

Student Use of Service Animals in Schools	
Adopted: September 30, 2019	Last Reviewed/Revised: October 31, 2022
Next Scheduled Review: 2025-2026	
Associated Policies & Procedures: VI-46 (B) Use of Service Animals by the General Public II-52 Student Use of Service Animals in Schools	

Purpose

The purpose of this procedure is to provide direction to school administrators regarding the admittance and integration of Certified Service Animals into the school environment for the benefit of a student¹.

A Certified Service Animal is meant to facilitate the independence, dignity, and integration of the student Handler.

Application and Scope

This procedure applies to all individuals of the HCDSB who may be involved in the integration of a Service Animal into schools, including parents/guardians, Principals, teachers and HCDSB personnel who may have duties and/or responsibilities under this procedure.

References

[Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act, 2005](#)

[Blind Person's Rights Act](#)

[Education Act](#)

[Ontario Human Rights Code](#)

[Ontarians with Disabilities Act, \(2001\)](#)

[PPM 163, School Board Policies on Service Animals](#)

[Special Education in Ontario, Kindergarten to Grade 12- Policy & Resource Guide, 2017](#)

¹ Visitors on HCDSB property who require the use of a Certified Service Animal must ensure that the animal wears the distinctive harness/saddlebag or vest, as appropriate. The Certified Service Animal must also be on a leash/tether at all times and accompanied by the Handler. For further information, please see the HCDSB's customer service policy and procedures pursuant to the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act (2001).

Definitions

Accredited training organization is a guide dog or service dog trainer that is accredited by:

- International Guide Dog Federation (“IGF”): develops and ensures compliance with the standards by which Guide Dogs for the blind/ow vision are trained by its member organizations; or
- Assistance Dogs International (“ADI”): develops and ensures compliance with the standards by which Guide, Hearing and Service Dogs are trained by its member organizations; or
- A Guide Dog or Service Dog trainer that attests to compliance with the Meghan Search and Rescue Standard in Support of Accessibility: Persons with a Disability Teamed with Service Dogs standard for training (MSAR).

Certified Service Dogs², for the purpose of the HCDSB’s policy, regulation and administrative procedure, includes all trained and registered service dogs who are handled by a student with a disability who receives the dog’s services to assist with daily living activities and/or access to the Ontario curriculum, which is readily apparent (obvious by the dog’s appearance or what it is doing) or identified as a requirement in a letter from a physician or nurse. A Certified Service Dog is a working dog and does *not* interact with employees or other students.

There are 3 recognized categories of trained **Certified Service Dogs** used to accommodate the special needs of some students. These include:

- a. Guide Dogs: for persons who are visually impaired (*blind/low vision*)
- b. Hearing Dogs: for persons who are hearing impaired (*deaf/hard-of-hearing*)
- c. Service Dogs: for persons with disabilities and/or medical conditions (*students using wheelchairs, students with Autism, students with Multiple Sclerosis, Seizure Disorder or Diabetes*)

Handler (dog handler) for the purpose of the HCDSB’s policy, regulation and administrative procedure is the student with disability related needs for whom the Certified Service Dog is performing services and who is managing and is responsible for the Certified Service Dog’s performance of those services. It is the expectation of the HCDSB that students utilizing a Certified Service Dog will be the dog’s Handler.

Service Animal means certified animal that provides supports relating to a student’s disability or medical related need(s) to assist that student in meaningfully accessing education.

Principles

Comments and Guidelines

The Human Rights Code, the Blind Persons’ Rights Act, and the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act (the AODA 2005) provide authority for Certified Service Dogs to accompany their Handlers in all public places and spaces accessible by third parties. The use of service animals by the general public is covered in a separate and specific procedure. Certified Service Dogs are recognized as an Accommodation strategy³ that aids the Handler (a student with special needs) to access the Ontario Curriculum or perform daily living activities.

Certified Service Dogs and their Handlers receive specialized training to work together, and consequently they are trained to present minimal risk to and impact on other people and their environment. As a result, access by the Certified Service Dog to the school attended by the Handler may be facilitated pursuant to this procedure.

² Animals, other than dogs, may only be considered as an accommodation for a student when other methods have been unsuccessful and subject to the standard of undue hardship, these service animals must meet the same standards, as listed above, for training and registration.

³ Accommodations refer to specialized supports that enable a student to learn and to demonstrate learning (*Special Education in Ontario K-12, Policy & Resource Guide 2017*).

