

**It all began on Sunday, September 8, 2019 at 3:33pm with this email.....**

Dear Mr. Johnson,

Hello! On opening day, you (and Mr. Day) posed a question to the audience, "What's your legacy going to be?" "How will you change the trajectory?" These are the questions that I have pondered and thought about a lot over the recent years, both personally and professionally. For me, there has been a missing piece in my everyday life at home and at school. I have been in search of how to make a desperately needed change. After years and years of research, and much contemplation, I was finally at a place in my life where I was ready to make a courageous decision to make a change in my life; in hopes to make a greater impact for others in my community. It is my commitment to my own healing and well being as well as my love of serving and helping others, that I made a huge financial investment and lifetime commitment of time and effort to raising a therapy service dog. For those that know me, when I commit to something, I am ALL in! I am accountable for everything I do, and I know what I am good at - connecting with kids - and I know what I can do to be better - connect with those kids that are "unconnectable".

My goal for my therapy dogs is to work in the community; ultimately I would love them to help and service my kids in my classroom. The mental health needs of our students in this district are demanding and are far reaching the extremes that we are not reaching with our current interventions. The community is changing - the needs are changing. The students are where the priorities and focus needs to be. Therapy dogs can be a real asset to our school, helping to provide a much needed resource and outlet for students and adults. They can especially help those who have mental health struggles by giving them something to look forward to, something to connect with and a way to work on socializing and managing stress. Many of our students deal with severe stress, anxiety, depression, social anxiety or trauma in their everyday lives. So much so that they're unable to attend school or class and ultimately will have a difficult time reaching their true potential.

Many neighboring school districts have done the research and have accepted and welcomed therapy dogs into their schools. Students of special ed teacher, Kathy Brown of Huth Rd Elementary, in the Grand Island School District are overwhelmed with joy and comfort when Hurley, the beagle, who is in the classroom. Williamsville School District and KenTon Schools (policy attached) also have adopted a therapy dog program for the district to help with the stress, anxiety in the classroom. There is endless research available on the benefits that animal therapy programs have in schools, hospitals, prisons, nursing homes, and airports. I am asking that we work together for collective greatness. We have to do



more for our students and adopting an animal therapy policy is adding another much needed tool to our toolbox. I will stand before you with the courage to lead Sweet Home in the direction of many neighboring schools and organizations in making a difference in our students' lives by reducing the stress, anxiety and so many other mental health issues with an animal therapy program.

Thank you for your time and consideration. I would love to speak to you further.

**There were several other follow up emails, conversations and meetings over the past three years; which leads me to where I am today.....**



# Sweet Home Central School District

## *Therapy Dog Program Handbook and Guidelines*



*Every student, one community, ready for the future.*



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## Introduction

Numerous studies have shown that therapy dogs have a significant impact on the enhancement of a child's psychological development, can improve social skills, increase self-esteem among other benefits. Dogs can also teach responsibility, compassion and respect for other living things. Dogs in an educational setting can calm fears, relieve anxiety, relieve stress and teach necessary skills.

Research has demonstrated that therapy dogs properly managed in the school setting not only make a measurable difference in terms of gaining various skills such as reading enhancement, but also in contributing to emotional and relational development. Mental health professionals find that the presence of a therapy dog can decrease anxiety and enable students to work through issues such as anger management, bullying tendencies and other psycho/social problems. The introduction of a therapy dog can serve as a catalyst for forming adaptive and satisfactory social interactions. Guided activities and group discussions help teach students how to handle interpersonal conflicts and develop constructive responses.

In a school setting, all programs that are introduced to students remain focused on the success of the student. When a child is able to regulate his/her emotional and relational skills, they are ready to learn thus have the maximum ability to benefit from classroom instruction. Therapy dog programs in the Sweet Home Central School District will be designed to support the same instructional goals. Appropriate data will be collected to evaluate the program's effectiveness. Adjustments will be made accordingly to ensure the maximum benefit to our students' overall development and successes.



