

ANIMALS IN SCHOOLS

Emotional Support Dogs

An Emotional Support Dog may only be brought into a Bristol Warren Regional School District School or any of its affiliated programs or facilities under the direction of the School Principal or designee and with the permission of the Superintendent or their designee for Instructional Purposes. Instructional purposes are defined as “having animals present to support the learning strategies of a specific educational program”. Other emotional support animals, including requests for Emotional Support Dogs from individuals, are not permitted in the Bristol Warren Regional School District.

All requests shall be submitted to the Superintendent in writing. The Superintendent or their designee reserve the right to request documentation supporting all requests. Such documentation may include documentation from a veterinarian that the Emotional Support Dog is in good health and up-to-date on all vaccinations as required by local ordinances and regulations.

If a request for an Emotional Support Dog is granted by the Superintendent or their designee, the owner of the Emotional Support Dog is responsible for ensuring that the Emotional Support Dog does not unduly interfere with school activities and is solely responsible for any damage to persons or school property caused by the Emotional Support Dog.

Emotional support dogs, which can be called therapy animals, comfort animals, or social-emotional assistance animals and are not service animals as defined by Rhode Island law or Title II or Title III of the American Disabilities Act (ADA). This policy addresses these non-service dogs who provide companionship, comfort and affection and sometimes help with depression, anxiety, and certain phobias, but do not have special training to perform tasks that assist people with disabilities. This policy also addresses emotional support dogs who provide people with therapeutic contact, to improve their physical, social, emotional, and/or cognitive functioning. Service dogs are not restricted to the limitations in this policy. The ADA permits a student with a disability who uses a service animal to bring the animal to school and the district’s Service Animal Policy applies to service animals.

PROTOCOL FOR EMOTIONAL SUPPORT DOG

1. At the request of school principal or designee, a handler will apply to bring an emotional support dog onto the Bristol Warren Regional School District’s property or to Bristol Warren Regional School District activities or events in writing. Approval must be received **prior** to the dog attending school activities or events or being present on school property.

An Emotional Support Dog may only be brought into a Bristol Warren Regional School District or any of its affiliated programs or facilities at the **sole discretion** of the Superintendent or his or her designee.

2. The handler must provide the following documentation prior to receiving approval:
 - i. Evidence from a veterinarian of the dog being up-to-date with required vaccinations, including rabies and receiving a clean bill of health.
 - ii. Appropriate licensure from a local dog licensing authority.
 - iii. Affirmation that the dog has regular flea prevention treatment and will be well-groomed while on school property or at school activities/events.

- iv. Evidence that the owner has liability insurance which would cover any damages or injuries caused by the dog's presence at school and/or school activities and events.
 - v. Statement that the handler is responsible for any damages caused by their Emotional Support Dog animal.
 - vi. Evidence that any Emotional Support dog has received an Emotional Support Dog certification from a national therapy dog organization. Exceptions may be made for Emotional Support Dog(s) undergoing training by the Bristol Police Department to serve as a therapy dog for the benefit of the schools.
3. The Emotional Support Dog must be obedient, calm as well as affectionate and friendly to strangers.
 4. The Emotional Support Dog will only be permitted in authorized areas within and outside of the school building.
 5. When using an Emotional Support Dog in a school setting, the dog must always be under control of the handler with either a harness or a leash no longer than four feet, unless holding such a leash would interfere with the Emotional Support Dog's safe, effective performance of its work or tasks. The handler shall maintain control of the Emotional Support Dog at all times and shall not tether the Emotional Support Dog to any individual or object. The school is not responsible for providing the handler or for handling the dog.
 6. The handler and Emotional Support Dog will wear appropriate identification identifying them as a registered handler and Emotional Support Dog.
 7. Volunteer handlers shall sign themselves and their Emotional Support Dog in upon arrival at any school and shall sign both out on departure from the building. Handlers who are Bristol or Warren School Resource Officers shall sign their Emotional Support Dog in upon arrival and sign him/her out on their departure.
 8. The handler fee shall not borrow money or personal items, or receive any personal gratuity, gift, or tip, such as money or jewelry from staff or students in the district.
 9. The handlers of an Emotional Support Dog are responsible for the supervision and care of the animal while on school property including feeding, exercising, and cleaning up after the animal.
 10. The School Principal will notify families, students, and staff whenever an Emotional Support Dog will be present on school property or at school activities and events. Families, students, and staff will have the opportunity to express their wish to avoid the Emotional Support Dog.

The handler shall remove the Emotional Support Dog to a separate area as designated by the school administrator in such instances where any student or school employee who suffers dog allergies or aversions is present in an office, hallway, or classroom. Students who are unable to participate in class activities will be provided with an alternative learning experience or be provided with accommodations, as appropriate.

11. The handler shall confirm whether or not there will be any other Emotional Support Dog(s) on site prior to scheduling any visit with an Emotional Support Dog and shall take steps with appropriate staff to ensure that the dogs do not engage inappropriately while on school property. When multiple Emotional Support Dogs are engaged in a planned activity on school district property, the handlers shall ensure that the dogs have an opportunity to greet each other prior to entering the school building. Once inside the building, the handlers shall ensure that the dogs are each on a four-foot leash, given work space at least eight feet from each other, and are given no opportunity for contact or socialization with each other while working.

12. The Superintendent or his/her designee may withdraw approval for an Emotional Support Dog at any time at his/her sole discretion.
13. Exceptions to these provisions may be made by the Superintendent for the inclusion of the Bristol Police Department's Emotional Support Dog in school-related activities and events.

Adopted: October 11, 2023