In all other circumstances, the access of dogs or other service animals for the benefit of a student will be considered by the Halton Catholic District School Board in accordance with the duty to accommodate the disability-related needs of that student to the point of undue hardship pursuant to the Human Rights Code.

Training and Registration

Both the Certified Service Dog and the Handler must receive training to ensure that the dog provides the Handler with accommodation services in an appropriate manner irrespective of the environment.

A Certified Service Dog and the dog's Handler must be trained, and the dog must be registered in Canada. The dog will generally have a black leather Special Skills Dog (SSD) harness and leash, and/or saddlebag or vest. Training schools for Certified Service Dogs in Ontario must be members and accredited by either:

- a. The International Guide Dog Federation, whose purpose is to serve the visually impaired and blind people from around the world by training and providing Guide Dogs, or
- b. Assistance Dogs International Inc., which is a coalition of not-for-profit organizations that train and place Assistance Dogs.

Certified Service Dogs are given to students with disabilities, including: Physical, Blind or Low Vision, Deaf/Hearing Impaired, Autism Spectrum Disorder, Post-traumatic Stress Disorder, a Seizure Disorder or Diabetes. When a Certified Service Dog is being considered by a family as an accommodation for their child, the parent/guardian may wish to consider meeting with the school principal, Coordinator of Special Education and the Special Education Consultant, prior to making a commitment to receive the dog.

Service Dogs for Students Who are Not the Handler

When the student is not able to 'handle' the dog, the dog will not be considered a Certified Service Dog for the purposes of these procedures, but the student may still receive a benefit from utilizing a service dog as an accommodation. Where the student is not the handler, an adult must be trained and must provide supervision and handling of the service dog. As a result, requests to permit the service dog to attend and be integrated into the school environment will be considered individually, in accordance with the duty to accommodate to the point of undue hardship pursuant to the Human Rights Code. Factors to be considered include, but are not limited to:

- the student's demonstrated disability/medical related needs;
- the accommodation(s) that may be provided by the service dog to meet the student's

disability related needs;

- alternative accommodations available that meet the student's demonstrated disability/medical related needs;
- the impact on the classroom and school.

Companion Dogs and Therapy Dogs

Companion Dogs for the purpose of the HCDSB's policy, regulation and administrative procedure provide comfort and friendship to students who may have emotional, self-esteem or social challenges. However, their assistance is generally not required to enable a student to access the Ontario Curriculum. While these animals may have training, the student they serve may not be the Handler, and the student and the animal do not have the same training that a Certified Service Dog and its Handler receive. As a result, requests for the use of Companion Dogs will only be considered as a last resort to accommodate the student's demonstrated disability related needs.

Therapy Dogs do not provide services to students while they are attending school.

Requirements

Initiating Admittance and Integration of a Certified Service Dog

Parents/guardians considering the use of a service animal for a student will be directed by school staff to HCDSB policy II-52 Student Use of Service Animals in Schools and this accompanying procedure for direction.

The parent(s)/guardian(s) must initiate the process by providing a letter to the school requesting permission to have a Certified Service Dog assist their child in school.

The entry of the Certified Service Dog is decided after extensive consultation and is not automatically approved. Decisions regarding the admittance and integration of Certified Service Dogs into the school environment for the benefit of a student are made on a case-by-case basis and reviewed accordingly.

When parent(s)/guardian(s) request that their child use a dog in school, it must be determined if the request is for a Certified Service Dog, and the Principal must review the request with the Special Education Consultant and Coordinator of Special Education. All circumstances of a particular case, including the individual needs of the student being assisted by the dog and the needs of other students and staff will be considered. Where necessary in the decision-making process, rights and needs of one person may have to be balanced against the rights and needs of another.

Upon approval, the Principal will schedule a school case conference meeting. The parent(s)/guardian(s) are expected to attend and provide input to ensure a safe and smooth transition for all.

Where the use of a Certified Service Dog in school has been approved, the animal may still be excluded from access to the school or part of the school, when:

- There is a risk to the health of students/staff or the physical or mental wellbeing of students as a result of the presence of the Certified Service Dog.
- Exclusion is required by another statute. Examples include the *Health Protection and Promotion Act* and the *Food Safety and Quality Act*. The former Act prohibits service animals in

places where food is prepared, processed, or handled (e.g. kitchen of school cafeteria or culinary arts classroom) although Certified Service Dogs are permitted where food is served and sold (e.g. school cafeteria or lunchroom);

- The Certified Service Dog is a breed that is prohibited by law. An example would be the Ontario *Dog Owners' Liability Act*, which places restrictions on pit bull terriers;
- There has been a material change in the circumstances that led to the original approval of the use of the Certified Service Dogs in school; or
- Exclusion is otherwise required by law.
- Consideration should be given to options available prior to exclusion of the Certified Service Dog.

