

536 Therapy Dog Policy

I. PURPOSE

The purpose of this policy is to establish parameters for the use of therapy dogs by employees and visitors within school buildings and on school grounds. The Osakis School District Therapy Dog Program is established for the benefit of all students in the District. The purpose of this program is to provide students with passive emotional support and comfort in the school setting in an effort to positively influence student achievement.

II. GENERAL STATEMENT OF POLICY

The District supports the use of therapy dogs by staff for students with a disability, or for the social and emotional benefit of the school climate and culture.

III. DEFINITION OF A THERAPY DOG

- A. A “therapy dog” is a dog professionally trained by a registered authority for the social and emotional benefit of students and animal-assisted education, activities, and interventions. Therapy dogs are trained to provide affection, comfort, and support to many people and are physically sound, mature, and have exceptional self-control and focus.
- B. Therapy dogs are not trained “service” dogs as described by the ADA. 2 Regulation 899. Therapy dogs are not “emotional support” or “companion” animals whose sole purpose is the emotional care of only one person.

IV. REQUIREMENTS FOR THERAPY DOGS

- A. District therapy dogs are independently owned by District employees or outside vendors who have been individually trained, evaluated, and registered with his/her therapy dog to provide animal-assisted activities and education, therapy, and interactions within the school.
- B. Therapy dogs must meet standards of health as prescribed by veterinarians at the owner’s expense. Vaccinations and verification of health are required for annual renewal with the therapy dog certification organization.
 - a. The therapy dog owner will ensure that the therapy dog is clean, fed, and given ample opportunity to relieve itself outside the building in an area away from District students. The therapy dog owner will be responsible for properly picking up and disposing of all therapy dog waste.
 - b. The therapy dog owner will ensure that the dog is groomed daily and bathed regularly but no less than monthly.
- C. District therapy dogs that are stationed in the school setting shall be recommended by the school administration to the Superintendent, and

approved by the School Board. Prior to recommendation and approval, owners shall provide proof of certification as a therapy dog.

- D. Prior to appearing in the school, a registration will be completed outlining and assuring liability insurance and appropriate membership fees are current and in place.
- E. The principal shall notify parents and staff on an annual basis regarding the presence of therapy dogs in the school.
- F. Therapy dogs will be under the supervision of a trained therapy dog owner at all times in the school setting to ensure that the dog is calm and behaving appropriately. The owner will remove the therapy dog from the District if the dog is out of control, shows aggression toward people or other dogs, or vocalizes unnecessarily (barking, whining, etc.)
- G. The number of planned visit days per school year and possible location of therapy dog will be approved by the school administration.
- H. After registration, a District therapy dog will need to be introduced to the school environment in increasing time increments until adequate stamina levels are achieved and the dog is able to maintain the proper levels of performance of a typical school day. After this acclimation period, the District therapy dog can be brought to school during normal school-day hours

V. ALLERGIES; FEAR OF ANIMALS

Each school year a notice will be sent to parents informing them of the therapy dog that may be present in the school. In that notice, the parent/guardians will be given the opportunity to notify the appropriate Principal of their allergies or fear of dogs.

If a student or employee notifies the School District that he or she is allergic to a therapy dog, the School District will balance the rights of the individuals involved. In general, allergies that are not life-threatening are not a valid reason for prohibiting the presence of a therapy dog. Fear of animals is generally not a valid reason for prohibiting the presence of a therapy dog. Accommodations will be considered and made where appropriate to limit any interaction with concerned students and the therapy dog.