CATHOLIC DISTRICT SCHOOL BOARD OF EASTERN ONTARIO
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BOARD ADMINISTRATIVE PROCEDURE

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404 – Use of Service Animals in Schools

DIRECTIONAL POLICY

400 – Safe, Inclusive & Protective Schools

Title of Administrative Procedure:

Use of Service Animals in Schools

Date Approved:

February 2026

Projected Review Date:

February 2031

Directional Policy Alignment:

The Catholic District School Board of Eastern Ontario recognizes that all people are created equal, in the image of God, each with inimitable characteristics deserving of dignity. (Genesis: 1:27). The Board also recognizes, like St. Francis, an appreciation for all living creatures in the communion that exists between all of God's Creation (Laudato Si).

In the context of this landscape, the Board will provide a learning environment which supports and enables diversity within its Catholic community. The Board recognizes that Board policies, programs, guidelines and practices, shared and committed leadership, engaged school-home-community relationships, inclusive curriculum and assessment practices, provision of religious accommodations, a positive school climate, professional learning, accountability and transparency are key to establishing and maintaining an equitable and inclusive learning environment.

The Board recognizes that the school system gives pre-eminence to the tenets of the Catholic faith, congruent with the protection afforded in the Ontario Human Rights Code, the Constitution Act, 1982, and confirmed in the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms.

Alignment with Multi-Year Strategic Plan:

The Service Animals in Schools Administrative Procedure supports the Board's Multi-Year Strategic Plan through its "to Nurture" tenant by creating a safe, supportive and healthy environment for all members of the CDSBEO community. The Board is committed to the safety

and well-being of all students, staff and families and will ensure that all members of the CDSBEO community are aware of the directives outlined in this Administrative Procedure.
CDSBEO Strategic Plan 2025-2030

Purpose

It is the policy of the Board in accordance with its obligations pursuant to the Ontario *Human Rights Code* to provide individualized accommodation to students with disabilities to enable them to have meaningful access to education services in a manner that respects their dignity, maximizes integration, and facilitates the development of independence.

The process of accommodation shall also consider the competing human rights of staff and other students' the impact of the Guide Dog, Service Dog or Service Animal on the learning environment; and the health and safety of all individuals who are or might be in the school, on school grounds, or at a school-related event.

The Board utilizes a variety of placements, differentiated programming, and evidence-based interventions and strategies to provide meaningful access to education for students who have disability-related needs that impact their learning.

The Board does not provide Guide Dogs, Service Dogs or Service Animals to students, nor does it provide or permit training in the school setting.

The Board encourages any family considering the purchase of a Guide Dog, Service Dog or Service Animal to meet with the school Principal before making any financial commitment.

Background

The term Service Animal is used in the *Accessibility Standards for Customer Service* made under the *Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act* (AODA), to describe an animal that assists an individual with a disability to be able to access goods and services available to the public. **A school is not a public space and is not generally accessible to the public. The AODA does *not* apply to a student's use of a Guide Dog, Service Dog or Service Animal when accessing education services in school buildings.**

Pursuant to the Ontario *Human Rights Code* it is possible that a Service Animal might include different species that provide a therapeutic function (e.g., horses), emotional support, sensory function, companionship and/or comfort.

Action Required

This Administrative Procedure identifies the individualized process to be followed when a parent/guardian or adult student applies to the School Board to have a Guide Dog, Service Dog

or Service Animal accompany the student while the student is attending school or a school-related event.

In circumstances where a parent/guardian or adult student requests to have the student's Guide Dog, Service Dog or Service Animal accompany the student while attending school or a school-related event, each such request shall be reviewed individually by the Board considering the student's dignity, integration, independence and disability-related learning needs and the accommodations available to enable meaningful access to education prior to a Guide Dog, Service Dog or Service Animal accommodation.

