

Western Beaver County School District
Therapy Dog Handbook

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What is a therapy dog?

According to the Alliance of Therapy Dogs: “Their responsibilities are to provide psychological or physiological therapy to individuals other than handlers.” - Stable temperaments, friendly, easy-going personalities - They are encouraged to interact and be pet by a variety of people while they are on-duty - Give children with learning disabilities confidence - Owners of therapy dogs do not have the same rights as service dogs to be accompanied by the dog in establishments where they are not permitted

Purpose

Improve the culture and general mood of the school.

Therapy dogs provide many healing effects including:

Reduced stress and anxiety

Decreased feelings of depression loneliness, and feelings of isolation

Decrease in aggressive behaviors

Increased in socialization resulting in a sense of happiness and well-being

Increase in mental stimulation

Make a connection with at-risk students and give them a reason to come to school.

The emotional well-being of students is a large factor in their success. The presence of a therapy dog can give students a sense of happiness that allows them to perform better academically. Animals have been incorporated into schools to allow children to discuss issues of grief There are many children who struggle to open up to a teacher or counselor about issues that they are facing. Interaction with animals can relieve their anxiety and improve their mood. Many children who experience emotional troubles often lack trust and using the intervention of a dog may help the child to develop trust. Interacting with animals helps to decrease anxiety, manipulative/abusive behaviors, depression, increase self-esteem, self-worth, expression of feelings, and ability to trust

Improve literacy skills

Reading to dogs can eliminate the fear of judgment for many children. Many studies have shown that students are able to improve their reading ability because of the increased motivation and interest they have in reading with a dog

Methods of Implementation

Snoopy has one handler- Mrs. Altenhof. The therapy dog will be in the presence of his handler when in classrooms or with children at all times

There will also be a kennel for Snoopy in each of her offices.

Teachers can sign up with Mrs. Altenhof to have the dog come to their classroom at any time that she is available

Teachers may provide incentives for kids to spend time with dog to improve academic performance. Policy

Policy

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

1. The dog must be one year of age or older and have documentation of completed vaccinations from a licensed veterinarian.
2. A licensed veterinarian must approve the dog.
3. The handler/owner must keep the dog on a leash or in a kennel at all times.
4. The dog will be present at the school for the sole purpose of providing academic and/or emotional support to students and staff.
5. The dog must have completed and have documentation of a Therapy Dog Certification program recognized by the American Kennel Club (AKC).
6. The therapy dog must be clean, well groomed, in good health, and housebroken.

Student/Staff Notification

After these requirements have been met, the handler will be notified of approval. At that time, a letter from the Director of Student Services (see attached letter to parents/staff) must be sent to school families and staff notifying them that it has been recommended that a therapy dog come to school. A copy of that communication will also be forwarded to the Superintendent.

Families/staff will have ten (10) days to notify the school of any concerns. If concerns are received that could not be addressed by the school, it is the responsibility of the Director to notify the Superintendent. If no concerns are received within the communicated deadline, the Superintendent will notify the Handler that the request has been approved and the therapy dog can begin the next school day.

Control.

A therapy dog must be under the control of the Handler (or designee assigned by Handler) 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 Handler's control at all times.

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 or safety risk to any student, employee, or other person at school.

Supervision and Care.

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

Insurance.

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

Exclusion or Removal from School.

A therapy dog may be excluded from school property and buildings if the Superintendent 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 Handler 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 Handler of the animal will be required to remove the animal to a different location designated by the principal.

Guidance for Staff

Staff should be open-minded to the dog about the benefits that she can provide to their classrooms. All teachers will have a sign on their door that indicates to the handler whether or not they currently want the dog in their room.

Teachers may also sign up as Mrs. Altenhof's schedule allows to have Snoopy visit their classroom.

No more than three students should be interacting with Snoopy at one time. Enforce this policy with your students. It may be appropriate to dismiss students one at a time to pet and interact with Snoopy.

It is important that staff can identify situations where it would be unsafe for a student to interact with the dog. Snoopy will be able to help calm upset students down; however, in the event of extreme outrage, it may be unsafe for the student to interact with Snoopy.

Guidance for Students

No more than three students should be interacting with Snoopy at one time.

When approaching Snoopy, meet him with an open palm to allow him to sniff you

Western Beaver County Therapy Dog

Western Beaver will be implementing a therapy dog program during the 2023-2024 school year.

Research has shown that therapy dogs in schools can help build strong social emotional skills in students. A therapy dog presence has also been shown to reduce anxiety, help students work through anger management concerns, reduce bullying tendencies, and address other personal and social issues that all of our developing students deal with.

There are specific goals of the therapy dog program: • Increase empathy and compassion in all students

Help students connect with something in the school setting and reduce anxiety

Improve academic performance, while increasing confidence and self-esteem

Our therapy dog will be certified through the Alliance of Therapy Dogs (ATD). To belong to the Alliance of Therapy Dogs, the dog must be tested and evaluated by a Certified ATD Evaluator. A dog must be a minimum of one (1) year old and have a sound temperament. Each dog must pass an ATD temperament evaluation for suitability to become a certified Therapy Dog. The test also includes the evaluation of each dog's behavior around people in a variety of settings. ATD has specific guidelines to meet cleanliness grooming requirements. The WBM therapy dog will be brushed and bathed as needed and professionally groomed on a regular schedule as needed. ATD also requires regular veterinarian checks for registered Therapy Dogs along with regular evaluations to maintain certification. Please complete the form below acknowledging your preference as to whether you wish your child to have contact with the Western Beaver Therapy Dog, Snoopy

Student's Name: _____ Grade: _____

I understand that my child may have incidental or student-initiated contact with the school therapy dog. I understand that the Therapy Dog may be in my child's room and may be part of the counseling process. I understand that this permission form will remain "active" during the years my child attends. If I should change my mind regarding my child's interaction and participation with the Therapy Dog, I understand I must provide this in writing to the school office.

☐ Yes, my child may have incidental and/or initiated contact with the WB Therapy Dog during the years my child is enrolled.

☐ No, my child may NOT have contact with the WB Therapy Dog.

☐ Due to Allergies ☐ Fear of Dogs ☐ Other Parent

Signature: _____ Date: _____

If you have questions please contact Elizabeth Altenhof Director of Student Services, at
elizabeth.altenhof@westernbeaver.org

