

The School Board of Sarasota County, Florida
Pupil Support Services

**Students with Disabilities and
Students with Section 504 Accommodation Plans**

Guidelines for Including Service Animals in Schools and on School Buses

Definition of a Service Animal – “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. Other species of animals, whether wild or domestic, trained or untrained, are not service animals for the purposes of this definition. The work or tasks performed by a service animal must be directly related to the handler’s disability. Examples of work or tasks include, but are not limited to, assisting individuals who are blind or have low vision with navigation or other tasks, alerting individuals who are deaf or hard of hearing to the presence of people or sounds, providing non-violent protection or rescue work, pulling a wheelchair, assisting an individual during a seizure, alerting individuals to the presence of allergens, retrieving items such as medicine or the telephone, providing physical support and assistance with balance and stability to individuals with mobility disabilities, and helping persons with psychiatric and neurological disabilities by preventing or interrupting impulsive or destructive behaviors. 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 for the purpose of this definition.” **Americans with Disabilities Act, 28 CFR Section 36.104.**

I. Process for Exceptional Education Students (ESE):

- Parent notifies school staff that a student will be using a service animal to access school campus.
- The school notifies the Pupil Support Services (PSS) Program Specialist assigned to the school and the Transportation Department.
- The school requests from the parent copies of the following documents regarding the service animal:
 - Letter from a physician stating that your child has a disability and should use a service animal
 - Service Animal Training Certification
 - Liability Insurance. Parent must maintain insurance for the student and animal for one year.
 - Current health status and immunization records of the service animal.
- The documentation is then reviewed by the PSS Program Specialist, PSS Executive Director and Transportation department.
- The school conducts an IEP team meeting to address the request once the documents have been reviewed by the district staff

- The service animal is documented on the IEP on the Specialized Services Page.
Under Accommodations "Service animal for assistance, Daily, School Campus"

If the student also requires Transportation, that service is listed under Related services as "Specialized Transportation, Daily, To and From School". Weighted funding is marked on the Special Factors section checking the box for "Medical Equipment" and Describe below: "service animal"

II. Process for Students with a Section 504 Accommodation Plan:

- Parent notifies school staff that a student will be using a service animal to access school campus.
- The school notifies the Pupil Support Services (PSS) Program Specialist assigned to the school and the Transportation Department.
- The school requests from the parent copies of the following documents regarding the service animal:
 - Letter from a physician stating that your child has a disability and should use a service animal
 - Service Animal Training Certification
 - Liability Insurance. Parent must maintain insurance for the student and animal for one year.
 - Current health status and immunization records of the service animal.
- The documentation is then reviewed by the PSS Program Specialist, PSS Executive Director and Transportation department.
- The school conducts a 504 Plan/CARE team meeting to address the request once the documents have been reviewed by the district staff
- Documenting the service animal on the 504 Plan

On the Classroom Accommodations page, indicate that a service animal is necessary for the student and note any specialized procedures.

III. Discussion of the following issues should be documented on either the IEP team notes or CARE notes for the 504 Plan.

A. General Issues

1. The service animal is provided by the family, not The School Board of Sarasota County, Florida (District).
2. The family must familiarize the service animal to the campus. The week before the service animal is going to be coming to school with the student, introduce the service animal to the campus so that it becomes familiar with its surroundings. Before or after school would be best because it is less crowded.
3. The student, with the service animal, should be interviewed in order to educate the faculty, staff and students about proper procedures in approaching the service animal, the job that the service animal is doing, and whom to report concerns and what to do in case of an emergency with the service animal. The school can determine the most appropriate interviewer such as a Team Leader, ESE Liaison or Guidance Counselor. Once gathered, this information is shared with appropriate staff, faculty, and students.

4. All parents of students in classes where the student with the service animal will attend must be notified in writing of the presence of the service animal in their child's classroom prior to the initiation of the service animal in the school/classroom setting.
5. A designated area should be established for the service animal to relieve itself. (Guide dogs have been trained to go for long periods of time without having to relieve themselves.) Universal precautions should be used by the student when they have to clean up after the service animal.
6. The responsibilities of the student regarding the service animal need to be identified, clarified, and documented in writing.
7. District/Faculty/Staff are not responsible for the service animal. Agencies responsible for training the student and service animal should be contacted to receive a list of these responsibilities.
8. The student should be allowed to leave class a few minutes early to avoid large crowds during class changes with the service animal. Considerations should be taken involving lunch, arrival, and dismissal, special gatherings, etc...
9. The administrative team at the school should be fully aware of all decisions made regarding the use of a service animal on campus. All documents should be kept in the student's cumulative file.

B. Considerations for District Transportation (if needed)

1. District transportation does not have to be an ESE bus. A student with a service animal may access a regular school bus.
2. Transportation, with the school's assistance, will notify in writing the parents of the other District bus riders that a service animal will be riding the bus to assist a student. Parents of other students may request that their student be able to access District transportation on another route. Examples include allergies or fear of animals. It is important to notify any newly added students to the bus route that a service animal is being transported.
3. District transportation and services will be provided even if the service animal is not with the student on a particular day. Clarification on accommodations when the service animal is not present should be documented.
4. To ensure that the animal is secure, the student will sit at the front of the bus with the service animal in the trained position, behind the driver's seat or the first seat on the opposite side for protection. Tethering the service animal may be necessary due to size. This should be discussed and the decision should be documented.
5. Document the discussion of emergency drills and safety issues pertaining to the evacuation of the bus.
6. Discuss any training that needs to be provided to the driver or students on the bus in regard to the service animal riding the bus. Example: bus evacuation in case of an emergency. Driver and monitor (if present) should learn critical commands. The animal

will be working so the students should be instructed not to “play with it”. The service animal should board the bus using the steps and not the lift.

7. There could be situations that would cause cessation of transportation of the service animal. Examples include: the service animal bites someone, the animal poses a direct threat to the health or safety of others, the animal is unable to control the excretion of bodily fluids on the bus and school due to medical reasons and the service animal does not respond to the student as trained.

8. If transportation or access to a school campus is suspended for the service animal, reinstatement may occur once additional training or medical issues are addressed. Parents and the student should be notified in writing of these consequences prior to the services being initiated.

A service animal is the personal property of the student. The School Board of Sarasota County, Florida does not assume responsibility for training, daily care, or healthcare of service animals.