

# 212 Animals in Schools – Administrative Procedures

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## Purpose

The North Vancouver Board of Education is committed to creating a safe, inclusive, and enriching learning environment that promotes student well-being and diverse educational experiences. Policy 212: Animals in Schools supports this work by ensuring that animals brought into schools support instruction for learners.

Per the policy, the Board recognizes that certified or accredited assistance dogs play a role in fostering an environment that ensures equitable access to services, programs, and activities within the school district. The school district supports the use of certified or accredited assistance dogs, in alignment with the BC Guide Dog and Service Dog Act.

## Scope

This administrative procedure applies to all students, staff, faculty, administrators, contractors, and visitors.

## Definitions

**“Assistance Dog”** refers to a specially trained dog that helps a person with a disability by avoiding hazards or performing specific tasks to support their daily needs. This includes **guide dogs**, which assist people, who are blind or have low vision and **service dogs**, which help people with other disabilities such as the Deaf, the deafened, and the hard of hearing or epilepsy. Assistance dogs can help their handlers navigate public spaces, alert them to sounds, open doors, and carry out other important tasks. In British Columbia, the Guide Dog and Service Dog Act and its regulations set the standards for certifying assistance dogs and their handlers, ensuring public safety, high training standards, and improved access for these teams.

Assistance dogs may be needed to support conditions for daily living such as:

- **Vision:** (legally blind)
  - “Guide Dogs” are dogs trained as a guide for people who are blind, Deafblind or have low vision
- **Hearing** to such a degree that the person requires a service dog.
  - “Hearing Dogs” are dogs that alert individuals who are deaf, deafened or hard of hearing to specific sounds.
- **Mobility needs** to such a degree that the person requires a service dog.
  - “Service Dogs” are dogs trained to assist individuals who utilize a wheelchair or have mobility needs.
- **Health conditions** where a person would benefit from a service dog that can alert the person of an impending event (e.g. seizure disorders, diabetes, cardiac rhythm disturbances, etc).

- “Health Response Dogs” are dogs trained to provide emergency response for individuals with health conditions.
- **Autism** in students where a service dog can assist by: Calming child when overwhelmed; preventing the child from self harming; preventing the child from eloping; facilitating social interactions for the child.
  - “Autism Support Dogs” are dogs trained as assistants for persons with autism.
- **Psychological conditions** where the person, although well enough to care for a service dog, requires a service dog to assist them with daily living and managing their condition (e.g. Post Traumatic Stress Disorder).
  - ⊖ “Psychological Support Dogs” are trained to assist with daily living and managing an individual’s condition.

**\*Note:** Therapy and emotional support animals, including dogs, are not eligible for certification under the BC Guide Dog and Service Dog Act.

## Procedures

### Part 1: Animals to Support or Enrich Instruction

1. Animals brought into schools for educational purposes are allowed, subject to the following:
  - a. Pre-Approval: The school Principal must approve the animal.
  - b. Curriculum Connection: The animal must be directly linked to curriculum or program objectives.
  - c. Control: Animals must be leashed, or tethered, or kept in a secure enclosure at all times, and under the supervision of an adult.
2. Principals must take into consideration the following when approving animals in schools:
  - a. Health and Safety Considerations
    - i. The school Principal has the authority under the School Act to remove any animal from School District property that poses a safety, health, or behavioral concern.
    - ii. Animals must be in good health, free of disease, and exhibit no tendencies to bite, scratch, or display aggressive or disruptive behavior; any animal that does will be removed.
    - iii. The owner of the animal must show proof of current records, including vaccinations or training where relevant.
    - iv. Parents/guardians must be informed prior to an animal visiting the school; and any concerns can be addressed to the teacher and the principal
    - v. Schools must accommodate students and staff with allergies, fears, or other sensitivities to animals.
    - vi. Animal waste must be disposed of in a sanitary manner.

- b. Animal Care and Rights
  - i. Humane Treatment: Animals must be treated with kindness, patience, and respect. No animal should be subjected to fear, distress, or harm due to mishandling, teasing, or loud environments.
  - ii. Right to Safety and Well-being: The environment must be safe and secure for the animal (e.g., free from harmful substances, rough play, or physical danger). Students and staff should be educated on appropriate interactions.
  - iii. Right to Proper Nutrition and Hydration: Animals must have access to clean water and appropriate food throughout the school day.
  - iv. Right to Natural Behavior: Animals should be able to express normal behavior (e.g., movement, play, rest) and not be confined in ways that cause stress.
  - v. Legal Protections: Animals brought into schools must comply with local animal welfare laws and regulations. Permits or documentation may be required for certain animals.

## Part 2: Assistance Dogs

Assistance Dogs are specially trained to support individuals, including children and adults, in performing daily living tasks, supporting greater independence, and/or fulfilling a safety need. A neurodivergent student or student with a disability may be permitted to use an Assistance Dog at school or on school district property if it is determined that the dog promotes greater independence and is necessary for the student to have equal access to school programs, services, or activities. Approval is contingent upon meeting the school district's established criteria and receiving authorization from the Board of Education.

### 1. Criteria:

A student may be eligible to receive the support of an Assistance Dog if they have an identified disability or health impairment (e.g., Chronic Health Condition, Visual/Hearing Impairment, Autism Spectrum Disorder), as defined by the British Columbia Ministry of Education.

1. The Assistance Dog must be trained and certified by a training school accredited by either the [International Guide Dog Federation \(IGDF\)](#) or [Assistance Dogs International \(ADI\)](#). Dogs who are not trained by these organizations are required to pass a public safety assessment administered by [Obedience Unleashed Dog Training \(OUDT\)](#). In any and all cases the dog/team should be able to present the British Columbia Guide Dog and Assistance Dog Provincial ID Card. Further Guide Dog and service dog certification can be found on the [BC Government Website](#).
2. The introduction of the Assistance Dog to the school community must not create barriers to other students' learning or the student requesting the use of an Assistance Dog.