Such a decision will consider that all animals approved for assistance in schools must be trained by an Accredited Training Organization, and animals other than dogs, are not trained by an Accredited Training Organization and may pose a risk to the safety of students and staff and/or may be disruptive to the learning environment and/or may act as a distraction to the learning environment.

Due to risks to safety, and risks of disruption and distraction in the learning environment, the School Board does ***not*** permit training of potential Guide Dogs, Service Dogs or Service Animals in the school setting or during school activities.

A regulated health professional cannot unilaterally prescribe that a Guide Dog, Service Dog or Service Animal be a specific accommodation while the student is receiving education services which may include accommodations at the school.

When an adult student or parent/guardian seeks to have their child attend school or school related events with a Guide Dog, Service Dog or Service Animal, both the Guide Dog, Service Dog or Service Animal and the Student Handler must be certified as having been successfully trained by an accredited training facility.

Only in exceptional circumstances, subject to the standards of undue hardship pursuant to the *Human Rights Code*, will the School Board consider Service Animals, other than dogs, as an accommodation for a student and only if other reasonable methods of accommodation in the school setting have been unsuccessful in meeting the demonstrated disability-related learning needs of the student. In these circumstances, relevant regional bylaws will be taken into consideration.

Only in exceptional circumstances subject to the standards of undue hardship pursuant to the Human Rights Code, will the School Board consider an application for a student who will not be acting as the primary trained Handler of the Guide Dog, Service Dog or Service Animal.

Dispute of Decision

If the decision made by the Principal is disputed by the parent/guardian or adult student, the Principal will initiate a case conference or reconvene a case conference to review the Guide Dog,

Service Dog or Service Animal request in relationship to the student's meaningful access to education. The Principal will inform their Superintendent of School Effectiveness and involve them in the process.

Responsibilities

The Board of Trustees is responsible for:

- Reviewing and considering for approval all new and revised policies recommended for consideration by the Policy Committee including the Use of Service Animals in Schools Administrative Procedure.
- Understanding and communicating with members of the community the content of this Administrative Procedure.

The Director of Education is responsible for:

- Implementing and operationalizing the Use of Service Animals in Schools Administrative Procedure.
- Ensuring that Senior Administration and designated staff are responsible for the development of this Administrative Procedure.
- Designating resources for ensuring the implementation and compliance with this Administrative Procedure.

Superintendent with responsibility for Special Education is responsible for:

- Developing the Use of Service Animals in Schools Administrative Procedure in keeping with the Safe, Inclusive and Protective Schools Directional Policy.
- Supporting the process for a Guide Dog, Service Dog or Service Animal accommodation.

Superintendents of School Effectiveness are responsible for:

- Providing input to ensure this Administrative Procedure captures the specific and relevant concerns that may arise from their family of schools and their particular portfolios.
- Conferring with Principals of their families of schools upon receipt of request for a Guide Dog, Service Dog or Service Animal.

Principals and Vice-Principals are responsible for:

Leading their school communities in communicating and understanding this Administrative Procedure in consideration of the following:

- School Principals are responsible for the management of the school premises, the staff providing educational programs and the safety of all students.
- A school Principal has authority to exclude any animal, including Guide Dogs, Service Dogs or Service Animals, from entry onto school premises and school

building(s), as an accommodation for a student, provided that the student is offered appropriate alternative accommodation to meet the student's demonstrated disability-related learning needs.

- School principals, before admitting a Guide Dog, Service Dog or Service Animals into the school or on school related activities with the Student Handler, shall require a parent/guardian/adult student to submit a completed application, included in Appendix A of the Procedure.
- Before admitting a Guide Dog, Service Dog or Service Animal, the school Principal shall require the parent/guardian or adult student to submit a completed application, included in Appendix B of this procedure.
- On receipt of an application for a Guide Dog, Service Dog or Service Animal, the school Principal shall review the application for completeness and may request any additional information or clarification necessary to assess the request for accommodation. The Principal will inform their Family of Schools Superintendent of this request. A case conference may be initiated.
- The School Principal shall be responsible for communication with the parent/guardian or adult student with respect to the accommodation process, and where approved, the implementation and management of the accommodation.
- Notwithstanding that schools are not public spaces, where a student supported by a Guide Dog, Service Dog or Service Animal, whose parent/guardian is the Handler, seeks only to attend a school excursion with the Guide Dog, Service Dog or Service Animal, which is at a location where the public is customarily admitted, efforts will be made to facilitate the student's participation with the Guide Dog, Service Dog or Service Animal and parent/guardian as the Handler.
- Inquiries may need to be made regarding competing rights and transportation arrangements.

