ANIMALS IN SCHOOLS

School Principals, in consultation with health services providers in each building, shall utilize the Department of Public Health publication “Guidelines for Animals in Schools or on School Grounds and review building-wide health records to determine which animals may be allowed in the school building.

Educational Program

Use of animals to achieve specific curriculum objectives may be allowed by the building 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. No animal shall be brought to school or onto Sharon Public School property without prior permission of the building Principal.

Student and Staff Health

The health and well-being of students and staff is the District’s highest priority. Animals may cause an allergic reaction or otherwise impair the health of students and staff. 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 or staff member who must utilize that area. Animals that cause an allergic reaction or impair the health of students or staff shall be removed from the school immediately so that no student or staff shall have their health impaired and each student and staff shall have full access to available educational opportunities.

Animals Prohibited from School

Rabies is a growing health problem and any fur-bearing animal is susceptible to this very serious fatal disease. Infected animals can transmit this disease to students and staff. Based on the Massachusetts Departments of Health and Education recommendations, the following animals are prohibited from schools within the Sharon Public Schools:

Wild Animals and Domestic Stray Animals – Because of the high incidence of rabies in bats, raccoons, skunks, foxes and other wild carnivores, these animals should not be permitted in school buildings under any circumstances (including dead animals).

Fur-Bearing Animals (pet dogs¹, cats, wolf-hybrids, ferrets, etc) – These animals may pose a risk for transmitting rabies, as well as parasites, fleas, other diseases and injuries.

Bats – Bats pose a high risk for transmitting rabies. Bat houses should not be installed on school grounds and bats should not be brought into the school building.

¹ Exception: Service Animals (dogs or miniature horses) – these animals may be allowed in school or on school grounds with proof of current rabies vaccination
Poisonous Animals – Spiders, venomous insects and poisonous snakes, reptiles and lizards are prohibited for safety reasons.

Exceptions to this policy may be made with the prior approval of the Superintendent of Schools.

Service Animals

The Sharon School Committee does not permit discrimination against individuals with disabilities, including those who require the assistance of a service animal. Sharon Public Schools will comply with Massachusetts and federal law concerning the rights of persons with service animals and will permit such animals on school premises and on school transportation.

A “service animal includes any dog that has been individually trained to do the work or perform tasks for the benefit of an individual with a disability.” Further “a public entity 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 to the benefit of the individual with the disability.” 28 CFR Part 35.

Service animals perform some of the functions and tasks that individuals with disabilities cannot perform themselves. Service animals are not pets. There are several kinds of service animals that assist individuals with disabilities. Examples include, but are not limited to, animals that:

- Assist individuals who are blind or have severe sight impairments as “seeing eye dogs” or “guide dogs;”
- Alert individuals with hearing impairments to sounds;
- Pull wheelchairs or carry and pick-up items for individuals with mobility impairments; and
- Assist mobility impaired individuals with balance.

A service animal shall be under the control of its handler. A service animal shall have a harness, leash, or other tether, unless either the handler is unable because of a disability to use a harness, leash or other tether, or the use of a harness, leash or other tether would interfere with the service animal’s safe, effective performance of work or tasks, in which case the service animal must be otherwise under the handler’s control (e.g. voice control, signals, or other effective means). 28 CFR §35.136(d).

The District shall not assume or take custody or control of, or responsibility for, any service animal or the care or feeding thereof. The owner or person having custody and control of the animal shall be liable for all costs and 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 their authorized 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 can also be excluded if it presents a direct and immediate threat to others in the school. The handler of the service animal shall use best efforts to ensure
the service animal is well-groomed and free of parasites at all times. The parent or guardian of
the student having custody and control of the animal will be required to remove the service
animal from District premises immediately.

If any student or staff member assigned to the classroom in which a service animal is permitted
has a documented allergy or suffers an allergic reaction to the animal, the person having custody
and control of the animal will be required to remove the animal to a different location designated
by the Building Principal or their designee and an alternative plan will be developed with
appropriate District staff. Such plan could include the reassignment of the person having
custody and control of the animal to a different classroom. This will also apply if an individual
on school transportation suffers an allergic reaction or has a documented allergy. In this case, an
alternate plan will be developed in coordination with appropriate school, District and
transportation staff including the involvement of the parents/guardian of the student.

When a student will be accompanied by a service animal at school or in other District facilities
on a regular basis, such student’s parent or guardian, as well as the owner and any other person
who will have custody and control of the animal, will be required to sign a document stating that
they have read and understood the forgoing.

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

Legal Ref: 28 CFR Part 35
   Americans with Disabilities Act