

ASSISTANCE DOGS

The Mansfield Public Schools supports the use of assistance dogs for the benefit of its students subject to the conditions of this policy. Professional School Assistance Dogs certified with their owners/handlers as Certified Assistance Dog Teams provide emotional and physical support in the educational setting. These highly-trained dogs model good behavior, tolerance, and acceptance.

All Certified Assistance Dog Teams in the Mansfield Public Schools work to support and positively influence student achievement. Benefits from working or visiting with an assistance dog include improved social skills, promotion of positive behavior, increased student engagement, improved attendance, reduced stress, improved physical and emotional well-being, low blood pressure, decreased anxiety, improved self-esteem and normalization of the environment, increasing the likelihood of successful academic achievement by the student. Examples of activities that students may engage in with an assistance dog include petting and/or hugging the dog, speaking to the dog, giving the dog simple commands that the dog is trained to respond to, and reading to the dog.

Definitions

An *Assistance Dog* is a dog that has been individually trained, evaluated, and registered with his/her handler to provide animal assisted activities and animal assisted interactions within a school or other facility.

Assistance dogs do not meet the definition of “service animals” under the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA). Assistance dogs in the Mansfield Public Schools are not family pets that have been certified as pet therapy animals.

The *handler* is an individual school district staff member or volunteer who has been individually trained, evaluated, and registered with the assistance dog to provide animal assisted activities and animal assisted interactions within a school or other facility. The handler will assume full responsibility for the assistance dog’s care, behavior and suitability for interacting with students and others in the school while the assistance dog is on school district property. The Superintendent shall approve and designate the handler. Assistance dogs are personal property of the handler and are not owned by the school district.

Animal Assisted Activities and Animal Assisted Interactions are non goal-driven interactions where the specific content of the visit is spontaneous and is meant to provide motivational, educational and/or recreational activities that enhance the quality of life.

ASSISTANCE DOGS

Standards and Procedures

1. Request/Approval: The Superintendent may approve at their sole discretion any request to have an assistance dog on school district property. Such approval may be suspended, curtailed, or rescinded at any time, for any reason, at the sole discretion of the superintendent. Once the Superintendent or the Superintendent's designee approves the request, a plan for dog visits shall be developed with the Principal or the Principal's designee. The following breeds will not be allowed: wolf/wolf-hybrid and coyote/coyote-hybrid.
2. Training and Registration: The handler shall submit proof of registration as an assistance dog handler with each assistance dog handler intends to bring to the school district. Such registration shall be from the National Education for Assistance Dog Services, Inc. (NEADS) or such other assistance dog registering organization as determined by the Superintendent.
3. Health and Vaccination: The handler shall ensure the assistance dog receives all medical necessities, including up-to-date vaccinations, and shall submit documentation that the dog is in good health and has been immunized against diseases common to dogs.
4. Disposition: Assistance dogs should show no signs of aggression. School officials will immediately suspend privileges in the event the dog shows signs of aggression (biting, growling, etc.) Dogs should not bark or otherwise create any disturbances/distractions in the educational environment.
5. Insurance: The Town of Mansfield shall maintain an insurance policy that provides liability coverage for the work of the handler and assistance dog while on School District property. The handler is responsible for maintaining appropriate insurance covering the assistance dog while not on School District property.
6. License: The handler shall properly license the dog with the appropriate municipality.
7. Ownership: The handler is the sole owner of the assistance dog and is solely responsible for the dog. The Town of Mansfield is only liable for the dog's actions when it is acting as an agent of the school, similar to regular employees.

Review of Professional School Assistance Dog Guidelines and Procedures

ASSISTANCE DOGS

1. Professional School Assistance Dog Guidelines and Procedures will be reviewed annually with staff and students at the start of the academic year.
2. Review of the guidelines and procedures will take place as needed (determined by the administrator and dog owner/handler) throughout the year.

District employees will not receive any additional pay, stipend, or compensation for providing the assistance dog or for being the handler and/or the owner of the assistance dog. The supervision and care of the approved assistance dog is solely the responsibility of the handler(s) when the dog is on campus.

This policy is not intended to, and does not, allow students, parents, or staff to bring emotional support animals onto the Mansfield Public Schools campus. Individuals who bring an animal onto the District campus that does not meet the definition of a service animal under District policy *IMG Animals in School* or that has not been approved under this policy will be asked to leave campus. Repeated violations may result in disciplinary or legal action.

ADOPTED: March 26, 2019

SOURCE: *Therapy Animals, Sample Policy*, Arkansas School Board Association, 2018
Therapy Dog Policy, Rumson, NJ School District
Use of Therapy Dogs in Schools, Manchester, CT Public Schools

CROSS REF: IMG Animals in the Classroom