

## ANIMALS ON SCHOOL PREMISES

### I. PURPOSE

The purpose of this policy is to ensure the health and safety of students while enriching the school curriculum and student support with visits/lessons regarding animals.

### II. GENERAL STATEMENT OF POLICY

#### A. Reason

An animal may be requested for a school visit for a variety of reasons including enriching the curriculum, learning about animals, increasing the excitement about an event or for animal therapy.

#### B. Prior Written Permission Required

Prior written approval via the **REQUEST FORM FOR AN ANIMAL VISIT** must be obtained before any animal is brought onto school premises. Handlers/owners wishing to bring animals on school premises can obtain request forms in each building office. Applicants can submit their information to be available as a resource to any staff. A **STAFF REQUEST FORM FOR AN ANIMAL VISIT** must be approved before scheduling an animal visit. Before approvals will be given, a building-wide perspective will be taken, as Big Lake Schools prefers to offer and provide similar experiences to every student in a given grade level.

#### C. Therapy Animal

##### 1) Role

A therapy animal is most commonly a dog (but can be other species) that is certified or registered and has been obedience trained and screened for their ability to interact favorably with humans and other animals. The primary role of a therapy animal is to complement more traditional modes of treatment or therapy through comforting, supportive, calming and engaging interactions. Because therapy animals have not been trained to perform a specific job, task or duty due to an individual's disability, they do not qualify as a service animal under the Americans with Disability Act (ADA).

##### 2) Certified Animals (most commonly dogs)

The therapy animal and certified handler must be approved through a certified therapy animal organization such as: Helping and Healing Paws, Pet Partners, or Therapy Dog International. The organization must carry insurance for the animal and handler.

##### 3) Certified Handlers

Certified handlers working with an accredited therapy or service animal program, who are in the building to provide social emotional support or provide animal therapy, will be allowed on school property with an approved background check, approved request form, and prearranged schedule.

##### 4) Control

Therapy animals must remain under control of the owner at all times. The therapy animal must be harnessed, leashed or tethered while on school premises. Under control also means that a therapy animal should not be allowed to bark repeatedly while on school premises. If the therapy animal is out of control and the owner does not take effective action to control it, the district may request that the animal be removed from the premises.

#### D. Safety

##### 1) Animal Health

- Animals must meet standards of health as prescribed by veterinarians at the owner's expense. The district bears no financial responsibility for the required training, care, feeding, health, behavior and suitability for interacting with students and others while on and/or off school premises.
- 2) **Proof of Inoculation**  
Animal owners/handlers must present proof of all proper inoculations verified by a veterinarian and/or accrediting agency. This includes, but is not limited to: rabies, distemper, hepatitis, parvovirus, healthy stool sample analysis, proof of heartworm test, and proof of physical. If this list of needed inoculations becomes out-of-date or there is an alternative list of inoculations per a specific type of animal, proof of this from a veterinarian will be reviewed.
  - 3) **Restraint/Handling**  
All animals must be properly restrained and controlled at all times in appropriate cages, tanks or leashes. Owners/handlers violating this provision will be asked to leave school premises immediately. Laboratory animals (mammals, fish, reptiles and birds) that are part of a curriculum project may be brought into a classroom for the duration of the project, but they must be kept in appropriate, properly maintained cages/containers.
  - 4) **Responsibility**  
The owner must ensure their animal: is controlled; housebroken; the animal's presence or behavior does not fundamentally interfere in the functions of the school district; behaves in a way that does not pose a direct threat to the health or safety of others or have a history of such behavior. The district retains the discretion to exclude or remove any animal from its property. The owner agrees to be responsible for any and all damage to school district property, personal property, and any injuries to individuals caused by their animal. The owner agrees to indemnify, defend, and hold harmless the school district, its school board members, administrators, employees, and agents, from and against any and all claims, actions, suits, judgments, and demands brought by any party arising on account of, or in connection with, any activity of or damage caused by their animal.
  - 5) **Health and Cultural Considerations**  
To address children and adults with allergies, asthma, other health or cultural concerns regarding a specific animal visit, instructors will communicate with parents/guardians to identify concerns before bringing an animal into the classroom. If needed, instructors will take the following steps:
    - a. Animals brought in for demonstration projects will be kept in an area away from students/faculty with health/cultural issues and after the presentation the animal will be removed from the building as quickly as possible.
    - b. Animals used for curriculum or therapy purposes will be segregated from students/faculty with health/cultural concerns. If the health/cultural issue is significant, the instructor will develop an alternative lesson for the class and not bring the animal into the classroom.
    - c. Non-allergenic animals (reptiles, amphibians, most insects, crabs and fish) will be used whenever possible as an alternative to birds and animals that may trigger more allergic reactions.
  - 6) **Transportation**  
Animals are not allowed on district transportation. It is the sole responsibility of the owner to transport the animal.
  - 7) **Signage**  
Signs may be posted on school grounds that animals are not allowed on school property without prior permission.

**This policy is superseded by policies related to Service Animals and Canine Searches.**

**Cross References:** MSBA/MASA Model Policy 535 (Service Animals)  
MSBA/MASA Model Policy 502 (Search of Student Lockers, Desks, Personal Possessions, and Student's Person)  
Student Handbook (Locker/Desk & Canine Searches)