



**COMMITTEE OF THE WHOLE
REPORT No. 20-014**

21 JANUARY 2020

MINOR REVISION TO POLICY P.121.GOV ACCESSIBILITY

Key Contact: Michèle Giroux, Executive Officer, Corporate Services, ext. 8310

PURPOSE:

1. To seek approval for a minor revision to Policy P.121.GOV Accessibility, in compliance with the newly issued Ministry of Education *Policy/Program Memorandum (PPM) No.163 School Board Policies on Service Animals*.

CONTEXT:

2. In Ontario, *the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act, 2005*, sets out a framework related to the use of service animals by individuals with a disability. The *Ontario Human Rights Code (the Code)* protects people with disabilities who use service animals to assist them with disability-related needs under the ground of “disability”, and requires school boards to accommodate individuals with disabilities in their community, including students, up to the point of undue hardship.

The OCDSB policy and procedures that address accommodations to individuals with a disability include the following:

- Policy P.121.GOV Accessibility, which ensures accessibility to all members of the OCDSB community. This policy has the following three procedures associated with it:
 - Procedure PR.666.GOV Accessibility, which ensures accessible customer services;
 - Procedure PR.686.SCO Use of Service Dogs for Students, which provides for a process to admit service dogs accompanying students to school; and
 - Procedure PR.572.HR Disability Support Program – Individual Accommodation Plans, which provides for appropriate work-related accommodations.

KEY CONSIDERATIONS:

3. New Requirements
On September 2019, the Ministry of Education issued *PPM 163 School Board*

Policies on Service Animals (Appendix A). The new PPM requires school boards to develop, implement, and maintain a policy or procedure on student use of service animals in schools. Among a number of other requirements, the OCDSB is required to provide processes to request species other than dogs as service animals to accompany students with disabilities to schools.

4. Status-quo

Currently, the only species of service animals allowed in OCDSB facilities are highly trained dogs (i.e. guide dogs and service dogs). Dogs will continue to be the most common species of service animals in schools due to their specialized training that permit students to gain meaningful access to education. The existing procedure prohibits the use of comfort or therapy animals.

5. Addressing the Gaps

To comply with PPM 163, service animals other than service or guide dogs would now be permitted in schools. However, this would be allowed only in extraordinary circumstances where no other reasonable methods of accommodation in the school setting have been successful in meeting the demonstrated disability-related learning needs of the student.

Policy P.121.GOV Accessibility requires an update to expand the definition of a “service animal” to include service animals from species other than dogs (Appendix B). As the PPM affects students only, PR.686.SCO Use of Service Dogs for Students is revised to accommodate the new requirements. PR.572.HR Disability Support Program – Individual Accommodation Plans and PR.666.GOV Accessibility do not require revision at this time.

RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS:

6. There are no resource implications relating to the proposed minor change to Policy P.121.GOV Accessibility.

COMMUNICATION/CONSULTATION ISSUES:

7. Consultation with the broader community is not required as the revision is proposed in order to comply with the new requirements of PPM 163.

STRATEGIC LINKS:

8. Allowing students with disability-related learning needs to bring service animals to schools helps them gain meaningful access to curriculum in alignment with the Culture of Caring and the equity goal of the Culture of Social Responsibility.

RECOMMENDATION:

THAT the proposed change to Policy P.121.GOV Accessibility, attached as Appendix B to report 20-014, be approved.

Michele Giroux
Executive Officer, Corporate Services
(ext. 8310)

Camille Williams-Taylor
Director of Education and
Secretary of the Board

APPENDICES:

Appendix A: PPM 163 School Board Policies on Service Animals
Appendix B: Policy P.121.GOV Accessibility