

Instruction

SUBJECT: THE USE OF THERAPY DOGS IN SCHOOL

The Spencerport Central School District supports the use of therapy dogs in the schools for the social and emotional benefit of its students. Only certified therapy dogs will be considered and those therapy dogs should be supported by the school counselors, school social workers, and/or school psychologists, or other school staff as approved by the Board. Therapy dogs in the school setting shall be recommended by the Building Principal to the Superintendent of Schools for approval by the Board of Education on an annual basis.

The following information will be submitted by the handler prior to approval by the Board of Education:

- The proof of registration as a therapy dog handler with the individual therapy dog to be used from a professional organization such as Therapy Dogs International, or other such organization. Registration shall be kept current at all times.
- Proof from a licensed veterinarian that the therapy dog is in good health and has been immunized against diseases common to dogs. Such vaccinations shall be kept current and up to date at all times.
- Proof of licensure from the local dog licensing authority.
- Copy of an insurance policy that provides liability coverage for the work of the handler and therapy dog while the two are on school district property. The District's insurance will operate as a secondary insurer thus the dog may not be of a breed which is unacceptable to the District's insurance plan.

Use of the Therapy Dog in School

The District supports the use of therapy dogs 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, lower blood pressure, decreased anxiety, improve 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.

Animal assisted therapy can be a goal-driven intervention, which is directed and/or delivered by a health, human, or education service professional and is meant to improve physical, social, emotional and/or cognitive function of an individual. Animal assisted therapy can also enhance existing academic and social emotional support programs for one or more students.

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SUBJECT: THE USE OF THERAPY DOGS IN SCHOOL (Cont'd.)

A therapy dog is a dog that has 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. Therapy dogs are not the same as “emotional support animals” nor are they “service animals” as that term is defined under the Americans with Disabilities Act. The handler is an individual school district staff member who has been individually trained, evaluated, and registered with the therapy dog to provide animal assisted activities, animal assisted therapy, and animal assisted interactions within a school or other facility.

The handler shall assume full responsibility for the therapy dog’s care, behavior, and suitability for interacting with students and others in the school while the therapy dog is on school district property. All other animals entering a school building must meet the requirements of Policy 3211, Service Animals or Policy 8360, Animals in the School (Instructional Purposes).

The 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 the school building or on school property. The handler shall not leave the therapy dog unsupervised or alone on school property at any time. The district bears no financial responsibility for the required therapy dog training, care or feeding of the animal.

The Building Principal shall notify parents and staff on an annual basis regarding the presence of therapy dogs in the school building.

Therapy Dog Standards and Procedures

Identification: The handler and therapy dog shall wear appropriate identification issued by the school district.

Health and Safety: The Board of Education shall ensure that the therapy dog does not pose a health and safety risk to any student, employee, or other person at school and that the therapy dog is brought to the school district only when properly groomed, bathed, free of illness or injury and of the temperament appropriate for working with children and others in the schools.

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Control: The handler shall ensure that the therapy dog wears a collar or harness and a leash no longer than four feet and shall maintain control of the therapy dog by holding the leash at all times that the therapy dog is not in an enclosed space such as a classroom or office. A leash shall be used during student interactions unless holding such leash would interfere with the therapy dog's safe, effective performance of its work or tasks. However, the handler shall maintain control of the therapy dog at all times and shall not tether the therapy dog to any individual or object.

Authorized Area(s): The handler shall ensure that the therapy dog has access to only such areas of the school building or properties that have been authorized by school district administrators.

Allergies and Aversions: The handler shall remove the therapy dog to a separate area, as designated by the school administrator, in such instances where any student or school employee who suffers dog allergies or aversion is present in an office, hallway, or classroom.

Damages and Injuries: The Board of Education shall not assume responsibility and/or liability for any damage to school property or injury to district staff, students, or others in the school caused by the therapy dog, except to the extent independently required by law. Any liability imposed on the handler will be covered by the handler's insurance policy which the handler shall purchase as described above.

Exclusion or Removal from School District Property: A therapy dog may be excluded from school district property if a school administrator determines that: (1) The 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 therapy dog's presence otherwise interferes with the educational program. The handler shall immediately remove his/her therapy dog from school property when instructed to do so by a school administrator.

Bite Policy: The Spencerport Central School District has a zero bite policy. A bite is defined as the bruising or breaking of the skin. A therapy dog that is determined to have bitten a person on school grounds or while engaged in therapy work will be permanently barred from working in the Spencerport School District.

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Instruction

SUBJECT: THE USE OF THERAPY DOGS IN SCHOOL (Cont'd.)**THERAPY (READING) DOGS – For Use in the School**

The Spencerport Central School District has a long standing partnership with reading programs that incorporate the use of therapy dogs to benefit students. The Building Principal shall provide approval for the use of occasional therapy reading dogs by outside groups in our school libraries or reading centers. Therapy reading dogs are still certified by an outside organization but they are not owned by District employees.