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District 77 Policy 549

549 COMFORT DOGS IN SCHOOL

I. PURPOSE

The purpose of this policy is to recognize the educational use of comfort dogs (therapy dogs) in school.

II. GENERAL STATEMENT OF POLICY

The school district supports the implementation of a comfort dog (therapy dog) program for the academic, social, and emotional benefit of students. In recognizing the educational uses of dogs in the classroom/ school, it is a requirement for the building principal or designee to give permission before dogs are brought into the school setting. It is the building principal's responsibility to confirm that there is an appropriate educational purpose for the dog to be working or doing tasks in the school setting.

III. DEFINITIONS

A. Handler

A "handler" is an individual or individuals who accompany a comfort dog.

B. Trainer

A "trainer" is a person who is training a dog and is affiliated with a recognized training program for dogs in this capacity.

C. Comfort Dog

A "comfort dog" is a dog, regardless of breed or size, that is individually trained to perform "work or tasks" that benefit individuals or groups of individuals in the school setting. The school can interchange the titles "comfort dog", "school dog" and "therapy dog".

D. Work or Tasks

Work or tasks that the dog can perform include, but are not limited to, being read to by students or staff; assisting with socialization, outward focus, independence, mental stimulation, or integration into a student's sensory integration; assisting with developing a sense of nurturing, acceptance and motivation, and utilization in school curriculum.

E. On Duty/Off Duty Time

The dog will have “on duty time” in the school setting and “off duty time”.

- a. On duty time will be time in which the dog is functioning as a working staff member.
- b. Off duty time will give the dog needed rest periods which include outdoor time and time in its kennel.

F. Host

The host is considered the person or persons in which the dog goes home with each night to sleep and on weekends.

III. RIGHTS AND RESPONSIBILITIES

- A. Equal Access: A handler has the right to have the school dog present on school district property or in school district facilities, attend or participate in school sponsored events, programs and activities, transported in a vehicle that is operated by or on behalf of the district.
- B. Equal Treatment: The handler(s) are solely responsible for the care and supervision of the school dog during the school day.
- C. Care and Supervision: The handler(s) is responsible for the care and supervision of the animal while the dog is in school. This includes feeding, watering, cleaning and toileting.
- D. Tether: The dog must have a leash or other tether, unless the dog is under the handlers control by voice, signals or other effective means. The dog must be under the control of the handler while on school grounds.
- E. It is the host’s responsibility to ensure all recommended vaccinations and exams are performed yearly or as needed.
- F. Allergies: If a student or employee notifies the district that he or she is allergic to a comfort dog, the district will balance the rights of the individuals involved. Generally, allergies that are not life threatening are not a valid reason for prohibiting the presence of a comfort dog.
- G. Fear of dogs: Fear of dogs is not a valid reason for prohibiting the presence of a dog in school. If a particular student has a fear of dogs, staff will respectfully honor that student’s exposure to the dog.

- H. Cultural views: If a particular culture of ethnicity is restricted from contact with the school dog, staff will respectfully honor that exposure.
- I. Working Status of Comfort Dog: Students, parents, volunteers and staff of the district should not feed or handle the dog without permission from the handling staff.

IV. ACCESS TO PROGRAMS AND ACTIVITIES

Any school which cares for or uses a dog for educational purposes will afford the dog the following: appropriate quarters; sufficient space for the normal behavior and postural requirements of the species; proper ventilation, lighting and temperature control; adequate food and clean drinking water; and quarters which shall be cleaned on a regular basis and located in an area where undue stress and disturbance are minimized. Dogs in school must be properly supervised, handled and cared for.

It shall be the responsibility of the principal or his/ her designee to develop a plan of care for the dog given school closings and/or drills/ crisis of any manner (i.e. fire drills, tornado drills, evacuations, etc.)

A comfort dog is a dog trained to provide affection and comfort to students. The most important characteristic of a comfort dog is its temperament. A good comfort dog must be friendly, patient, confident, at ease in all situations and gentle. Comfort dogs must enjoy human contact and be content to be petted and handled, sometimes clumsily. A comfort dog's primary job is to allow unfamiliar people to make physical contact with it and to enjoy that contact. Comfort dogs are not considered trained service dogs as described by the Americans with Disabilities Act.

A. MINIMUM STANDARDS

The following minimum standards shall be in effect for all comfort dogs (therapy dogs) approved to serve in the district.

- A. A comfort dog is expected to be clean, well-groomed, and not have an offensive odor.
- B. A comfort dog is expected not to urinate or defecate in inappropriate locations.
- C. A comfort dog is expected to not annoy any member of the student body or school personnel by seeking attention.
- D. A comfort dog is expected to not vocalize unnecessarily.
- E. A comfort dog is expected to show no aggression towards people or other animals.

- F. A comfort dog is expected to not solicit or steal food or other items from a student body member or school personnel.
- G. A comfort dog is expected to not in any way interfere with the educational process of any student or staff.
- H. A comfort dog is expected to not pose a health or safety threat to any student, personnel, or other persons.

A comfort dog may be excluded from school property if a school administrator determines any of the standards listed above are being violated. If it is determined that the standards listed are not being met, the comfort dog must be immediately removed from school property by the handler.

B. GUIDELINES

- A. Comfort dogs must meet standards of health.
 - 1. Examined by a practicing, licensed Veterinarian.
 - 2. Required to complete training for accreditation and certification to be a comfort dog.
- B. Comfort dogs in the school setting shall be recommended by the Superintendent of Schools and approved by the Board of Education. Prior to recommendation and approval, handlers shall provide:
 - 1. Proof of current immunizations and yearly preventive treatments (such as heartworm) will be provided by the Host.
 - 2. Proof of health, such as a current health certificate from a licensed Veterinarian will be provided by the Host yearly.
 - 3. Visible cleanliness of the dog with no signs of fleas/ticks will be the responsibility of the Host.
 - 4. A visually healthy, alert and not grossly over or underweight dog.
 - 5. Proof of comfort Dog certification will be provided by the Host.
 - 6. Comfort dogs must have appropriate identification (such as a collar, dog tags and on/off duty vest) and will be the sole responsibility of the Host.

- C. These requirements must be met on an annual basis, prior to the start of any school year.
- D. The Building Principal shall notify parents on an annual basis regarding the presence of a comfort dog in the school building.

Legal References: Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1972
28 C.F.R. § 35.104, 28 C.F.R. § 35.130(b)(7), and 28 C.F.R. § 35.136
(ADA Regulations)
20 U.S.C. § 1400 *et seq.* (Individuals with Disabilities Education Act)
Minn. Stat. § 256C.02 (Public Accommodations for Persons with Disabilities)
Minn. Stat. § 363A.19 (Discrimination Against Blind, Deaf, or Other Persons with Physical or Sensory Disabilities Prohibited)
Minn. Stat. § 609.226 (Harm Caused by Dog)
Minn. Stat. § 609.833 (Misrepresentation of Service Animal)

Cross References: District 77 Policy 548 (Service Animals in Schools)