

TITLE: Service Animals Policy

The Gilmer County Board of Education strives to make reasonable accommodations for disabled person's use of a service animal on school property. The following policy has been established for evaluating whether and how a request to bring a service animal on school property can be implemented and under what circumstances.

Service animal means any dog that is individually trained to do work or perform tasks for the benefit of an individual with a disability, including a physical, sensory, psychiatric, intellectual, or other mental disability. Except as provided by law, other species of animals, whether wild or domestic, trained or untrained, are not service animals for the purpose of this definition.

School officials may ask the owner or handler of a service animal whether the animal is required because of a disability and what work or task the animals has been trained to do. School officials may not ask about the nature or extent of a person's disability and may not require documentary proof or certification or licensing as a service animal.

The work or tasks performed by a service animal must be directly related to the student's or person's disability. Examples of work or tasks include but are not limited to:

- a. Assisting individuals who are blind or have low vision with navigation and other tasks;
- b. Alerting individuals who are deaf or hard of hearing to the presence of people or sounds;
- c. Providing non-violent protection or rescue work;
- d. Pulling a wheelchair;
- e. Assisting an individual during a seizure;
- f. Alerting individuals to the presence of allergens;
- g. Retrieving items such as medicine or the telephone, providing physical support and assistance with balance and stability to individuals with mobility disabilities, and

h. Helping persons with psychiatric and neurological disabilities by preventing or interrupting impulsive or destructive behavior.

The crime deterrent effects of an animal's presence and the provision of emotional support, well-being, comfort, or companionship do not constitute work or tasks.

Before a service animal will be allowed on school property the following requirements must be satisfied:

A student or person who wants to be accompanied by his/her service animal at school must make a prior written request of the county superintendent. These requests must be renewed each school year.

The service animal must be in good health and must meet every veterinary requirement set forth in State law and County and/or local regulation/ordinance, including but not limited to rabies vaccination or other inoculations required. The owner or handler of the animal must submit to Gilmer County Schools, each school year, documentation from a licensed veterinarian including a health certificate and proof of the animal's current vaccinations and immunizations.

A student who wants to bring his/her service animal to school must notify the Building Principal in writing, at least ten (10) school days prior to the date the animal will be coming to school so that the school staff can meet with the student and his/her parents/guardians to discuss any concerns and develop a plan. The plan, at a minimum, should address how school staff and other students will be educated about and introduced to the service animal, how the student will be accommodated to care for the dog, and how any issues will be resolved.

The Principal should provide the student and staff with specific instructions concerning emergency evacuation plans, entry and egress points, areas where the animal may urinate/defecate, waste removal procedures, and building restrictions, if any.

The Principal will provide written notification to all parents/guardians of students in the affected class(es) and staff in the affected class(es) that a service animal will be coming into the school setting. The notification will

request that the parents/guardians and/or staff notify the Principal if their child or they have any known allergies, asthma, or other health condition that might be aggravated by the service animal's presence. The Principal will take appropriate action to protect any such students or staff members from exposure to the service animal.

Individuals with disabilities may be accompanied by their service animals in all areas of the school system's facilities where students, members of the public, participants in service, programs, or activities, or invitees are allowed to go.

A service animal must be under the control of its owner or handler at all times. The service animal must have a harness, backpack, vest, leash or tether unless the handler is unable, because of disability, to use one of the aforementioned or because it 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 control of the handler.

The owner or handler of a service animal is responsible for the supervision and care of the animal, including and feeding, exercising, and clean up.

For students utilizing such animals, the service animal's trainer can help to develop a plan to provide for assistance to the student with the dog (e.g., the student's aide might transfer the service dog's leash from a student's wheelchair to a tree during recess). Additionally, a younger student might need reminders from school staff about controlling the dog until s/he is comfortable handling the service animal at school.

While the student is responsible for the service animal's care, including feeding and supervision, the District should develop a plan to provide the student with the necessary time to care for the animal and designate a location for the animal's toileting needs. The owner or handler (or adult parent/guardian, where applicable) of the service animal is solely responsible for any damage to school property or injury to personnel, students, or others caused by the animal.

Gilmer County Schools may exclude a service animal from its facilities, grounds, vehicles or functions if:

- 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 poses a direct threat to the health and safety of others; or
- d. The presence of the animal would require a fundamental alteration to the service, program, or activity of the school.

Allergies and fear of dogs are not valid reasons for denying access or refusing service to individuals using service animals. When a person who is allergic to dog dander and a person who uses a service animal must spend time in the same room or facility, they both should be accommodated by assigning them, for example, to different locations within the room or the facility as needed, or other appropriate accommodation measures.

With prior notification and approval of the building administrator, experienced trainers of service animals may accompany the service animal and handler (student or person) on school property for the purposes of continued training.

Legal Authority:

Board Adoption: September 11, 2017