

To: School Committee

From: Eileen Doherty

Re: Policy for Comfort/Therapy/Emotional Support Dogs and/or Animals

Date: 11/24/24

### Comfort/Therapy/Emotional Support Dogs and/or Animals

The Haverhill Public Schools supports using Comfort/Therapy/Emotional Support Dogs and/or Animals (limited to domesticated mammals as defined by The Commonwealth of Massachusetts, Executive Office of Health and Human Services Department of Public Health document entitled *Animals in the Classroom: Recommendations for Schools*) in its building and premises for the benefit of all students and staff. Comfort/Therapy/Emotional Support Dogs have been trained to provide comfort, therapy, and/or emotional support which positively impacts emotional functioning, mental health, education, attendance, and communication skills of staff and students. In addition, the use of Comfort/Therapy/Emotional Support Dogs and or Animals may decrease anxiety while improving self-esteem. Decreased anxiety may lead to improved attendance and improved student achievement. This policy is intended to allow an approved Comfort, therapy, and Emotional Support Animal for the use of all students in Haverhill Public Schools. Other Comfort/Therapy/Emotional support animals, including requests for Emotional Support/Therapy Dogs from individuals, are not permitted in the Haverhill Public Schools without the express written permission of the Superintendent or Designee.

These Animals are not categorized as service animals according to the ADA. To qualify as a Comfort/Therapy/Emotional Support Dog and/or Animal, the Animal and Handler must acquire specialized training to provide support to identified activities, people, and/or interactions. The handler must be with the animal at all times and assume full responsibility for the Animal's control, care, behavior, and assessment of its ability to interact with others.

The owner of the Animal must demonstrate that the emotional support dog has the temperament and obedience skills to maintain appropriate safe behavior in a school setting and is not a distraction to the learning environment. The health, safety, and learning environment of the school is

paramount and if at any time the Principal of the building or the Superintendent determines there is a conflict, the health, safety, and learning of the students is prioritized.

In order for a Comfort/Therapy/Emotional Support Animal to enter HPS grounds or property, specific permission in writing will be obtained through a formal request to the building Principal in question who will seek approval of the Superintendent. The animal owner will be required to provide written proof of training and endorsement as a handler of said animal by a Comfort/Therapy/Emotional Support Dog/Animal organization, a current certificate of insurance of the owner, proof of all vaccinations required by Massachusetts Law signed by a practicing veterinarian and licensure from the town in which it lives.

Comfort/Therapy/Emotional dogs and/or Animals must be leashed or in a cage at all times. The owner/handler is responsible for the health, cleanliness, and care of the animal at all times. Haverhill Public Schools shall not assume or take custody or control of, or responsibility for, any Comfort/Therapy/Emotional support animal or the care or feeding thereof. The owner or person having custody and control of the Animal shall be liable for any damage to persons, premises, property, or facilities caused by the animal, including, but not limited to, clean up, stain removal, etc.

Students will be reminded of what is appropriate behavior around the animal before any interaction or visit. Students must never be left alone with the animal and there must be appropriate adult supervision at all times.

The school nurse shall keep a list of all students and staff with a reported allergy to animals and explicit plans must be written to ensure student safety.

When a Comfort/Therapy/Emotional Support Animal has been approved for a building the Principal is required to notify all families and staff in writing of its presence every year and visitors will be notified upon arrival at the building. **Staff, visitors, and children known to have allergic reactions to animals must not go near the Comfort/Therapy/Emotional Support Animal.** The handler shall remove the Comfort/Therapy/Emotional Support Animal to a separate area as designated by the school administrator in such instances where any

person known to suffer from animal/fur 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.

Exclusion or Removal from HPS Property: A Therapy/Emotional Support Dog and/or Animal may be excluded from school property if the building principal or Superintendent determines that the dog/animal poses a threat to the health or safety of students and/or staff. Should the animal be deemed to detract from the use of the school by others, is out of control, is not housebroken and/or damages or destroys school property? The handler may be instructed to remove the animal from the premises. Upon request, the handler shall immediately remove his/her Comfort/Emotional/Therapy dog and/or animal from school property verbally and/or in writing by the building Principal or the Superintendent.

Every year a copy of the following form must be completed by the handler and a copy kept in the school office.

|               |                  |
|---------------|------------------|
| School Name:  | Date:            |
| Breed of Dog: | Name of Handler: |

|  |     |    |     |
|--|-----|----|-----|
| Attached to this form is proof of up-to-date vaccines and licensure.                             | Yes | No |     |
| Is dog clean and well-groomed with no odor?  | Yes | No |     |
| Has dog shown signs of aggression?   | Yes | No |     |
| Does the dog have a training certificate?  | Yes | No | N/A |
| Attached to this form is a copy of the HPS policy owner/handler signed and dated by the handler. | Yes | No | N/A |
| Have the rules regarding the location of the dog been reviewed with the dog's owner/handler?     | Yes | No | N/A |

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| Have the rules regarding sanitation and hygiene been reviewed with the dog's owner/handler? | Yes | No | N/A |
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Signature of Handler

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Date

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Signature of Principal

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Date