

Therapy Dog Description

A “Therapy Dog” is a dog that has been individually trained and certified to work with its owner/handler 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 Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), nor are they “emotional support animals” designated to work with an individual student. A Therapy 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 the personal property of a teacher or employee and are not owned by the school district. Therapy Dogs have been individually trained, evaluated and registered with his/her handler to provide animal assisted activities, animal assisted therapy and animal assisted interactions within a school or other facility.

An “Owner” is a full- or part-time employee of the district who owns a Therapy Dog and wishes to incorporate the dog into school programming for the benefit of students. An Owner must have been individually trained, evaluated and registered with his/her Therapy Dog to provide animal assisted activities, animal assisted therapy and animal assisted interactions within a school or other facility.

A “Handler” is a full- or part-time employee of the district who has been trained to work with the Therapy Dog as part of the school program. In this policy the term “Owner/Handler” is to be understood to mean the Owner and/or a Handler.

Requirements for Therapy Dogs on School Property

Request: An Owner/Handler who wishes to propose the use of a Therapy Dog on school grounds or in school programming must have permission from the school’s principal and the Superintendent. For all other school division facilities, requests should be made directly to the Superintendent.

Health: The Therapy Dog must be in good health. Each school year, and upon request, the Owner/Handler of the animal must submit documentation to the school principal / designee from a licensed veterinarian of the following: a current veterinary health certificate and proof of the service animal’s current vaccinations and immunizations.

Control: A Therapy Dog must be under the control of its Owner/Handler or other appropriately trained staff at all times. The Therapy Dog must have a harness, backpack, or vest identifying it as a trained Therapy Dog; a leash or other tether; and tags or other noise-generating accessories which the dog will be required to wear at all times when moving about the building. The Therapy Dog must not disrupt the educational process by barking, seeking attention, or any other behavior.

Training and Registration: The Owner shall submit proof of registration as a Therapy Dog handler.

Licensing: The Owner shall submit proof of licensure from the local dog licensing authority.

Authorized Area(s): The Owner/Handler 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: The building principal may remove or exclude a Therapy Dog from the school or school property if the presence of the dog poses a direct threat to the health and safety of others; if the Owner/Handler is unable to fully control the animal; or the animal fails to consistently perform the function(s)/service(s) for which it has been trained and brought to school.

Allergic Reactions: If any student or school employee assigned to a classroom in which a Therapy Dog is permitted suffers from allergies the Owner/Handler will ensure the animal does not come in direct contact with the student or school employee (i.e., petting). Student/Parent opt out forms will be available for those who do not wish to come in contact with the therapy dog.

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.

Supervision and Care of Therapy Dog: The Owner/Handler shall be solely responsible for the supervision and humane care of the Therapy Dog, including any feeding, exercising, and cleaning up after the Therapy Dog while the Therapy Dog is in a school building or on school property. The Owner/Handler will not leave the Therapy Dog unsupervised or alone on school property unless the dog is in a secure and designated location which will not be accessed by students.. The school district is not responsible for providing any care, supervision or assistance to the Therapy Dog.

Therapy dog in Training: This policy shall also be applicable to Therapy Dogs in training that are accompanied by a certified trainer.

Training Students /Staff: The Owner/Handler will provide appropriate training for staff and students who may be interacting with the service animal.