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Revised: 4/28/26, 10/20/26

535 SERVICE ANIMALS IN SCHOOLS

I. PURPOSE

The purpose of this policy is to establish parameters for the use of service animals by students, employees, and visitors within school buildings and on school grounds.

II. GENERAL STATEMENT OF POLICY

Individuals with disabilities shall be permitted to bring their service animals into school buildings or on school grounds in accordance with, and subject to, this policy.

III. DEFINITIONS

A. Handler

A "handler" is an individual with a disability who uses a service animal. In the case of an individual who is unable to care for and supervise the service animal for reasons such as age or disability, "handler" means the person who cares for and supervises the animal on that individual's behalf. School district personnel are not responsible for the care, supervision, or handling responsibilities of a service animal.

B. Service Animal

A "service animal" is a dog (regardless of breed or size) or miniature horse that is individually trained to perform "work or tasks" for the benefit of an individual with a disability, including an individual with a physical, sensory, psychiatric, intellectual, or mental disability. Other species of animals, whether wild or domestic, trained or untrained, are not service animals. Service animals are working animals that perform valuable functions; they are not pets. The work or tasks performed by the service animal must be directly related to the individual's disability. An animal accompanying an individual for the sole purpose of providing emotional support, therapy, comfort, or companionship is not a service animal.

C. Trainer

A "trainer" is a person who is training a service animal and is affiliated with a recognized training program for service animals.

D. Work or Tasks

1. "Work or tasks" are those functions performed by a service animal.

2. Examples of "work or tasks" include, but are not limited to, assisting individuals who are blind or have low vision with navigation and other tasks, alerting individuals who are deaf or hard of hearing to the presence of people or sounds, providing non-violent protection or rescue work, pulling a wheelchair, assisting an individual during a seizure, alerting individuals to the presence of allergens, retrieving items such as medicine or the telephone, providing physical support and assistance with balance and stability to individuals with mobility disabilities, and helping persons with psychiatric and neurological disabilities by preventing or interrupting impulsive or destructive behaviors.

3. The crime deterrent effects of an animal's presence and the provision of emotional support, well-being, comfort, or companionship are not "work or tasks" for the purposes of this policy.

IV. ACCESS TO PROGRAMS AND ACTIVITIES; PERMITTED INQUIRIES

A. In general, handlers (i.e., individuals with disabilities or trainers) are permitted to be accompanied by their service animals in all areas of school district properties where members of the public, students, and employees are allowed to go. A handler has the right to be accompanied by a service animal whenever and to the same extent that the handler has the right: (a) to be present on school district property or in school district facilities; (b) to attend or participate in a school-sponsored event, activity, or program; or (c) to be transported in a vehicle that is operated by or on behalf of the school district.

B. It is an unfair discriminatory practice to prohibit a person with a disability from taking a service animal into the public place or conveyance to aid persons with disabilities, and if the service animal is properly harnessed or leashed so that the person with a disability may maintain control of the service animal.

C. The school district shall not require a person with a disability to make an extra payment or pay an additional charge when taking a service animal into any school district building.

D. When an individual with a disability brings a service animal to a school district property, school district employees shall not ask about the nature or extent of a person's disability, but may make the following two inquiries to determine whether the animal qualifies as a service animal:

1. Is the service animal required because of a disability; and

2. What work or tasks is the service animal trained to perform.

E. School district employees shall not make these inquiries of an individual with a disability bringing a service animal to school district property when it is readily apparent that an animal is trained to do work or perform tasks for an individual with a disability. However, school district employees may inquire whether the individual with a disability has completed and submitted the request form described in Article VI., below.

F. An individual with a disability may not be required to provide documentation such as proof that the animal has been certified, trained, or licensed as a service animal.

V. REQUIREMENTS FOR ALL SERVICE ANIMALS

A. The service animal must be required for the individual with a disability.

B. The service animal must be individually trained to do work or tasks for the benefit of the individual with a disability.

C. A service animal must have a harness, leash, or other tether, unless either the handler is unable, because of a disability, to use a harness, leash, or other tether, or the use of a harness, leash, or other tether would interfere with the service animal's safe, effective performance of work or tasks, in which case, the service animal must be otherwise under the handler's control (e.g., voice control, signals, or other effective means).

D. The service animal must be housebroken.

E. The service animal must be under the control of its handler at all times. The handler is responsible for the care and supervision of a service animal, including walking the service animal, feeding the service animal, grooming the service animal, providing veterinary care to the service animal, and responding to the service animal's need to relieve itself, including the proper disposal of the service animal's waste.

F. The school district is not responsible for providing a staff member to walk the service animal or to provide any other care or assistance to the animal.

G. In the case of a student who is unable to care for and/or supervise his or her service animal, the student's parent/guardian is responsible for arranging for such care and supervision. In the case of an employee or other individual who is unable to care for and/or supervise his or her service animal, the employee or other individual's authorized representative is responsible for arranging for a service animal's care and supervision.

H. The service animal must be properly licensed and vaccinated in accordance with applicable state laws and local ordinances.

VI. REQUESTING THE USE OF A SERVICE ANIMAL AT SCHOOL

A. Students with a disability seeking to be accompanied by a service animal are requested to submit the Approval Request Form to the building administrator of the school the student attends. The administrator will notify the Executive Director or the administrator designated with responsibility to address such requests. School district employees seeking to be accompanied by a service animal are requested to submit the Approval Request Form to the Executive Director or the administrator designated with responsibility to address such requests.

