians, classroom teacher(s), appropriate Student Support employees, the student Handler (when appropriate), supervisors, other consultants as deemed necessary by the District, and the Director of Learning Services to discuss:
 - 4.3.1 The purpose and function of the Assistance Dog;
 - 4.3.2 The role/duties of the Assistance Dog student Handler;
 - 4.3.3 Classroom considerations such as, but not limited to, student seating arrangements;
 - 4.3.4 Any necessary changes in routine, procedures, classrooms, or programs;
 - 4.3.5 Arrangement for the Assistance Dog to visit the school without other students present in order to familiarize it with the school site prior to commencement of services;
 - 4.3.6 A transition plan for the Assistance Dog and the student Handler;
 - 4.3.7 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), Student Support Worker(s), etc);
 - 4.3.8 Rules of conduct around the Assistance Dog for other students, employees and the public; and disseminating and regulating such rules.
 - 4.3.9 The care and physical needs of the Assistance Dog including:
 - 4.3.9.1 The safest, most hygienic, and environmentally sound place for the Assistance Dog to defecate;
 - 4.3.9.2 Removal and disposal of animal waste;
 - 4.3.9.3 Provision of suitable pick-up bags and container for waste; and,
 - 4.3.9.4 Considerations for seasonal changes and inclement weather.

5. Notifications

- 5.1 When an Assistance Dog is approved by the District, letters of notification shall be forwarded by the school Principal to inform:

- 5.1.1 All relevant employees including teachers, educational assistants, custodians, support employees, volunteers, and the site's Health and Safety Committee representatives of the presence of the Assistance Dog;
- 5.1.2 The students, and their parent(s)/guardian(s), in any of the classes where the Assistance Dog will be present. In this notification, the Principal will seek information concerning any allergies or extreme phobias of these students;
- 5.1.3 The students, and their parent(s)/guardian(s), who will be sharing transportation with the Assistance Dog. In this notification, the Principal will seek information concerning allergies or extreme phobias of these students; and
- 5.1.4 The school community of the arrival of the working Assistance Dog, its purpose, rules and regulations regarding the presence of the Assistance Dog at the school;
- 5.1.5 The District Transportation Desk regarding any special transportation requirements. This will only be necessary if the student requires District provided transportation.

6. Familiarization with School Community

- 6.1 The school Principal will arrange for demonstrations from the appropriate individual, agency or another certified Assistance Dog organization for the student body, employees, and the community as required to provide education and awareness on Assistance Dogs in schools, what to expect, and how to interact with Assistance Dogs.

7. Emergency Procedures

- 7.1 The school Principal will update emergency procedures, as required, to include the Assistance Dog.

8. Removing or Excluding Assistance Dog(s) from School

- 8.1 The District may remove or exclude from school facilities or property any Assistance Dog for reasons it deems appropriate.
- 8.2 If an Assistance Dog poses a risk to the health or safety of an employee, student or others at school, causes a significant disruption of school activities, or otherwise jeopardizes the safe operation of the school, or school event, it may be removed or excluded. Examples of such include, but are not limited to:
 - 8.2.1 The Assistance Dog does not urinate or defecate in appropriate/designated locations;
 - 8.2.2 The Assistance Dog vocalizes unnecessarily (example: barking, growling, or whining);
 - 8.2.3 The Assistance Dog shows aggression towards people or other animals;

- 8.2.4 The Assistance Dog solicits or steals food or other items from the student body or school personnel;
- 8.2.5 The Assistance Dog is unable to reliably perform the service for which it has been approved;
- 8.2.6 The Assistance Dog is not under the full control of the student Handler or the employee Handler;
- 8.2.7 The Assistance Dog poses a public health risk as a result of being infested with parasites or having a communicable disease;
- 8.2.8 The Assistance Dog is unclean and unsanitary;
- 8.2.9 The Assistance Dog's presence significantly impairs the learning of other students;
- 8.2.10 The student or the student's parent(s)/guardian(s) fail to provide or maintain current documentation required by this administrative procedure;
- 8.2.11 The Assistant Dog's presence impedes the goals, or is unnecessary to meet the goals, of the student's Individual Education Plan; or

9. Transportation of Assistance Dogs

- 9.1 When approving an Assistance Dog for a student at school, additional approval may be required from the District's bus company and the District may need to provide directions for transporting the student and the Assistance Dog.
- 9.2 The bus driver and, if applicable, the bus assistant should meet with the Assistance Dog's Handler and owner/student Handler's parent(s)/guardian(s) prior to using the bus. The Assistance Dog owner/student Handler's parent(s)/guardian(s) are responsible for providing information to the driver and bus assistant regarding critical commands needed for daily interaction and emergency/evacuation.
- 9.3 The Assistance Dog's owner/student Handler's parent(s)/guardian(s) 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 working dog.
- 9.4 The Assistance Dog should board the bus by the steps, not on a lift.
- 9.5 The Assistance Dog should be positioned on the floor, at the student Handler's feet.

10. Cessation of Transportation

- 10.1 Situations that would cause cessation of transportation of the Assistance Dog include:

- 10.1.1 The Assistance Dog's behaviour poses a direct risk to the health or safety of others;
 - 10.1.2 The Assistance Dog urinates or defecates on the bus;
 - 10.1.3 The Assistance Dog does not remain in the designated area; or
 - 10.1.4 The bus company, independent of the District, may alter its requirements thus withdrawing services to transport the Assistance Dog. The District is not responsible for the decisions of the bus company.
- 10.2 If transportation is suspended due to any of the above reasons, transportation may be reinstated after additional training or issues are resolved. Parents will be informed of the conditions.

11. Restrictions on Assistance Dogs

- 11.1 The 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 identified programs for safety reasons. Areas or programs that may be considered off-limits for Assistance Dogs include, but are not limited to:
- 11.1.1 Laboratories and laboratory-like classrooms (examples may include Home Economics, art, technical studies, etc.);
 - 11.1.2 Mechanical rooms;
 - 11.1.3 Custodial closets;
 - 11.1.4 Food preparation areas;
 - 11.1.5 Areas where protective clothing is necessary;
 - 11.1.6 Areas which have exposed sharp metal cutting or other sharp objects;
 - 11.1.7 Areas with other hazards such as chemical storage;
 - 11.1.8 Areas where there is moving machinery; and
 - 11.1.9 Areas which may pose a risk to employee safety, student safety, or the Assistance Dog's safety.
- 11.2 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 by the school Principal.

12. Conflict Resolution

- 12.1 Employees or the parent(s)/guardian(s) of other students with medical issues

that are impacted by dogs (such as from allergies) should contact the school Principal if they have a concern about exposure to an Assistance Dog at the school. These employees or parent(s)/guardian(s) will be asked to provide medical documentation that identifies the medical issue and their need for an accommodation. The school Principal, in collaboration with the Director of Instruction, Learning Services, will facilitate a process to resolve or address the conflict.

13. Notice of Appeal

- 13.1 A student or parent(s)/guardian(s) of a student with an Assistance Dog who is aggrieved by the school Principal's or Director of Instruction's decision to include, remove, impose restrictions on or exclude an Assistance Dog may appeal that decision under VSB Bylaw 2, Appeal Procedure.

References: BC Guide Dog and Service Dog Act

Adopted: June 2023