

ANIMALS IN SCHOOL

The Lowell School Committee is committed to providing a high quality educational program for all students and employees in a safe and healthy environment. No animal shall be brought to school without prior permission of the building principal.

School principals, in consultation with the Health Services Providers in each building, shall utilize the Massachusetts Department of Public Health publication "Animals in the Classroom: Recommendations for Schools" and review student health records to determine which animals may be allowed in the school building. The decision of the principal shall be final.

Educational Program

Use of animals to achieve specific curriculum objectives may be allowed by the building principal provided student health and safety is not jeopardized. The individual requesting that the animal be brought to school is responsible for adhering to "Animals in the Classroom: Recommendations for Schools" and any other conditions established by the principal to protect the health and well-being of students.

Student Health

The health and well-being of students are the District's highest priorities. Animals may cause an allergic reaction or otherwise impair the health of students. No animals may be brought to school or kept in the school, classroom, office or common area that may negatively impact the health of any student who must utilize that area. 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 nor less than fall access to available educational opportunities.

Conditions for Allowing Animals in School

In an effort to reduce the chances of transmitting rabies and other zoonotic diseases (those transmitted from animals to people) to staff and students, the following conditions must be met before allowing animals in the classroom:

- The principal of the building must approve all animals to be brought into the classroom.
- The animal (to be brought in) must have an educational purpose.
- The animal must be free of diseases and if applicable have a rabies certification.
- The animal must not be a wild or stray animal (dead or alive) unless under the control of a licensed professional.
- The animal must not be poisonous.
- Where appropriate, the source of the animal should be from a licensed professional company with certification of health.

Service Animals (Guide or Assistance Dogs)

The School Committee does not permit discrimination against individuals with disabilities, including those who require the assistance of a service animal. The district will comply with Massachusetts and federal law concerning the rights of persons with guide or assistance dogs and will permit such animals on school premises and school transportation.

For purposes of this policy, a service animal “includes any dog that has been individually trained to do the work or perform tasks for the benefit of an individual with a disability.” The regulations further state that “a public entity shall make reasonable modifications in policies, practices, or procedures to permit the use of a miniature horse by an individual with a disability if the horse has been individually trained to do work or perform tasks for the benefit of the individual with the disability.”

Service animals perform some of the functions and tasks that individuals with disabilities cannot perform themselves. Service animals are not pets. 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.

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.

If in the opinion of the school principal or authorized designee, any service animal is not under the control of its handler, or if it is not housebroken, the service animal may be excluded from the school or program. The service animal can also be excluded if it presents a direct and immediate threat to others in the school. The parent/guardian of the student having custody and control of the animal will be required to remove the service animal from district premises immediately.

If any student or staff member assigned to the classroom in which a service animal is permitted suffers an allergic reaction to the animal, the person having custody and control of the animal will be required to remove the animal to a different location designated by the building principal or designee. 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 procedure 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/guardians 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/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 of schools or her designee shall be responsible for developing procedures to accommodate a student's use or an employee's use of an assistance animal in district facilities and on school transportation vehicles.

SOURCE: MASC February 2011

Cross Ref: Latest revision of Ma DOH publication: "Animals in the Classroom: Recommendations for Schools"