1. Parental/Guardian Process

- 1.1. Provide a letter to the school requesting permission for a Certified Service Dog and outlining the purpose and benefits of having a Certified Service Dog attend school with their child, including details of the way the Certified Service Dog will accommodate the student's demonstrated disability/medical related needs, for example providing guidance in hallways.
- 1.2. Provide a letter from a member of the College of Physicians and Surgeons, a member of the College of Psychologists, or nurse qualified in a discipline relevant to the person's disability confirming the recognized disability/medical need and related special needs, including a recommendation for the use of a Certified Service Dog.
- 1.3. Provide a Certificate of Training for the Certified Service Dog and the Handler from the National Service Dogs Training Centre, or from another certified training centre.
- 1.4. Pay for any financial implications regarding the use and care of the Certified Service Dog, which may include training for staff and training from time to time for the Certified Service Dog and Handler.
- 1.5. Provide and annually update the school with proof of up-to-date vaccinations, a municipal Certified Service Dog license, and confirmation that the Certified Service Dog is in good health.
- 1.6. Arrange for the personal care and physical needs of the Certified Service Dog, including a once a day bio-break procedure, if necessary.

2. Principal Process: The school Principal will be the primary point of contact and will:

- 2.1. Ensure that the dog is a Certified Service Dog and use by the student who is the Handler is consistent with the needs or recommendations of the IPRC and/or IEP process and/or the student plan of care. If the dog is not a Certified Service Dog or the student is not a Handler and the decision is made that alternative accommodations to meet the student's demonstrated disability/medical related needs are available, the school Principal will identify in writing the rationale for the decision.
- 2.2. Consult with the appropriate Family of Schools Superintendent and the Superintendent of Special Education prior to setting a meeting to discuss use of a Certified Service Dog.
- 2.3. Inquire about any potential severe allergies, anxieties or religious objections with respect

- to dogs and possible accommodation plans to meet competing rights.
- 2.4. Arrange a meeting with parent(s)/guardian(s), classroom teacher(s), Special Education Consultant, Coordinator of Special Education, a representative of the Certified Service Dog provider, the student, as appropriate, and other staff determined necessary, to discuss and develop a plan to determine:
 - 2.4.1. The purpose and function of the Certified Service Dog;
 - 2.4.2. Training provided for the Handler (student) and the Certified Service Dog;
 - 2.4.3. Personal care and physical needs of the Certified Service Dog, such as:
 - The safest and most environmentally sound place for the Certified Service Dog to relieve itself;
 - Removal and disposal of animal waste;
 - Provision of a suitable container for waste that the Handler can access, and
 - Considerations for seasonal changes and inclement weather
 - Placement of the dog crate and any related equipment
 - 2.4.4. Classroom considerations such as seating arrangements;
 - 2.4.5. Any necessary changes in routine and procedures, and program changes;
 - 2.4.6. Arrangements for the Certified Service Dog to visit the school without students present in order to familiarize it with the school site;
 - 2.4.7. A transition plan timeline for the Certified Service Dog and the student;
 - 2.4.8. A timetable for the introduction of the Certified Service Dog to the school and class;
 - 2.4.9. A timetable for the training of the student's school team (i.e., principal; teacher(s); education assistant(s); etc.)
 - 2.4.10. Rules of conduct around the Certified Service Dog for students, staff & the public; and
 - 2.4.11. Methods for disseminating and regulating such rules.
 - 2.5. Inform all staff and the parent/guardian community, as appropriate, regarding the presence of the Certified Service Dog.
 - 2.6. Liaise with the appropriate Special Education Consultant, appropriate Teacher to resolve any specific concerns or issues raised regarding the presence of a Certified Service Dog.
 - 2.7. Arrange for demonstrations by the Certified Service Dog provider for the student body, staff, and/or the community as deemed necessary to provide education and awareness of the Certified Service Dog in the school.
 - 2.8. If applicable, ensure that the Manager: Student Transportation Students of Halton Student Transportation Services is contacted regarding any transportation requirements.
 - 2.9. Revise emergency procedures as required to include the Certified Service Dog (e.g. *notification to the Fire Department regarding the existence of the Certified Service Dog*).



