

ANIMALS IN SCHOOL

The Littleton School District is committed to providing a high-quality educational program to all students in a safe and healthy environment.

Service Animals

The Littleton School Committee does not permit discrimination against individuals with disabilities, including those who require the assistance of a service animal. The District will comply with Massachusetts and Federal Laws concerning the rights of persons with a service animal and will permit such animals on school premises and on school transportation.

For the purpose of this policy a service animal includes, “Any dog/miniature horse individually trained to do work or perform tasks for the benefit of an individual with a disability, including a physical, sensory, psychiatric, intellectual, or other mental disability. Other species of animals, whether wild or domestic, trained or untrained, are not service animals for the purposes of this definition.” (U.S. Department of Justice, Titles II and III). Service animals are not pets.

The District shall not assume or take custody or control of, or responsibility for, any service animal or the care or feeding thereof. The owner or person having custody and control of the animal shall be liable for any damage to persons, premises, property, or facilities caused by the service animal, including, but not limited to, clean up, stain removal, etc.

If, in the opinion of the School Principal or authorized designee, any service animal is not in the control of its handler, or if it is not housebroken, the service animal may be excluded from the school or program. The service animal can also be excluded if it presents a direct and immediate threat to others in the school. The parent or guardian of the student having custody and control of the animal will be required to remove the service animal from District premises immediately.

If any student or staff member assigned to the classroom in which a service animal is permitted suffers an allergic reaction to the animal, the person having custody and control of the animal will be required to remove the animal to a different location designated by the building Principal or designee and an alternative plan will be developed with appropriate District staff. Such plan could include the reassignment of the person having custody and control of the animal to a different classroom. This will also apply if an individual on school transportation suffers an allergic reaction. In this case, an alternate plan will be developed in coordination with appropriate school, district, and transportation staff and will include the involvement of the parents/guardians of the student.

When a student will be accompanied by a service animal at school or in other District facilities on a regular basis, a student’s parent or guardian, as well as the animal’s owner and any other person who will have custody and control of the animal will be required to sign a document stating that they have read and understood the school’s regulations specific to service animals.

The Superintendent of Schools or his/her designee shall be responsible for developing procedures to accommodate a student's use of service animals in District facilities and on school transportation vehicles.

Therapy Animals

The school district supports the use of therapy animals for the benefit of its students, subject to the conditions of this policy. Benefits from working or visiting with a therapy animal include, reduced stress, improved physical and emotional well-being, decreased anxiety, improved self-esteem and normalization of the environment increasing the likelihood of academic success. Examples of activities that students may engage in with a therapy animal include petting and/or hugging the animal, speaking to the animal, giving the animal simple commands to which the animal is trained to respond and reading to the animal.

Animal Assisted Activities and Animal Assisted Interactions are non-goal driven interactions where the specific content of the visit is spontaneous and is meant to provide motivational, educational and/or recreational activities that enhance the quality of life.

Animal Assisted Therapy is a goal driven intervention which is directed and/or delivered by a health, human or education service professional and is meant to improve physical, social, emotional and/or cognitive functioning of an individual.

A therapy animal is an animal who has been individually trained, evaluated and registered with his/her handler to provide animal assisted activities, animal assisted therapy and animal assisted interactions within a school or other facility. Therapy animals are not "emotional support animals" or "service animals."

A handler is an individual school district staff member, contracted service, or volunteer who owns a therapy animal and who has been individually trained, evaluated, and registered with their therapy animal to provide animal assisted activities, animal assisted therapy and animal assisted interactions within a school or other facility.

A therapy animal is the personal property of the handler and is not the property of the school district. The handler shall assume full responsibility for the therapy animal's care, behavior and suitability for interacting with students and others in the school while the therapy animal is on school district property.

Therapy Animal Standards and Procedures

The following requirements must be satisfied before a therapy animal will be allowed in school buildings or on school district property.

Request: At the request of the principal or the principal's designee, a handler who wishes to bring a therapy animal on school property, shall submit a completed written request form to the Superintendent or the Superintendent's designee, for approval. The request for approval shall be

submitted each school year, or whenever a handler wishes to use a different therapy animal. Such approval may be rescinded at any time by the Principal and/or Superintendent. Once the Superintendent or Superintendent designee approves the request, a protocol outlining the intended use of the therapy animal inclusive of scheduled times will be submitted and authorized by the school Principal and Superintendent.

Training and Registration: The handler shall submit proof of registration as a therapy animal handler with each individual therapy animal that will be utilized within the school district. Such registration will be from an organization that requires an evaluation of the therapy animal and handler prior to registration. Registration shall remain current and in good standing at all times.

Health and Immunization: Proof from a licensed Veterinarian indicating that the therapy animal is in good health and is current with all required vaccinations.

Licensing: The handler shall provide proof of licensure from the local licensing authority.

Insurance: The handler shall submit a copy of an insurance policy that provides liability coverage for the work of the handler and therapy animal while they are on school district property.

Exclusion or Removal from School District Property: A therapy animal may be excluded from school district property if the school administrator determines that: (1) The handler does not have control of the therapy animal; (2) The therapy animal is not housebroken; (3) The therapy animal presents a direct and immediate threat to others in the school; (4) The therapy animal's presence otherwise interferes with the educational program. The handler shall immediately remove their therapy animal from school property when instructed to do so by a school administrator.

Once the handler has been approved by the Superintendent/Designee to bring a therapy animal into the school district, such handler shall adhere to the rules of his/her registering organization as well as expectations set forth by the school district.

Educational Program

School Principals, in consultation with the Health Services Providers in each building, shall utilize the Department of Public Health publication "*Animals in the classroom, Recommendations for schools*" and review student health records to determine which animals may be allowed in the school building. No animal shall be brought to school without prior permission of the building Principal. The decision of the Principal and/or Superintendent shall be final.

Student Health

The health and well-being of students is the District's highest priority. Animals may cause an allergic reaction or otherwise impair the health of students. No animals may be brought to school or kept in the school, classroom, office or common area that may negatively impact the health of any student who must utilize that area. Animals that cause an allergic reaction or impair the

health of students shall be removed from the school immediately so that no student shall have their health impaired and each student shall have full access to available educational opportunities.

Animals in Schools

Rabies is a growing problem and any fur-bearing animal is susceptible to this disease. Infected animals could transmit this disease to students and staff. Based on the Massachusetts Departments of Health and Education recommendations, the following animals are prohibited from schools within the Littleton School District.

Wild Animals and Domestic Stray Animals - Because of the high incidence of rabies in bats, raccoons, skunks, foxes and other wild carnivores they should not be permitted in school buildings under any circumstances (including dead animals).

Fur-Bearing Animals (pet dogs, cats, wolf-hybrids, ferrets, etc.,) - These animals may pose a risk for transmitting rabies, as well as parasites, fleas, other diseases and injuries. Exceptions include, fur bearing animals that are trained service or therapy animals and law enforcement dogs. All animals must have proof of rabies vaccination (with the exception of service animals) prior to entering a school.

Exceptions may be made with the prior approval of the Superintendent of Schools.

Bats - Bats pose a high risk for transmitting rabies. Bat houses should not be installed on school grounds and bats should not be brought into the school building.

Poisonous Animals - Poisonous and venomous animals of all types are prohibited for safety reasons.

SOURCE: MASC February 2011

References: Massachusetts Department of Public Health "Animals in the classroom, Recommendations for schools"

US Department of Justice Information and technical assistance on the Americans with Disabilities Act "Revised ADA Requirements: Service Animals" (2010)

Adopted: 10 May, 2012
Reviewed: 10 December 2015
Revised: 9 January 2020