

Best Practices for Transporting Service Animals

There are several key aspects to think about as you prepare or modify your transportation policy to include transporting service animals. These areas include definitions, laws, possible roles, school bus logistics, emergencies and evacuations and behavior issues.

“Service animal” refers to any dog, or in specific circumstances, a miniature horse. No other species of animal, whether wild or domestic, will be permitted in schools as a “service animal”. A service animal is an animal that is individually trained to do work or perform tasks for the benefit of someone with a disability. The provision of emotional support, well-being, comfort, or companionship does not constitute work or tasks for the purpose of this definition.

The district acknowledges its responsibility to permit students and/or adults with disabilities to be accompanied by a “service animal” in its school buildings, in classrooms, and at school functions, as required by the Americans with Disabilities Act, 28 C.F.R. Part 35, subject to the following:

1. All requests for an individual with a disability to be accompanied by a service animal must be addressed in writing to the superintendent and must contain required documentation of vaccinations. This written request must be delivered to the superintendent’s office at least ten (10) business days prior to bringing the service animal to school or a school function.
2. Owners of a service dog must provide annual proof of the following vaccinations: DHLPPC (Distemper, Hepatitis, Leptospirosis, Parainfluenza, Parvovirus, Coronavirus), Bordatella and Rabies.
3. Owners of service miniature horses must provide annual proof of the following vaccinations: Equine Infectious Anemia (Coggins Test), Rabies, Tetanus, Encephalomyelitis, Rhinopneumonitis, Influenza and Strangles.
4. All service dogs must be spayed or neutered.
5. All service dogs must be treated for, and kept free of fleas and ticks.

6. All service animals must be kept clean and groomed to avoid shedding and dander.

(A severe allergy to animals has to be dealt with in a sensitive manner. Bus routes for the driver, attendant or other students may need to be changed in response to their allergic condition.)

7. Owners of service animals are liable for any harm or injury caused by the animal to other students, staff, visitors and/or property.

8. The animal must be “required” for the individual with a disability.

9. The animal must be “individually trained” to do work or a task for the individual with a disability.

10. Special Provisions/Miniature Horses: Requests to permit a miniature horse to accompany a student or adult with a disability in school buildings, in classrooms, or a school functions will be handled on a case-by-case basis, considering:

a. The type, size, and weight of the miniature, and whether the facility can accommodate these features.

b. Whether the handler has sufficient control of the miniature horse.

c. Whether the miniature horse is housebroken.

d. Whether the miniature horse’s presence in a specific facility compromises the legitimate safety requirements that are necessary for safe operation.

11. Examples of possible services provided by service animals for students with special needs

a. For those students who are physically weak or experience fatigue, service dogs can actually pull them in their wheelchairs, providing longer periods of independent mobility.

b. For those who have visual or memory problems, the dogs can help lead them throughout the school and bus area.

c. For those with seizure activity, the dogs can actually give the student a warning that they are going to have a seizure. This gives students an opportunity to find a place to sit before they actually go into the seizure activity. Also, in case a student who is alone has a seizure, service dogs are trained to go find help.

d. For those with balance and walking difficulties, the dogs can provide physical support to aid with walking, balance and coordination.

e. For students with limited upper extremity movement and strength, the service dogs can pick up objects that might be out of the students' reach or ability.

f. For those who use motorized wheelchairs, service dogs have often been trained to pick up the students' arms if they drop and actually place them back on the wheelchair joystick box.

g. For those with phobias or emotional disturbance disorders, the dogs provide a calming effect.

h. In many cases, the service animal provides a social opportunity for the child where one would not have occurred otherwise. Other children are drawn to dogs and begin to chat with the child about the dog, creating important and sometimes therapeutic social interaction. Service animals become constant companions and best friends.

12. Decisions should be made as to whether the service animal should be restrained or remain free to assist the student according to the student's individual needs, in which case the service animal must be otherwise under the handler's control (e.g., voice control, hand signal, or other effective means).

13. The school system is not responsible for the care or supervision of a service animal, including walking the animal or responding to the animal's need to relieve itself.

a. The district is not responsible for providing a staff member to walk the service animal or provide any other care or assistance to the animal.

b. Students with service animals are expected to care and supervise their animal. In the case of a young child or a student with disabilities who is unable to care for or supervise his service animal, the parent is responsible for providing care and supervision of the animal.

c. Issues related to the care and supervision of service animals will be addressed on a case-by-case basis in the discretion of the building administrator.

14. Loading logistics

A service animal must never be allowed on the bus lift. Lead the service animal up the steps while the student is on the lift and the lift is still on the ground. This provides maximum safety for the dog and child.

Ambulatory students should ascend the steps separately, with the service animal boarding first so it doesn't block or trip the child during boarding.

15. Riding position and safety

Once the student and service animal are on the bus, the best position for the service animal is between the wheelchair and the bus wall. The important thing is to minimize potential injury to the service animal and others on the bus in case of a collision. The service animal should never be allowed to block the aisle. Depending on space available, an ambulatory student's service animal may be placed on the floor near the student's immediate seating area. Safety on bus floor surfaces during the actual bus ride with all the stops and acceleration should come into consideration.

16. Emergencies procedures

Establish evacuation plans.

A service animal may be taken off the bus via the steps or allowed to jump off the back of the bus without assistance. Students or their parents should train bus staff in basic commands, should the student be unable to give the service animal commands. Handling of an injured service animal during an emergency should be left to the direction of the handler. In the event that the handler becomes incapacitated, first responders should determine the best method of evacuation.

17. Removal of a Service Animal:

A school administrator may ask an individual with a disability or his parents to remove a service animal from a school building, a classroom, or from a school function if any one of the following circumstances occurs:

- a. The animal is out of control and the animal's handler does not take effective action to control it.
- b. The animal is not housebroken.
- c. The animal's presence would "fundamentally alter" the nature of the service, program or activity.
- d. The animal presents a direct threat to students, staff, or other individuals.

(Reference: NCST 2015 & Idaho Falls School District)
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