- 2.10. Post signs on each entry door of the school to advise visitors of the presence of a working Certified Service Dog.
- 2.11. Inform the Family of Schools Superintendent and the Superintendent of Special Education that a Certified Service Dog is in place at the school and when/if the Certified Service Dog is no longer going to be at the school.
- 2.12. Ensure that requests for a Service Animal are kept in the OSR. In addition, the approval or denial of the request must be communicated to the parents/guardians in writing, and a copy of the correspondence must be retained in the OSR.
- 2.13. At the end of each school year, the Special Education Consultant will solicit information regarding the number of requests, approvals and denials for Ministry reporting requirements.

3. Communication

- 3.1. Letters will be distributed as follows to inform:
 - 3.1.1. The school community of the arrival of the Certified Service Dog, its purpose, and rules regarding conduct around the Certified Service Dog, Appendix A;
 - 3.1.2. The families of the students in any of the classes where the Certified Service Dog will be present to elicit information concerning allergies, anxiety, or religious considerations from the students' families, Appendix B;
 - 3.1.3. The families of any students who will be sharing transportation where the Certified Service Dog will be present, where applicable, Appendix C.
- 3.2. All information regarding the Certified Service Dog will be retained in the student's OSR.

APPROVED: Regular Meeting of the Administrative Council

AUTHORIZED BY: _____
Director of Education and Secretary of the Board

APPENDIX A

SAMPLE LETTER TO THE SCHOOL COMMUNITY

(School Letterhead)

Date:

Dear Parent/Guardian:

This letter is to inform you that there will be a Certified Service Dog in our school assisting one of our students.

This Certified Service Dog is a highly trained Certified Service Dog for our student and is able to assist in many of the routine activities which may pose some challenges for this student. This child's right to have a Certified Service Dog is protected under Human Rights legislation.

There will be information sessions at the school to integrate the Certified Service Dog into our daily routines and all our students will be instructed as to the proper procedure regarding the Certified Service Dog. They will be informed that the Certified Service Dog is a working Certified Service Dog and not a pet while at school.

Already, the Certified Service Dog has been a benefit to the student, and we look forward to a lot of growth and learning together.

Thank you for your understanding and support.

Sincerely

Principal

C.C.: Family of Schools Superintendent, Superintendent of Special Education, OSR

This information is collected under the authority of the Education Act, and managed in accordance with the Municipal Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act and the Personal Health Information Protection Act. If you have questions regarding the collection, use or disclosure of this information, please speak to your school Principal.



APPENDIX B

SAMPLE LETTER TO THE FAMILIES OF CHILDREN IN THE CLASS(ES)

(School Letterhead)

Date:

Dear Parent/Guardian:

This letter is to inform you that there will be a Certified Service Dog in our school assisting one of our students, and this student and the Certified Service Dog will be a part of your child's class.

This service dog is a highly trained Certified Service Dog for our student and is able to assist in many of the routine activities which may pose some challenges for this student. This child's right to have a Certified Service Dog is protected under Human Rights legislation.

There will be information sessions at the school to integrate the Certified Service Dog into our daily routines and all our students will be instructed as to the proper procedure regarding the Certified Service Dog. They will be informed that the Certified Service Dog is a working Certified Service Dog and not a pet while at school.

If you have any specific concerns regarding the presence of the Certified Service Dog in your child's class, please contact me at the school.

Thank you for your understanding and support.

Sincerely

Principal

C.C.: Family of Schools Superintendent, Superintendent of Special Education, OSR

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APPENDIX C

SAMPLE LETTER TO THOSE SHARING TRANSPORTATION

(School Letterhead)

Date:

Dear Parent/Guardian:

This letter is to inform you that there will be a Certified Service Dog in our school assisting one of our students, and this student and the Certified Service Dog will be a part of your child's transportation.

This Certified Service Dog is a highly trained Certified Service Dog for our student and is able to assist in many of the routine activities which may pose some challenges for this student. This child's right to have a Certified Service Dog is protected under Human Rights legislation.

There will be information sessions at the school to integrate the Certified Service Dog into our daily routines and all our students will be instructed as to the proper procedure regarding the Certified Service Dog. They will be informed that the Certified Service Dog is a working Certified Service Dog and not a pet while at school.

If you have any specific concerns regarding the presence of the Certified Service Dog on your child's mode of transportation, please contact me at the school.

Thank you for your understanding and support.

Sincerely

Principal

C.C.: Family of Schools Superintendent, Superintendent of Special Education, OSR

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