

Westford Public Schools recognizes the need to accommodate the use of animals to achieve specific curriculum objectives and the crucial assistance that service animals provide to individuals with a disability. While the district recognizes the educational value and assistive roles of animals in the schools, those benefits must be secondary to student health and safety. Westford Public Schools prohibits discrimination against individuals with disabilities, including those who require the assistance of a service animal. The district will comply with Massachusetts law concerning the rights of persons with service animals.

Student/Staff Health

A safe classroom environment shall be maintained. To ensure the protection of all students, the school principal, in consultation with the Health Services providers in each building, shall utilize relevant guidelines 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 and the decision of the Principal shall be final.

Animals integral to the study of the curriculum should be appropriately secured in cages and tanks to ensure student safety. Non-service 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 his/her health impaired and each student shall have full access to available educational opportunities.

Animals Prohibited from School

Based on the Massachusetts Departments of Health and Education recommendations, the following animals are prohibited from district schools:

- **Wild Animals and Domestic Stray Animals** – including bats, raccoons, skunks, foxes and other wild carnivores, (including dead animals except for animal specimens used in science labs).
- **Family Pets**– including but not limited to pet dogs, cats, wolf-hybrids, ferrets. Note that service animals are not considered pets.
- **Poisonous Animals** - Any animal whose bite includes venom.

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

Service Animals

A service animal is defined as an animal, “that has been individually trained to do the work or perform tasks for the benefit of an individual with a disability.” Service animals perform some of the functions and tasks that individuals with disabilities cannot perform themselves. There are several kinds of service animals that assist individuals with disabilities. Examples include, but are not limited to, animals that:

- assist individuals who are blind or have severe sight impairments as “seeing eye dogs” or “guide dogs;”
- alert individuals with hearing impairments to sounds;
- pull wheelchairs or carry and pick-up items for individuals with mobility impairments; and
- assist mobility-impaired individuals with balance.

Parent/Guardian-Responsibility for Service Animals

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. The school principal or authorized designee may exclude the service animal from the school or program if they determine that it,

- is not housebroken, or
- presents a direct and immediate threat to others in the school, or
- its handler is not in control of the service animal
- the owner cannot provide proof of current rabies vaccination

Should a service animal be removed for any of these reasons, the parent or guardian of the student having custody and control of the animal will be required to remove the animal.

If the animal is removed because of an allergic reaction, it shall be removed 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 including the involvement of the parents/guardian of the student.

When a student will be accompanied by a service animal at school or in other district facilities on a regular basis, such staff member or such 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 foregoing.

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

References

Federal Regulation, **28 C.F.R. § 35.136 Service Animals**

Animals In The Classroom: Recommendations For Schools The Commonwealth of Massachusetts Executive Office of Health and Human Services dated April 2004.

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