## Description of Program

Therapy dogs in schools is a specific, research-based (academic and mental health) intervention program that is designed to achieve established goals. The therapy dog intervention is intentionally incorporated in health, education and human service for the purpose of therapeutic gains and improved health and wellness. The therapy dog is certified and trained, working under the direction of a certified, and registered professional, as part of a larger intervention program.

The therapy dog intervention program is designed around the following principles:

- Research-based.
- Purposeful, based on goals.
- Requires district approval and adherence to the Sweet Home Central School board policy and implementation guidelines.
- Part of the multi-tiered system of mental health and academic support.
- An experiential intervention provided by a professional who is certified as a Therapy Dog handler, working under his/her direct scope of practice.
- Provided in systematic, designated areas with progress monitoring and data collection to determine efficacy and efficiency.

Therapy dogs in schools can be implemented in many ways, to allow for the school to best work toward the goal established by the Therapy Dog Team. The following suggests some of the models in which the Sweet Home Central School District may implement therapy dogs:

- During individual counseling sessions
- During small group counseling sessions
- During small class instruction
- During large class instruction (as planned and scheduled)
- During large class sessions (impromptu)
- In the hallways and other common areas during designated times

At all times when a therapy dog is in the school building, the dog's presence will always be under the strict supervision of his/her Owner/Handler and will work exclusively toward the goals and objectives established. Progress toward the goals of the program will be regularly evaluated and adjustments may be made to respond to the available data.

## Value

### The Value of Therapy Dog Visits

Animals have long been recognized as a positive addition to the healing process. In facilities, visits from Therapy Dogs have shown an increased happiness, calmness, and overall emotional well-being. Studies have shown a decrease in blood pressure and stress levels during Therapy



Dog visits. Therapy Dogs provide a break from the daily routine of illness and loneliness for residents, visitors, and staff.

## **Purpose**

The purpose of a therapy dog program is to increase:

- A positive culture and climate within the educational setting.
- The social-emotional well being of the students and staff.
- A sense of belonging for students that could lead to better attendance outcomes.
- Support for student academic achievement.



## Goals and Objectives

### ***Improve culture and general mood of the school***

Therapy dogs provide many healing effects including:

- Reduced stress and anxiety/anxiousness
- Decreased feelings of depression, loneliness and feelings of isolation
- Decrease in aggressive behaviors
- Increase in socialization resulting in a sense of happiness and well-being
- Increase in mental stimulation
- Increase emotional support during crisis situations
- Decrease of blood pressure
- Release of strain and tension
- Can draw out a person from loneliness and depression.

### ***Make a connection with at-risk students to improve behavior and attendance***

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. Dogs have been incorporated into schools in order to allow children to discuss issues with a truly impartial listener. There are many children who struggle to open up to a mental health provider or teacher about issues that they are facing. Interaction with animals can relieve their anxiety and improve their mood. The therapy dog will give our mental health staff the opportunities to talk with children that otherwise wouldn't share how they feel about a specific situation. Children may find comfort in talking with the dog, and in turn will be willing to share with a trusted adult.

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. (Chandler, 2001)



### ***Improve attitudes with learning***

Reading to dogs can eliminate the fear of judgment for many children. Many studies have shown that students are able to improve perceptions of learning because of the increased motivation and interest they have in reading with a dog. A study of the All Ears Program conducted at the Veterinary School at the University of California-Davis showed that school children who read aloud with a handler/dog team improved their reading skills by 12 percent compared to children who read with only an adult. (Paddock, 2010)

<http://www.west-bend.k12.ia.us/wp-content/uploads/2020/08/Therapy-Dog-Handbook.pdf>

### ***Program Goal and Objective:***

The main objective of this program is to provide a relaxed and “dog-friendly” atmosphere, which allows students to practice the skill of reading. Many of the children chosen for this program have difficulties reading and as a result have developed self-esteem issues. They are often self-conscious when reading aloud in front of other classmates (Therapy Dog International, 2022).

