

Division of Operations

Animals on School System Property and Service Animals

To: All Staff

From: Scott W. Washington  
Chief Operating Officer

Animals in schools or offices, whether leashed or not, present health, safety, environmental, and liability issues. Students and staff may be exposed to potential physical hazards, such as bites, and/or allergy-related health problems. As a result, animals are prohibited from HCPSS buildings, except for the instances mentioned below. Animals are also prohibited from school system property during arrival, dismissal, recess, and other Howard County Public School System-sponsored outdoor activities.

**Animals for Instructional Purposes:**

HCPSS staff are responsible for the proper control of animals brought to school for instructional purposes (i.e., must be part of the curriculum). Prior approval for these activities must be received from (1) the school administration (principal or designee), (2) the appropriate academic coordinator (below), and (3) the Office of Safety and Security.

Elementary Science Coordinator	Amy L. Reese
Secondary Science Coordinator	Naté L. Hall
Media Specialist Coordinator	Melissa Daggett
Language Arts Coordinator Elementary School	Stephanie G. Milligan
Language Arts Coordinator Secondary School	Nancy L. Czarnecki
Office of Safety and Security (Risk Management)	Pierre van Greunen, or Andrea Misner

When requesting an animal for instructional purposes, please prepare answers to the following questions:

- i. **Learning Goal:** There must be a purpose - curricular connections and learning goals associated with having an animal in the classroom (not just for a classroom "pet"). Think about science or social-emotional learning (SEL) connections and be clear on these connections related to the animal you have chosen.
- ii. **Animal Care Plan:** You must have a plan in place for care: inclement weather days, habitat care/cleaning, long weekends/vacations (not leaving an animal on site without care), food, and sanitizing. These should be discussed with your administration and will need to be written down/kept with your animal habitat area, as well as safety directions for caring for the animal (in case of a substitute or other adult in your room who may not know the requirements).

- iii. **Safety:** Students should likely **not** be touching the animal (depending on what kind of animal it is). If students are performing jobs around/near the animal/habitat, they must wear gloves and wash their hands thoroughly afterward. You must have a plan for this, for how to obtain these safety materials, and access/safety for students.

### **In-School Field Trips Involving Animals:**

Requests for visiting animals as part of an in-school field trip are permissible. The request must go through the field trip process (see [Policy 8100](#)). For planning purposes, please remember that related contracts must be submitted 60 school days in advance of the contractual deadline for review and approval. Supervisory responsibility and permissible interaction will be defined in the contract. Once the in-school field trip is fully approved, the school is required to send permission slips home to inform families of the upcoming activity.

### **Service Animals (not therapy animals – see therapy animals further below):**

Service animals [per MD Annotated Code Section 7-705 (Service Animals) and the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA)] are exempt from prohibition. In accordance with Maryland law, no HCPSS employee shall “deny or interfere with the admittance of a service animal that accompanies an individual with a disability or a parent of a minor child with a disability.” As a general rule, employees should not “deny or interfere with the admittance of an animal being trained as a service animal that accompanies a service animal trainer.” However, a service animal in training may be denied entry into a facility per MD Annotated Code Section 7-705 “if admitting the animal would create a clear danger of a disturbance or physical harm to an individual” on site.

According to the US Department of Justice Civil Rights Division, a service animal under the ADA is defined as a dog that has been individually trained to do work or perform tasks for people with disabilities. When it is not immediately obvious what service an animal provides, only limited inquiries are allowed. Staff may ask two questions: (1) is the dog a service animal required because of a disability, and (2) what work or task the dog has been trained to perform? Staff may not ask about the person’s disability, require medical documentation, require a special identification card, or training documentation for the animal, or ask that the animal demonstrate its ability to perform the work or task. Animals whose sole function is to provide comfort or emotional support do not qualify as Service Animals under the ADA.

No additional fees shall be charged for a service animal or a service animal in training at events where paid admission is required. However, the disabled individual or the parent of a minor child will be responsible “for any damages to the premises or facilities caused by the service animal.” The service animal trainer’s organization/trainer will be responsible for any personal injuries as well as damages to the premises or facilities caused by an animal in training.

Service animals must be harnessed, leashed, or tethered, unless these devices interfere with the service animal’s work or if the individual’s disability prevents using these devices. In that case, the individual must maintain control of the animal through voice, signal, or other effective controls.

A person with a disability may not be asked to remove his service animal from the premises unless: (1) the dog is out of control and the handler does not take effective action to control it, or (2) the dog is not housebroken. When there is a legitimate reason to ask that a service animal be removed, staff must offer the person with the disability the opportunity to obtain goods or services without the animal's presence.

**Service animals for students** in HCPSS schools are approved through the individual school's Service Animal Review Committee, following ADA guidelines. A Service Animal Plan must be completed for all students with service animals and can be coordinated and obtained from Sally Dorman, HCPSS Section 504 Coordinator. Service animals are specifically trained to perform a task or to work for an individual student with a disability. Therefore, the service animal must be allowed to accompany the student throughout the school day, as well as during any extra-curricular, co-curricular, or school-sponsored activities.

Any **student-related** service animal questions should be directed to Sally Dorman, HCPSS Section 504 Coordinator, at 410-313-1252.

**Therapy Animals**

Therapy and emotional support animals (dogs, rabbits, horses, and other animals) are not permitted in HCPSS buildings.

If you need additional information on this matter, please contact the Office of Safety and Security at 410-313-6739.

SWW/PvG/vw