

GUIDELINES FOR THE USE OF PROFESSIONAL THERAPY DOGS

The school district supports the use of therapy dogs by teachers or other qualified school personnel (“Owner”) for the benefit of its students subject to the conditions of this policy. Benefits from working or visiting with a therapy dog include reduced stress, improved physical and emotional well-being, lowered blood pressure, decreased anxiety, improved self-esteem and normalization of the environment, increasing the likelihood of successful academic achievement by the student. Examples of activities that students may engage in with a therapy dog include petting and/or hugging the dog, speaking to the dog, giving the dog simple commands that the dog is trained to respond to, and reading to the dog.

Therapy Dog

A “therapy dog” is a dog that has been individually trained and certified to work with its Owner to provide emotional support, well-being, comfort, or companionship to school district students. Therapy dogs are not “service animals” as that term is used in the American with Disabilities Act. The dog must be well behaved and have a temperament that is suitable for interaction with students and others in a public school. Therapy dogs are personal property of the teacher or employee and are not owned by the school district.

Therapy Dog Standards and Procedures

The following requirements must be satisfied before a therapy dog will be allowed in school buildings or on school grounds:

Initial Request

An Owner who wants to bring a therapy dog to school must submit a written request to the superintendent outlining the benefits for students and the proposed training timeline. The approval will include consideration of the professional responsibilities of the Owner. Final approval will be given when all documentation is completed.

Training and Certification

The Owner must submit the American Kennel Club’s Canine Good Citizen Certification or its equivalent as determined by the superintendent. The certification must remain current at all times.

Health and Vaccination

The therapy dog must be clean, well groomed, in good health, house broken, and immunized against diseases common to dogs. The Owner must annually submit proof of current licensure from the local licensing authority and proof of the therapy dog's current vaccinations and immunizations from a licensed veterinarian.

Control

A therapy dog must be under the control of the Owner or a designated school employee through the use of a leash, tether, or verbal command.

Identification

The therapy dog must have appropriate identification identifying it as a therapy dog.

No Disruption

The therapy dog must not disrupt the educational process by barking, seeking attention, or any other behavior.

Health and Safety

The therapy dog must not pose a health and safety risk to any student, employee, or other person at school.

Supervision and Care of Therapy dogs

The Owner is solely responsible for the supervision and care of the therapy dog, including any feeding, exercising, and clean-up while the animal is in a school building or on school property. The school district is not responsible for providing any care, supervision, or assistance for a therapy dog.

Authorized Area(s)

The Owner shall only allow the therapy dog to be in areas in school buildings or on school property that are authorized by school district administrators.

Insurance

The Owner must submit a copy of an insurance policy that provides liability coverage for the therapy dog while on school property.

Exclusion or Removal from School

A therapy dog may be excluded from school property and buildings if a school administrator determines that:

- (1) A handler does not have control of the therapy dog;
- (2) The therapy dog is not housebroken;

- (3) The therapy dog presents a direct and immediate threat to others in the school; or
- (4) The animal's presence otherwise interferes with the educational process.
- The Owner shall be required to remove the therapy dog from school premises immediately upon such a determination.

Allergic Reactions

If any student or school employee assigned to a classroom in which a therapy dog is permitted suffers an allergic reaction to the therapy dog, the Owner of the animal will be required to remove the animal to a different location.

Damages to School Property and Injuries

The Owner of a therapy dog is solely responsible and liable for any damage to school property or injury to personnel, students, or others caused by the therapy dog.

Adopted on: April 10, 2023