Staff are responsible for:

- Being familiar with and adhering to this Administrative Procedure in keeping with all other accommodations to learning for all students of the board.

Parents/Guardians or Adult Students are responsible for:

Parents/Guardians or Adult Students are required to provide all necessary documentation and engage in the consultation process for the purpose of considering and implementing, if appropriate, the request that a Guide Dog, Service Dog or Service Animal accompany the student at school and/or school-related activities. The parent/guardian or adult student shall be responsible for:

- Submission of Appendix A.
- All costs related to the dog, food, grooming, harness, crate and/or mat and veterinary care.
- Obtaining training and maintaining the Guide Dog, Service Dog or Service Animal training to provide the accommodation in a safe manner that does not disrupt

student learning.

- Providing confirmation of municipal license for the dog (to be updated annually).
- Providing confirmation of certificates of training not older than 6 months from an Accredited Training Organization attesting that the Guide Dog, Service Dog or Service Animal and Student Handler have successfully completed training and may safely engage in a public setting without creating a risk of safety or a risk of disruption within a school setting.
- Providing a diagnosis from a registered pediatrician, psychologist, psychiatrist (or other regulated health professional as determined by the School Board) with a recommendation for the use of a Guide Dog, Service Dog or Service Animal.
- Providing a description of the services provided by the Guide Dog, Service Dog or Service Animal to the student, and how those services will accommodate the student's disability-related needs and assist the student in achieving their learning goals and/or goals of daily living while at school.
- Providing a certificate not greater than three (3) months old from a veterinarian qualified to practice veterinary medicine in the Province of Ontario attesting that, the Guide Dog, Service Dog or Service Animal is an adult; identifying the age and breed; does not have a disease or illness that might pose a risk to humans; has received all required vaccinations; and is in good health to assist the student (to be updated annually).
- Obtaining and confirming that the owner has liability insurance in place for school-related activities in the event where the Guide Dog, Service Dog or Service Animal causes injuries to someone. This coverage could be provided through a homeowner's/tenant's policy. Limits of $1-2 million would be reasonable.
- In the event that the Guide Dog, Service Dog or Service Animal is stolen, injured or inflicts injury upon something or someone, the owner is to provide confirmation that this is no fault of the school board.

Students are responsible for:

Students who have a Guide Dog, Service Dog or Service Animal will be expected to act as the Guide Dog, Service Dog or Service Animal's primary Handler. The Student Handler must be able to perform the following:

- Demonstrate the ability to control the Guide Dog, Service Dog or Service Animal in accordance with the training received.
- Ensure that the Guide Dog, Service Dog or Service Animal is always wearing a vest and leash or harness when the dog is not in its crate.
- Ensure the Guide Dog, Service Dog or Service Animal does not disrupt the learning of others with unnecessary movement, vocalization, or other behaviour, including aggressive or threatening behaviour;
- Ensure that the Guide Dog, Service Dog or Service Animal's biological needs are addressed.
- Transition and maintain at all times the Guide Dog, Service Dog or Service Animal on a leash, harness, mat and/or crate.

- Comply with an accommodation plan that addresses the competing rights of others.

Progress Indicators

- Collection of data in relation to the number of applications and approval of Guide Dogs, Service Dogs or Service Animals in schools of the Board.
- Meaningful access to education for students who have disability-related needs that impact their learning.

