

THERAPY DOGS IN THE CLASSROOM

Therapy Dogs in the Laconia School District

The school district supports the use of therapy dogs by teachers or other qualified school personnel (“Owner”) for the benefit of its student’s subject to the conditions of Policy IMG, “Animals in Schools”, and the accompanying procedures. The Superintendent of Schools recognizes that the use of a “Therapy Dog” could be one tool in the toolbox to help create a positive and safe school culture within the Laconia School District.

Definition of a 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 staff member or approved source and are not owned by the school district.

Requirements

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

Request: An Owner who wants to bring a therapy dog to school must submit a written request form to a principal or superintendent.

The request must be renewed each school year or whenever a different therapy dog will be used.

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 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 teacher or school employee or other trained (or certified) staff member through the use of a leash or other tether unless the use of a leash or other tether would interfere with the therapy dog’s safe, effective performance of its work or tasks. However, the therapy dog must be under the Owner’s control at all times. If a Laconia School

District employee is the Owner of the Therapy Dog, the school must submit a daily schedule to the office of the Superintendent that outlines which employee(s) will be responsible for the therapy dog, and how the therapy dog will be supervised if that employee needs to attend to other responsibilities. If the use of the Therapy Dog consistently interferes with that employee, or other employees, carrying out their roles and responsibilities, the Superintendent will ask that the school discontinues the use of the Therapy Dog by school employees.

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

Student Rules, Procedures, and Education: Before the implementation of a Therapy Dog program, a school must create clear rules for students to work with Therapy Dogs, clear procedures for interaction, and a plan to educate students about the Therapy Dog program in the school building. These rules, procedures, and education plan must be submitted to the office of the Superintendent and updated annually as needed.

Staff Rules, Procedures, and Education: Before the implementation of a Therapy Dog program, a school must create clear rules for staff to work with Therapy Dogs, clear procedures for interaction, and a plan to educate staff about the Therapy Dog program in the school building. These rules, procedures, and education plan must be submitted for approval to the office of the Superintendent and updated annually as needed. The Owner will be expected to acknowledge receipt of and acceptance of procedures.

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. Every year a school that has a Therapy Dog must review all incoming student medical records and submit a report to the office of the Superintendent that outlines if there are any students that might be a health risk for the Therapy Dog program before the start of the school year. Every year a school that has a Therapy Dog must notify all parents of the program and provide them with an “opt out” form when they are notified. The school must also submit a report to the office of the Superintendent that summarizes the number of parents and the general reasons for “opting out” of the Therapy Dog program. CDC guidelines for animals in school settings must be followed.

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 Laconia school district is not responsible for providing any care, supervision, or assistance for a therapy dog. The Owner of the Therapy Dog must communicate with the building principal and additional cleaning that needs to occur in the Therapy Dog authorized areas to maintain both a clean environment, as well as limit any effects of students with animal allergies. On a yearly basis, the Superintendent of schools and the building principal will need to determine if there are additional costs associated with housing a Therapy Dog that needs to be built into the annual district budget.

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 both the building principal and the Superintendent of Schools.

Insurance: The Owner must submit a copy of an insurance policy that provides liability coverage for the therapy dog while on school property. The Superintendent of Schools will ensure on a yearly basis that the School District's insurance covers the use of Therapy Dogs in the school.

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 designated by an administrator. If the Superintendent of Schools concludes after a thorough investigation that any student or employee's allergic reactions to the Therapy Dog pose imminent danger, they can choose to adapt, suspend, and/or discontinue the Therapy Dog program until a safe plan is created by the Dog's Owner and the school building principal.

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.

Therapy dog in Training: This procedures and Policy IMG, “Animals in Schools”, shall also be applicable to therapy dogs in training that are accompanied by a bona fide trainer.

Adopted: October 1, 2019