

Administrative Procedure 256-2 - Therapy Dogs/Animals in Schools

Background

Animals can provide valuable educational, therapeutic, and support benefits in school settings. These include enhancing student learning, serving as classroom pets, supporting individuals with disabilities (service dogs), and offering emotional or therapeutic assistance. However, the presence of animals must be carefully managed to mitigate health risks and ensure the safety and well-being of students, staff, and the animals themselves.

Definitions

- **Animal:** Any classroom pet or animal brought into a school for presentations or educational purposes. The supervising teacher is responsible for the animal's care and for ensuring community safety.
- **Service Dog:** A dog trained and qualified under Alberta's Service Dogs Act to assist a person with a disability, including dogs trained through recognized programs such as Canine Vision, Special Skills, or Seizure Response Dog Guides. Only dogs registered and qualified in Canada are considered service dogs under this procedure. **See AP 256 for specific guidance.**
- **Therapy Dog:** Not recognized as service dogs. A therapy dog is a dog that has been trained and certified through recognized therapy animal organizations to provide comfort, affection, and interaction to individuals in settings such as schools, hospitals, and care facilities.

Transportation

No animals, with the exception of approved Service Dogs, are permitted to be transported by Clearview's Transportation Department.

Communication

Once a therapy dog has been approved for use within the school environment, it is essential that clear and timely communication is sent out to all relevant stakeholders, including parents and the school council. This communication should outline the purpose and benefits of the therapy dog program, the specific role the dog will play within the school, and any relevant policies or safety protocols. Providing this information helps ensure transparency, allows parents to express any concerns or ask questions, and fosters a collaborative and supportive atmosphere for the successful integration of the therapy dog into the school community.

Guidelines for a Therapy Dog

1. When considering the use of a Therapy Dog *administration* must obtain the Division's prior written authorization by submitting a written request to the Director of Student Services that includes (dogs under the age of 1 year are not old enough to be certified in all areas. These animals may be approved by the Superintendent of Schools):
 - 1.1. proof of the Therapy Animal's certification from a verified certifying agency such as Community Therapy Dogs Society or St. John's Ambulance.
 - 1.2. proof of the Therapy Dog's obedience training from a verified CKC test such as Canine Good Neighbour or Companion Dog (CD) from CKC.
 - 1.3. proof of the Therapy Animal's current vaccination against transmissible disease and documentation from a veterinarian confirming the animal's good health.
 - 1.4. an executed agreement to indemnify the Division for any damage or injury that may result from the Therapy Animal's presence on Division Property.
 - 1.5. proof of a minimum of \$2,000,000 general liability insurance naming The Board of Trustees of Clearview Public School Division as a named insured.
2. Owners of Therapy Dogs will be held responsible for any costs, damages, injury and/or lawsuits brought against the Division in relation to their Therapy Dog(s).
3. Owners of Therapy Dogs are required to maintain control over their Therapy Dogs at all times. In all cases, dogs
 - 3.1. must be clean, well-groomed, and not have an offensive odour. Being well-groomed refers to:
 - Regular bathing to maintain a clean coat free of dirt, odors, or debris.
 - Brushed fur to reduce shedding and matting, keeping the coat smooth and tidy.
 - Trimmed nails to prevent scratching
 - Clean ears and eyes free from discharge or odor.
 - Parasite-free (e.g., free from fleas or ticks).
 - 3.2. must not annoy any member of the student body or school personnel by seeking attention;
 - 3.3. must not vocalize unnecessarily;

- 3.4. must show no aggression towards people or other animals; (Growling, baring teeth, raised hackles, aloofness to strangers etc.)
 - 3.5. must not solicit or steal food or other items from the student body or school personnel; and
 - 3.6. must not pose a health or safety threat to any student, personnel or other persons.
 - 3.7. must be kept under control at all times. Leashed if applicable.
4. The Division reserves the right to ask the owner to remove the Therapy Dog(s) from the property.
5. It is the responsibility of the Therapy Dog's owner to ensure that the dog does not urinate, defecate, or cause any damage within Division buildings. Owners are also solely responsible for cleaning up after their Therapy Dog and should not rely on others, including caretaking staff, for assistance with clean-up.
6. Animals are not allowed in classrooms with students/staff who have allergies or medical conditions unless risk assessments are conducted in conjunction with Administration.

Guidelines for other animals on School Property

1. Animals are not permitted in Division-owned, leased, or rented facilities except:
 - Registered service and therapy dogs. (Approved by the Director of Student Services)
Animals with a clear educational purpose (e.g., class projects).
 - Animals are part of social or school-wide events (e.g., pet days).
2. Principal must approve animal presence based on:
 - Animal health and behavior.
 - Proper containment (leash, cage).
Proof of vaccinations/licensing if requested.
 - Educational merit.
 - Prohibited animals: reptiles (e.g., turtles, iguanas), ferrets, wild animals (e.g., skunks, foxes), venomous species, and certain livestock unless

strict hygiene can be ensured.

2. Care and Supervision

- The responsible individual (typically the teacher or animal owner) must oversee care, supervision, and clean-up.
- Animals must not be left on site during extended breaks or holidays (does not apply to aquariums.)

3. Health and Safety Considerations

- Animals are not allowed in classrooms with students/staff who have allergies or medical conditions unless risk assessments are conducted in conjunction with Administration.
- Notifications must be issued to parents/staff prior to an animal's arrival to identify potential health concerns.
- Animals must remain restrained and may not roam freely in school environments.
- Immediate removal of the animal may be requested by the Principal or Division.

4. Hygiene and Cleanliness

- Handwashing with soap and water is mandatory before and after animal interactions
- Students must be taught how to safely interact with animals.
- Animals must not be kissed or closely contacted with students' faces.
- Cages must have trays/drop sheets to prevent mess.
- Animal enclosures must remain clean; student cleaning must be supervised.
- Cleaning of animal housing must not occur in food preparation or drinking areas.
- Protective gloves must be used during cleaning.
- Animal waste must be bagged and disposed of in external waste containers.

5. Liability

- The Division accepts no liability for animal injuries or damages occurring on school property.

Reference:

Education Act, Sections 11, 52, 53, 196, 197, 222

Alberta Human Rights Act

Alberta Service Dogs Act and Qualifications Regulation 197/2008 (consolidated to 34/2015)

Blind Persons' Rights Act
Alberta Occupational Health and Safety Act and Code
Alberta Public Health Act and Regulations