Definitions

For the purpose of this Administrative Procedure, the following definitions apply:

Accredited Training Organization
Guide dogs and Service Animals must be certified and registered in Canada. The Special Skills Dog (SSD) or National Service Dog (NSD) will have a distinctive harness and leash and/or saddlebag and vest.
Training schools for any type of Service Animal, guide or working dog in Ontario must be members and accredited by either:

- International Guide Dog Federation ("IGDF") which develops and ensures compliance with the standards by which Guide Dogs for the blind/low vision are trained by its member organizations; or
- Assistance Dogs International ("ADI") which develops and ensures compliance with the standards by which Guide, Hearing and Service Dogs are trained by its member organizations or approved candidate members of Assistance Dogs International (ADI) that are trained to ADI standards.
- 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).
- Online accreditations/certifications will not be recognized.

Adult Student: Shall be defined to mean a student who is 18 years of age or older or 16 or 17 years of age and has removed him/her/themselves from the care and control of their custodial parent.

Disability means:

a. Any degree of physical disability, infirmity, malformation or disfigurement that is caused by bodily injury, birth defect or illness and, without limiting the generality of the foregoing, includes diabetes mellitus, epilepsy, a brain injury, any degree of paralysis, amputation, lack of physical coordination, blindness or visual impediment, deafness or hearing impediment, muteness or speech impediment, or physical reliance on a guide dog or other animal or on a wheelchair or other remedial

appliance or device.

b. A condition of mental impairment or a developmental disability.
c. A learning disability, or a dysfunction in one or more processes involved in understanding or using symbols or spoken language.
d. A mental disorder; or
e. An injury or disability for which benefits were claimed or received under the insurance plan established under the Workplace Safety and Insurance Act, 1997.

Guide Dog: Means a dog is trained as a guide for a blind person and having the qualifications prescribed by the regulations pursuant to the **Blind Persons' Rights Act.**

Handler: Refers to the individual trained by an Accredited Training Organization who is managing the Guide Dog/Service Dog and in most cases will be the student for whom the Guide Dog/Service Dog is provided.

Parent/Guardian: Shall be defined to mean a custodial parent of the student or a guardian pursuant to the *Education Act*.

Service Dog: Means a dog which has been certified after successfully completing a training program provided by an Accredited Training Organization.

Service Animal: For the purpose of this Procedure includes a therapy dog, companion animal, comfort animal and emotional support animal and includes a dog or other domesticated animal that may legally reside in an urban, residential home, that is not highly trained to perform particular tasks to assist with a student's disability-related needs, but provides emotional support (and/or companionship, calming influence) for a student with a disability-related to mental health and/or psychological need and/or comfort during a difficult period.

Related Documents

- Appendix A – Application Request for Guide Dog/Service Dog
- Appendix B – Application Request for Service Animal
- Appendix C – Principal Checklist
- Appendix D – Sample Letters
    - Sample Letter to Employees & School Permit Holders
    - Sample Letter to the School Community
    - Sample Letter to the Parents of Students on the School Bus
    - Sample Letter to Parents of Students in the Class(es)
    - Sample Letter Approving the Guide Dog, Service Dog or Service Animal
    - Sample Letter Denying the Guide Dog, Service Dog or Service Animal

References

- Human Rights Code, RSO 1990, c.H.19
- Education Act, RSO 1990, c.E2, s. 170(1), s.265(1); O. Reg. 298, s.11
- PPM163 – School Board Policies on Service Animals
- J.F. v. Waterloo Catholic District School Board, 2017 HRTO 1121 (CanLII)
- Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act, 2005, SO 2005, c.11
- Blind Persons' Rights Act, RSO 1990, c.B7
- Dog Owners' Liability Act, RSO 1990, c.D16
- Health Protection and Promotion Act, RSO 1990, c.H7
- Food Safety and Quality Act 2001, SO 2001, c.20
- Laudato Si