

**ADMINISTRATIVE
DIRECTIVE**

Administrative Directive Title: Procedures for the Use of Service and Therapy Animals in Schools	AD Number: 3.218.1	Adopted: September 2022
Policy References: Board Policy 3.218 – Service Animals in District Facilities		Revised: 11/24

1 This procedure provides guidelines for the presence of service, therapy animals, and emotional
 2 support animals on school property, ensuring compliance with legal requirements and promoting
 3 a safe, positive environment for students, staff, and visitors.

4 **DEFINITIONS**

5 **Service Animal:** Defined under the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), a service animal is
 6 typically a dog trained to perform specific tasks directly related to an individual’s disability.

7 **Therapy Animal:** A trained animal that provides therapeutic benefits within structured, district-
 8 approved programs. Therapy animals are distinct from service animals in that they are not
 9 specifically trained to perform tasks for a person with a disability.

10 **Emotional Support Animal:** Emotional support animals are generally not permitted on school
 11 property, as they are not recognized as service animals under the ADA or Tennessee law.
 12 Exceptions may be considered on a case-by-case basis, in accordance with applicable legal
 13 standards, and must be approved by the Director of Schools.

14 **ELIGIBILITY FOR USE OF SERVICE AND THERAPY ANIMALS**

15 Service animals are permitted in all areas where their handler is authorized to go, as required by
 16 law, and are not restricted to specific programs.

17 Therapy animals are permitted only as part of district-approved programs that provide therapeutic
 18 or educational benefits to students, such as mental health support or specific learning programs.
 19 Therapy animals must be certified by an accredited organization, with all necessary documentation
 20 provided before program participation.

21 **RESPONSIBILITIES OF HANDLERS**

22 **Service Animal Handlers:** Handlers are responsible for the care, supervision, and control of their
 23 service animal at all times. The animal must be harnessed, leashed, or tethered unless these
 24 interfere with the service animal’s tasks.

25 **Therapy Animal Handlers:** Handlers must provide up-to-date certification, vaccination records,
 26 and proof of the therapy animal’s suitability for school interactions. Therapy animals must remain
 27 under the handler’s control and supervision and may not be left unattended.

28 Emotional support animal handlers, if permitted by special exception, must provide documentation
29 of health and vaccinations and ensure that the animal is supervised and under control at all times.

30 **APPROVAL PROCESS FOR USE OF THERAPY ANIMALS**

31 Therapy animals must be formally approved by the Director of Schools or designated administrator
32 for participation in district-approved programs. Handlers must submit a program application,
33 including the purpose, scope, and frequency of the therapy animal's presence, at least four weeks
34 prior to the anticipated start date. Therapy animal program approval is program-specific and time-
35 limited, subject to review and reapproval annually.

36 **GUIDELINES FOR INTERACTIONS WITH THERAPY ANIMALS**

37 Therapy animal interactions must occur within the parameters of the approved program and are
38 limited to designated spaces.

39 All students and staff participating in therapy animal programs must be notified of the animal's
40 presence in advance, and consent must be obtained from parents/guardians before a student may
41 interact with a therapy animal.

42 Handlers must monitor interactions and ensure the animal's welfare and the safety of students and
43 staff.

44 **HEALTH AND SAFETY REQUIREMENTS**

45 Service and therapy animals must be in good health, well-groomed, and free of parasites.

46 School staff must ensure that any areas visited by therapy animals are cleaned after each session.
47 Students and staff are advised to wash hands after direct contact with therapy animals to maintain
48 hygiene standards.

49 **EMERGENCY PROTOCOLS**

50 In an emergency, the handler is responsible for the safe removal of the service or therapy animal
51 if required.

52 Any adverse reaction to a therapy animal, such as an allergic response, should be immediately
53 reported, and the handler may be asked to move the animal to a different area if necessary.

54 **IMPLEMENTATION AND REVIEW**

55 This procedure will be reviewed annually to ensure alignment with current legal requirements
56 and district policies. The Director of Schools reserves the authority to modify this procedure as
57 needed.