

Inclusive Student Services Impact Update

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Service Animals in Schools

DDSB has a long standing history of inclusion of certified service animals where students or staff use for accommodation and are the independent handlers.

“The term “service animal” refers to any animal that provides support to a person with a disability. Traditionally, service animals have been dogs, and dogs remain the most common species of service animal; however, other species may also provide services to individuals with disabilities. The types of functions performed by service animals are diverse, and may or may not include sensory, medical, therapeutic, and emotional support services.” (Ministry of Education, Policy Program Memorandum (PPM) 163, ontario.ca)

Service animals are traditionally highly trained dogs (Guide Dog, Autism Support Dog, Hearing/Signal Dog, Mobility Assistance Dog, Seizure Response Dog) that assist individuals with various daily tasks.

Service animals help students move safely, be more independent, and support opportunities for participation and integration. Licensed organizations like the Lions Foundation of Canada Dog Guides (LFCDG) and Canadian National Institute for the Blind (CNIB) Guide Dogs maintain high standards of training and care in supporting handler, family, and the service animal.

Students

Where students are supported by a Guide Dog/Service Dog at school, the student is the primary handler. The student handler must:

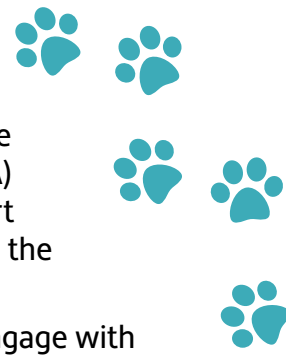
- demonstrate the ability to control the Guide Dog/Service Dog in accordance with the training received by the accrediting training organization;
- ensure the Guide Dog/Service Dog is always wearing a vest and leash or harness when the dog is not in its crate;
- ensure the Guide Dog/Service Dog’s biological needs are addressed;
- transition and maintain at all times the Guide Dog/Service Dog on a leash, harness, mat and/or crate.

Service animals in schools raise awareness about disabilities and the importance of inclusion. This leads to greater understanding and helps foster inclusion within the school community.



“We have a yellow lab trained by the LFCDG. He quickly became my son’s best friend, attending school with him daily. Autism is isolating and can come with a high degree of anxiety. Our service dog provides a calming effect and physical de-escalation when my son is overwhelmed. My son’s favourite part of having a service dog is “when he licks my face”. I think that’s gross, but who am I to come between a boy and his dog?”

-Parent

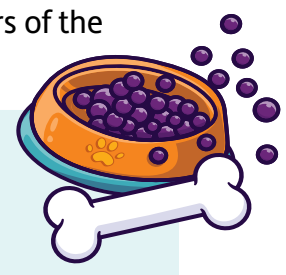


Consideration and use of service animals in schools is aligned with the expectations of the Ontario Human Rights Code (OHRC), Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act (AODA) and Ministry of Education PPM 163. Each request for a service or support animal to be part of a student in school accommodation plan is reviewed on an individual basis considering the student’s dignity, integration, independence, and disability-related learning needs.

The accommodation process is a shared responsibility and the DDSB will cooperatively engage with the student/parent/caregiver to consider accommodation options.

How Do I Know If There is a Service Animal Working at My Child’s School?

Communication is shared with school staff and broader school community. Information is shared through the school newsletter and may include assemblies supported by the training organization. Standardized DDSB signage is placed on the entrance doors of the school to inform visitors of the service animal.



“(Service Animal)’s greatest impact is not just seen in (student handler)’s eyes, but in the eyes of all the students who feel their presence in the school. A sense of empathy and curiosity allows you to feel the good in people and their acceptance of individual differences.”

-Parent and Educator

Transportation

If the student accesses transportation, Durham Student Transportation Services (DSTS) may add the service animal to the school bus roster.

Current DDSB Data (2024)

Accommodation for students is an ongoing process where programming is reviewed regularly to ensure it meets their evolving needs.

Currently, seven students are actively supported by working service dogs as part of their accommodations at school. During the previous calendar year, the DDSB received nine requests with seven approved and/ or renewed for the school year and two declined/accommodations met in other ways to support student learning and well-being. Where a student is, for example, not yet able to be the primary handler for the service animal at school, other accommodations are put in place to meet student’s programming needs and the DDSB remains committed to ongoing considerations for accommodation.

Multiple schools also welcome service animals, with parent/caregiver handlers, on the school grounds daily during pick up and drop off times.

“Having a Service Dog at school is like having a silent teacher for life skills—patience, responsibility, and inclusion. Their presence encourages children to think beyond themselves, fostering empathy and understanding in ways that traditional lessons sometimes cannot.”

-Principal



For more information about the DDSB Inclusive Student Services Impact Update, please visit [DDSB Inclusive Student Services](#).