

District Policy

5337.1 - THERAPY ANIMALS

Section: Students

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Therapy Animals

The school district supports the use of therapy animals for the benefit of its students subject to the conditions of this policy. Benefits from working or visiting with a therapy animal include reduced stress, improved physical and emotional well-being, low 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 animal include petting and or hugging the animal, speaking to the animal, giving the animal simple commands that the animal is training to respond to, and reading to the animal.

Animal Assisted Therapy is 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.

A therapy animal is an animal 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 animals are not the same as “emotional support animals” or “service animals”.

The handler is an individual school district staff member or volunteer who has been individually trained, evaluated, and registered with the therapy animal to provide animal assisted activities, animal assisted therapy, and animal existed interactions within a school or other facility.

The following information will be kept current and submitted to the Board of Education:

1. The proof of registration as a therapy animal handler with the individual therapy animal to be used. (Note, such registration shall be from an organization that requires an evaluation of the therapy animal and handler prior to registration and at least every two years);
2. Proof from a licensed veterinarian that the therapy animal is in good health and has been immunized against diseases common to animals. Such vaccinations shall be kept current and up to date at all times;
3. Proof of licensure from the local animal licensing authority;
4. Copy of an insurance policy that provides liability coverage for the work of the handler and therapy animal while the two are on school district property. This is provided by the owner and will name the Board of Education as additionally insured.

Therapy Animal Standards and Procedures:

Registration: The therapy animal shall have registration from an organization that requires an evaluation of the therapy animal and handler that demonstrates both handler and animal remain current and in good standing at all times.

Health and Vaccination: The handler shall submit proof from a licensed veterinarian that the therapy animal is in good health and has been immunized against diseases common to animals. Such vaccinations shall be kept current and up-to-date at all times.

Licensing: The handler and therapy animal shall wear appropriate identification issued by the school district.

Health and Safety: The Board of Education shall ensure that the therapy animal does not pose a health and safety risk to any student, employee, or other person at school and that the therapy animal 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 other in the schools.

Control: The handler shall ensure that the therapy animal wears a collar or harness and a leash no longer than four feet (no retractable leashes permitted) and shall maintain control of the therapy animal by holding the leash at all times that the therapy animal is on school district property, including during breaks, unless holding such leash would interfere with the therapy animal's safe, effective performance of its work or tasks. However, the handler shall maintain control of the therapy animal at all times and shall not tether the therapy animal to any individual or object.

Supervision and care of the Therapy Animal: The handler shall be solely responsible for the supervision and humane care of the therapy animal, including any feeding, exercising, and cleaning up after the therapy animal while the therapy animal is in the school building or on school property. The handler shall not leave the therapy animal unsupervised or alone on school property at any time, and shall submit to Administration an Emergency Plan to address the animal's well-being in the event of a fire/security event or crisis.

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

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

Recordkeeping: Handlers who are school district staff shall sign in their therapy animal upon arrival and sign him/her out on their departure.

Exclusion or removal from School District Policy: A therapy animal may be excluded from school district property if a school administrator determines that: (1) the handler does not have control of the therapy animal; (2) The therapy animal is not housebroken; (3) The therapy animal presents a direct and immediate threat to others in the school; or (4) The therapy animal's presence otherwise interferes with the educational program. The handler shall immediately remove his/her therapy animal from school property when instructed to do so by a school administrator.