

CERTIFIED THERAPY ANIMALS

Certified therapy animals, which can be called comfort or social-emotional assistance animals and are not service animals as defined by Massachusetts law or Title II or Title III of the American Disabilities Act (ADA). This policy addresses these non-service animals that provide companionship, comfort and affection and sometimes help with depression, anxiety, and certain phobias, but do not have special training to perform tasks that assist people with disabilities. This policy also addresses certified therapy animals that provide people with therapeutic contact, to improve their physical, social, emotional, and/or cognitive functioning. Service animals are not restricted to the limitations in this policy. The ADA permits a student with a disability who uses a service animal to bring the animal to school.

A certified therapy animal may only be brought into a Milton Public School or any of its affiliated programs or facilities under the direction of the school principal or designee and with the permission of the Superintendent or their designee for instructional purposes. Instructional purposes are defined as “having animals present to support the learning strategies of a specific educational program”. Other certified therapy animals, including requests for certified therapy animals from individuals, are not permitted in the Milton Public Schools.

All requests shall be submitted to the Superintendent in writing. The Superintendent or their designee reserves the right to request documentation supporting all requests. Such documentation may include documentation from a veterinarian that the certified therapy animal is in good health and up-to-date on all vaccinations as required by local ordinances and regulations.

If a request for a certified therapy animal is granted by the Superintendent or their designee, the owner of the certified therapy animal is responsible for ensuring that the certified therapy animal does not unduly interfere with school activities and is solely responsible for any damage to persons or school property caused by the certified therapy animal.

PROTOCOL FOR CERTIFIED THERAPY ANIMALS

At the request of the school principal or designee, a handler will apply to bring a certified therapy animal onto the Milton Public Schools property or to Milton Public Schools activities or events in writing. Approval must be received **prior** to the animal attending school activities or events or being present on school property.

1. A certified therapy animal may only be brought into a Milton Public School or any of its affiliated programs or facilities at the **sole discretion** of the Superintendent or his or her designee.
2. The handler must provide the following documentation prior to receiving approval:
 - Evidence from a veterinarian of the animal being up-to-date with required vaccinations, including rabies and receiving a clean bill of health.
 - Appropriate licensing from a local animal licensing authority.
 - Affirmation that the animal has regular flea prevention treatment and will be well-groomed while on school property or at school activities/events.
 - Evidence that the owner has liability insurance which would cover any damages or injuries caused by the animal's presence at school and/or school activities and events.
 - Statement that the handler is responsible for any damages caused by their certified therapy animal.
 - Evidence that any certified therapy animal has received a certified therapy animal certification from a national therapy animal organization.
Exceptions may be made for certified therapy animal(s) undergoing training by the Milton Police Department to serve as a therapy animal for the benefit of the schools.
3. The certified therapy animals must be obedient, calm as well as affectionate and friendly to strangers.
4. The certified therapy animals will only be permitted in authorized areas within and outside of the school building.
5. When using a certified therapy animal in a school setting, the animal must always be under control of the handler with a leash no longer than four feet, unless holding such a leash would interfere with the certified therapy animal's safe,

effective performance of its work or tasks. The handler shall maintain control of the certified therapy animal at all times and shall not tether the certified therapy animal to any individual or object. The school is not responsible for providing the handler or for handling the animal.

6. The handler and certified therapy animal will wear appropriate identification identifying them as a registered handler and certified therapy animal.
7. Volunteer handlers shall sign themselves and their certified therapy animal in upon arrival at any school and shall sign both out on departure from the building. Handlers who are Milton School Resource Officers shall sign their certified therapy animal in upon arrival and sign him/her out on their departure.
8. The handler shall not borrow money or personal items, or receive any personal gratuity, gift, or tip, such as money or jewelry from staff or students in the district.
9. The handlers of a certified therapy animal are responsible for the supervision and care of the animal while on school property including feeding, exercising, and cleaning up after the animal.
10. The school Principal will notify families, students, and staff whenever a certified therapy animal will be present on school property or at school activities and events. Families, students, and staff will have the opportunity to express their wish to avoid the certified therapy animal.
11. The handler shall remove the certified therapy animal to a separate area as designated by the school administrator in such instances where any student or school employee who suffers allergies or aversions is present in an office, hallway, or classroom. Students who are unable to participate in class activities will be provided with an alternative learning experience or be provided with accommodations, as appropriate.
12. The handler shall confirm whether or not there will be any other certified therapy animal(s) on site prior to scheduling any visit with a certified therapy animal and shall take steps with appropriate staff to ensure that the animals do not engage inappropriately while on school property. When multiple certified therapy animals are engaged in a planned activity on school district property, the handlers shall ensure that the animals have an opportunity to greet each other prior to entering the school building. Once inside the building, the handlers shall ensure that the animals are each on a four-foot leash, given work space at least eight feet from

each other, and are given no opportunity for contact or socialization with each other while working.

13. The Superintendent or his/her designee may withdraw approval for a certified therapy animal at any time at his/her sole discretion.

14. Exceptions to these provisions may be made by the Superintendent for the inclusion of the Milton Police Department's certified therapy animal in school-related activities and events.

First Reading: March 22, 2023

Second Reading and Approval: April 12, 2023