B. Students or employees seeking to bring a service animal onto district premises are requested to identify whether the need for the service animal is required because of a disability and to describe the work or tasks that the service animal is trained to perform.

C. The owner of the service animal shall provide written evidence that the service animal has received all vaccinations required by state law or local ordinance.

VII. REMOVAL OR EXCLUSION OF A SERVICE ANIMAL

A. A school official may require a handler to remove a service animal from school district property, a school building, or a school-sponsored program or activity, if:

1. Any of the requirements described in Article V., above, are not met.

2. The service animal is out of control and/or the handler does not effectively control the animal's behavior;

3. The presence of the service animal would fundamentally alter the nature of a service, program or activity; or

4. The service animal behaves in a way that poses a direct threat to the health or safety of others, has a history of such behavior, or otherwise poses a significant health or safety risk to others that cannot be eliminated by reasonable accommodations.

B. If the service animal is properly excluded, the school district shall give the individual with a disability the opportunity to participate in the service, program, or activity without the service animal, unless such individual has violated a law or school rule or regulation that would warrant the removal of the individual.

VIII. ADDITIONAL LIMITATIONS FOR MINIATURE HORSES

In assessing whether a miniature horse may be permitted in a school building or on school grounds as a service animal, the following factors shall be considered:

A. The type, size, and weight of the miniature horse and whether the facility can accommodate these features;

B. Whether the handler has sufficient control of the miniature horse;

C. Whether the miniature horse is housebroken; and

D. Whether the miniature horse's presence in a specific building or on school grounds compromises legitimate health and safety requirements.

IX. ALLERGIES; FEAR OF ANIMALS

If a student or employee notifies the school district that he or she is allergic to a service animal, the school district will balance the rights of the individuals involved. In general, allergies that are not life threatening are not a valid reason for prohibiting the presence of a service animal. Fear of animals is generally not a valid reason for prohibiting the presence of a service animal.

X. NON-SERVICE ANIMALS FOR STUDENTS WITH INDIVIDUALIZED EDUCATION PROGRAMS (IEPS) OR SECTION 504 PLANS

If a special education student or a student with a Section 504 plan seeks to bring an animal onto school property that is not a service animal, the request shall be referred to the student's IEP team or Section 504 team, as appropriate, to determine whether the animal is necessary for the student to receive a free appropriate public education (FAPE) or, in the case of a Section 504 student, to reasonably accommodate the student's access to the school district's programs and activities.

XI. NON-SERVICE ANIMAL AS AN ACCOMMODATION FOR EMPLOYEES

If an employee seeks to bring an animal onto school property that is not a service animal, the request shall be referred to the Executive Director or the administrator designated to handle such requests. A school district employee who is a qualified individual with a disability will be allowed to bring such animal onto school property when it is determined that such use is required to enable the employee to perform the essential functions of his or her position or to enjoy the benefits of employment in a manner comparable to those similarly situated non-disabled employees.

XII. LIABILITY

A. The owner of the service animal or non-service animal is responsible for any harm or injury to an individual and for any property damage caused by the service animal while on school district property.

B. An individual who, directly or indirectly through statements or conduct, intentionally misrepresents an animal in that person's possession as a service animal may be subject to criminal liability.

Legal References:

Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973
28 C.F.R. § 35.104 (ADA Regulations)
28 C.F.R. § 35.130(b)(7) (ADA Regulations)
28 C.F.R. § 35.136 (ADA Regulations)
20 U.S.C. § 1400 *et seq.* (Individuals with Disabilities Education Act)
Minn. Stat. § 256C.02 (Public Accommodations)
Minn. Stat. § 363A.19 (Discrimination Against Disabilities Prohibited)
Minn. Stat. § 609.226 (Harm Caused by Dog)
Minn. Stat. § 609.833 (Misrepresentation of Service Animal)

Cross References:

Policy 402 (Disability Nondiscrimination Policy)
Policy 521 (Student Disability Nondiscrimination)

APPROVAL REQUEST FORM FOR USE OF A SERVICE ANIMAL

Please turn in your request to the MAWSECO Executive Director.

Student/Employee Name: _____ Date: _____

Parent or authorized representative name(s) and contact information (*please include email, phone number, and address*): _____

_____

Building: _____

Type of service animal: _____

Name of service animal: _____ Name of handler: _____

Is the service animal required because of a disability: _____

_____

What work or tasks is the service animal trained to perform: _____

_____

_____

Checklist for Completion of Form

Attached is documentation that the service animal is:

____ Properly licensed
____ Properly and currently vaccinated

I have read and understand the School District's policy regarding service animals and will abide by the terms of the policy.

I understand that if my service animal: is out of control and/or the animal's handler does not effectively control the animal's behavior; is not housebroken or the animal's presence or behavior fundamentally interferes in the functions of the School District; or behaves in a way that poses a direct threat to the health or safety of others, has a history of such behavior, or otherwise poses a direct threat to the health and safety of others that cannot be eliminated by reasonable modifications, the School District has the discretion to exclude or remove my service animal from its property.

I agree to be responsible for any and all damage to School District property, personal property, and any injuries to individuals caused by my service animal. I agree to indemnify, defend, and hold harmless the School District, its governing 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 my service animal.

Executive Director/Administrator Signature: _____ Date: _____

Parent/Guardian Signature: _____ Date: _____

Employee Signature: _____ Date: _____

Note: This Registration/Agreement is valid until the end of the current school year. It must be renewed prior to the start of each subsequent school year or whenever a different service animal will be used.