

Cambridge Public Schools Policy on Animals in School

The Cambridge Public Schools is committed to providing a high quality educational program to all students in a safe and healthy environment. Consistent with this commitment, it is the policy of the Cambridge Public Schools that no animal shall be brought to school without prior permission of the building principal. Principals shall, in consultation with school nurses utilize the Massachusetts Department of Public Health publication “Guidelines for Animals in Schools or on School Grounds” and review student health records to determine which animals may be allowed in a 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 principal provided student health and safety is not jeopardized and the individual requesting that the animal be brought to school is responsible for adhering to the “Guidelines for Animals in Schools or on School Grounds” 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 is a high priority for the Cambridge Public Schools. 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 their health impaired and each student shall have full access to available educational opportunities.

Service Animals

The Cambridge Public Schools does not permit discrimination against individuals with disabilities, including those who require the assistance of a service animal. The Cambridge Public Schools will comply with Massachusetts law concerning the rights of persons with guide or assistance dogs and with federal law and will permit such animals on school premises and on school transportation. In connection with permitting such animal on school premises and on school transportation, the student and their parents/guardians/caregivers or the animal’s owner will be required to submit proof of a current rabies vaccination for the animal.

For purposes of this policy a “service animal includes any dog that has been individually trained to do the work or perform the tasks for the benefit of an individual with a disability.” In accordance with applicable federal and state law, the Cambridge Public Schools “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 are not pets but are animals that are specially trained to perform some of the functions and tasks that individuals with disabilities cannot perform themselves. There are several kinds of service animals that assist individuals with disabilities. Examples of such service animals include, but are not limited to, guide dogs or seeing eye dogs that assist individuals who are blind or have severe sight impairments; animals that alert individuals with hearing impairments to sounds; animals that pull wheelchairs or carry and pick-up items for individuals with mobility impairments; and animals that assist mobility impaired individuals with balance.

The Cambridge Public Schools shall not assume or take custody or control or responsibility for any service animal or for 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 principal or designee, any service animal is not in 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 also can be excluded if it presents a direct and immediate threat to others in the school. In such situations, the parent/guardian/caregiver of the student having custody and control of the service animal will be required to remove the service animal from school district premises immediately.

If any student or staff members assigned to the classroom in which a service animal is permitted suffers an allergic reaction to the service animal, the person having custody and control of the service animal will be required to remove the service animal to a different location designated by the principal or designee and an alternative plan will be developed with appropriate Cambridge Public Schools’ staff. Such plan could include the reassignment of the person having custody and control of the service animal to a different classroom. This will also apply if an individual on school transportation suffers an allergic reaction to the service animal. In this case, an alternate transportation plan will be developed in coordination with appropriate Cambridge Public Schools’ staff and the parents/guardians/caregivers of the student.

When a student will be accompanied by a service animal at school or in other facilities of the Cambridge Public Schools on a regular basis, the student and their parents/guardians/caregivers as well as the service animal’s owner and any other person who will have custody and control of the service animal will be required to sign a document acknowledging that they have read and understand the Cambridge Public Schools Policy on Animals in School.

The Superintendent of Schools or designee shall be responsible for developing administrative procedures to accommodate a student’s use of a service animal in school district facilities and on school transportation vehicles.

Animals Prohibited from School

Any fur-bearing animal is susceptible to the serious and fatal disease of rabies. Infected animals can transmit this disease to students and staff. Based upon the recommendations of the Massachusetts Department of Health and Education, the following animals are expressly prohibited from the Cambridge Public Schools unless an exception is approved, in advance, by the Superintendent of Schools:

Wild Animals and Domestic Stray Animals – Due to high incidence of rabies in bats, raccoons, foxes, skunks, and other wild carnivores, these animals (whether alive or dead) should not be permitted in school buildings or on school grounds under any circumstances.

Fur-Bearing Animals – Pet dogs, cats, wolf-hybrids, ferrets and other fur-bearing animals may pose a risk of transmitting rabies as well as parasites, fleas and other disease and injuries. As detailed above, this prohibition does not apply to guide, hearing or other service animals or law enforcement animals. These animals may be allowed in school buildings or on school grounds with proof of current rabies vaccination.

Bats – Bats pose a high risk for transmitting rabies and should not be brought into school buildings or on school grounds and bat houses should not be installed on school buildings or on school grounds.

Poisonous Animals – Spiders, venomous insects, poisonous snakes, reptiles and lizards are prohibited from school buildings and school grounds for safety reasons.

LEGAL REF.: 28 C.F.R. Part 35

Adopted: January 17, 2023