## 2. Application:

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

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.
2. Provide a copy of the letter of recommendation from an appropriate professional confirming the diagnosis of a recognized disability or need, including a recommendation for the use of an Assistance Dog.
3. Provide a Certificate of Training for the Assistance Dog and the Handler from the appropriate agency and British Columbia Guide Dog and Assistance Dog Provincial ID Card.
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).
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.
6. Annually, provide the school district with proof of a 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.

## 3. School District Responsibilities

The school district shall not be responsible for the training, feeding, grooming, care or any costs incurred by the owner of any Assistance Dog permitted to attend school or ride on school buses under this policy. The school district must approve any person who is authorized to assist in the care and supervision of the Assistance Dog while on school property.

The school district shall:

1. Ensure that the use of an Assistance Dog is consistent with the needs or recommendations of the student's Individual Education Plan ("IEP") by way of:
  - a. school community (staff and parents minimum) consultation and
  - b. an assessment of all information and a decision notification to the family.
2. Arrange a case conference with parents/guardians, the dog handler, classroom teachers(s), appropriate Student Support staff, a representative from the appropriate agency, the student (when appropriate), and other consultants if necessary, 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 sound 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 procedures 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(s) 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.

#### 4. Notifications and Communication

- 1. The following letters/communication shall be forwarded by the school district to all students attending the school, to inform:
  - 1. The **school community** of the arrival of the working Assistance Dog, its purpose, rules and regulations regarding the existence of the Assistance Dog at the school.
  - 2. The **students in any of the classes** where the Assistance Dog will be present to elicit information concerning allergies, or extreme phobias from the students' parents/guardians.
  - 3. The **students who will be sharing transportation** where the Assistance Dog will be present.
- 2. The school district shall inform all staff including teachers, educational assistants, custodians, support staff, volunteers, and health and safety representatives of the presence of the Assistance Dog(s).
- 3. The school district shall contact the school district's Transportation coordinator regarding any student/service dog transportation requirements.

## **5. Familiarization within the School Community**

A school shall 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**

A school shall revise emergency procedures 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 Assistance Dogs from School**

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

If the school district determines that 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 the school district may remove or exclude the Assistance Dog from school facilities or property. Examples of such include, but are not limited to:

- urinating or defecating in inappropriate/undesignated locations.
- vocalizes unnecessarily (e.g., barking, growling or whining).
- shows aggression towards people or other animals.
- solicits or steals food or other items from the student body or school personnel.
- is unable to perform reliably the service for which it has been approved.
- is not under the full control of the student with the disability or the designated employee.
- is a public health threat because of being infested with parasites or having a communicable disease of the skin, mouth, or eyes.
- is unclean and unsanitary.
- presence significantly impairs the learning of students.
- the student or the student's parent/guardian fail to provide or maintain current documentation required by these regulations.
- the student or the student's parent/guardian 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 school district may need to provide directions for transporting the student and the Assistance Dog.

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.
2. Loading/Unloading
  - a) The Assistance Dog should board the bus by the steps, not on a lift.
3. Seating Location
  - a) The Assistance Dog should be positioned on the floor, at the student's feet.
4. Cessation of Transportation
  - a) Situations that would cause cessation of transportation of the service animal include:
    - i. The Assistance Dog's behaviour 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/guardians 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 Dogs**

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: Laboratories, mechanical rooms, custodial closets, food preparation 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.

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. Staff Assistance Dogs- Pacific Assistance Dogs Society (PADS)**

The school district recognizes the benefit dogs can have on students. There may be school district staff who wish to bring an Assistance Dog into a school. Staff Assistance Dogs must be accredited assistance dogs.

Staff who wish to bring an Assistance Dog to school shall follow the following procedures:

- a) A staff Assistance Dog must be accredited by the [Pacific Assistance Dogs Society](#).
- b) A staff member must provide a written request to the principal of the school to bring a staff Assistance Dog into the School. The Written Request shall include information regarding:
  - i. identifying the school where the staff member shall bring the Staff Assistance Dog;
  - ii. consultation with the school community regarding bringing a Staff Assistance Dog into the School;
  - iii. how the Staff Assistance Dog will: support students; improve instruction to students; improve learning for students; and/or provide emotional support to students.
- c) The principal of the school must provide written authorization to the staff member before the staff member may bring a Staff Assistance Dog into the school.
- d) The Authorization is only valid in the school listed in the Written Request. If a staff member switches schools within the school district, the staff member shall issue a separate Written Request and seek a new Authorization before bringing in a Staff Assistance Dog to the new school.
- e) The school and/or school district shall not be responsible for expenses related to the training, feeding grooming or care related to the staff owned Assistance dog.

## **11. 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 or a Staff Assistance Dog. The employee, student/parents 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 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.

## **12. 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 the Director of Instruction, as per [Policy 406](#).



## Related Policies

- [Policy 106: Statements of Mandate, Vision, and Values](#)
- [Policy 201: Learning Resources for Classroom Use](#)
- [Policy 211: Special Education Services and Programs](#)
- [Policy 301: Student Safety and Welfare](#)
- [Policy 416: Anti-Ableism](#)
- [Policy 505: Employee Welfare](#)

## Resources

- [BC Guide Dog and Service Dog Act](#)
- [BCSPCA – Position Statement on Animals in Schools](#)
- [British Columbia Ministry of Education – Science Safety Resource Manual](#)
- [DNV – Bylaw 5981 Dog Tax and Regulation](#)
- [CNV – Bylaw 8113 Dog Tax and Regulation](#)