

<i>Policy</i>	<i>Title</i> THERAPY ANIMALS	<i>Code</i> IMG
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HOLLISTON

Holliston Public Schools (HPS) supports the use of therapy animals to provide educational and social/emotional support for students, faculty, and staff. The safety and well being of our students, faculty, and staff shall be the primary consideration. Therefore, the presence of therapy animals on school premises, any school-related setting, and/or district transportation is allowed in accordance with law and with this policy and as authorized by the Superintendent. This policy is intended to provide guidance for the safe and effective use of therapy animals in schools, while respecting the needs of others with regard to allergies and other concerns.

For the purpose of this policy, a therapy animal is an animal that has been certified, along with its handlers, by a therapy organization. As such, the handler is responsible for the care and control of the therapy animal, and the therapy organization provides certification of and insurance for the therapy teams. Volunteer therapy animal visits are scheduled and approved by school administration with notice to students and families. Students and staff can opt out of visits to the therapy animal for any reason. All therapy animal visits require appropriate planning and mitigation to minimize allergen exposure, such as avoiding visits to carpeted areas or to rooms with upholstered furniture. Volunteer therapy animal visits will not be provided in a classroom/instructional setting.

Based on the **Massachusetts Departments of Health and Education** recommendations, the following animals are prohibited from schools within the School District:

Wild Animals and Domestic Stray Animals - Because of the high incidence of rabies in bats, raccoons, skunks, foxes and other wild carnivores, these animals 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.

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 - Spiders, venomous insects and poisonous snakes, reptiles and lizards are prohibited for safety reasons.

Other exceptions may be made with the prior approval of the Superintendent.

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

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

First Reading:	April 7, 2011
Second Reading:	April 28, 2011
Third Reading:	Waived
Policy Adopted:	April 28, 2011
Policy Amended:	June 6, 2019; January 19, 2023; April 4, 2024
Policy Reviewed:	November 20, 2019; March 21, 2024
Legal References:	Title II of the Americans with Disabilities Act; 28 CFR 35 – Nondiscrimination on the Basis of Disability in State and Local Government Services
Policy Cross Reference:	IMGA
Procedure Reference:	https://www.mass.gov/info-details/rabies-protocols-and-regulations

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