By sitting down next to a dog and reading to the dog, all threats of being judged are put aside. The child relaxes, pats the attentive dog, and focuses on the reading. Reading improves because the child is practicing the skill of reading, building self-esteem, and associating reading with something pleasant (Therapy Dog International, 2022).



## Policy

Therapy dogs 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, the following requirements must be satisfied before a therapy dog will be allowed in school buildings or on school grounds:

- The dog must be actively registered with [Therapy Dog International \(TDI\)](#). The current certification must be kept on file with the district.
  - a. Yearly renewal required by TDI by December 31<sup>st</sup> each year, must be provided to the District office.
  - b. Health record for dog (heartworm, vaccinations, yearly physical)
  - c. Dog must be treated for fleas/ticks (dogs can not be treated less than 6 days before attending school)
  - d. Per TDI rules and regulations all dogs will be at least one year of age or older and no more than ten years of age.
  - e. All dogs must be cleaned, well groomed, and housebroken in order to visit any facility.
- The handler/owner must keep the dog on a leash. The only exception to this rule is during an exhibition exercise.
- The dog will be present at school for the sole purpose of providing academic and/or emotional support to students.
- A copy of the owner's canine (endorsement) liability insurance policy.
- The principal shall notify parents and staff on an annual basis regarding the presence of therapy dogs in the school.
- A [memorandum of understanding](#) is completed by the district - listing all of the school buildings involved. (TDI as of 5/26/22 had 57 certified TDI handlers within a 10 mile radius of zip code 14228) **SAMPLE OF FORM BELOW**

**This form would be filled out for each of the buildings in the district**

[Memorandum of Understanding between Therapy Dogs International \(TDI\) and](#)



**Sweet Home Central School District**

88 Bartley Road, Flanders NJ 07836

Tel: 973-252-9800; Fax: 973-252-7171

Email: [facilities@tdi-dog.org](mailto:facilities@tdi-dog.org); [www.tdi-dog.org](http://www.tdi-dog.org)

**Name of Facility: Sweet Home Central School District**

**Address: 1901 Sweet Home Road Amherst NY 14228**

**Contact:**

**Phone:**

**Email:**

Therapy Dogs International, a non-profit organization, provides visitations free of charge through its tested and registered handlers to wherever a therapy dog is needed. All of our registered handlers are volunteers and covered under TDI's liability insurance program.

**Hospital/Facility visits**

At all times while visiting, our dog/handler teams are governed by TDI's rules and regulations (see attached).

While in a facility the handler must follow the rules and guidelines set forth by the facility as long as no harm can come to either dog or handler.

If additional training or paperwork for hospital volunteers is required, it is up to the handler to comply if the handler wants to visit at a facility.

The facility should provide guidelines to the handler for its therapy dog program. A staff member must be assigned to take charge of the therapy dog program. Preferably all visits should be accompanied by a staff member. If that is not possible, it should be made clear to the handlers in which sections of the hospital visitations can be conducted. This is important for the health and safety of our volunteer dog/handler teams as well as for the hospital patients.

The facility must have a policy in place for infection control to protect the dog/handler team from coming in contact with possible dangerous germs. The dog handlers will visit with a clean dog. The handler is expected to wipe hands (with a disinfectant which should be supplied by the facility) prior to visiting with a patient. The patient is expected to also have hands wiped prior to touching the dog. This procedure is to be repeated for each patient. Upon leaving the facility the handler should wipe the dog including its feet.

All visitations must be scheduled in advance. The volunteer as well as the facility is responsible for adhering to a scheduled visitation program. If a scheduled visit cannot be made, the volunteer or the facility must cancel in advance.

TDI would like to receive periodic updates on the work of its volunteers. After a dog/handler team is accepted into our program we request that the handler complete a facility form after three months. TDI will call the facility about the work of the dog handler team. This is important to us so that we may provide the best volunteer work.

The hospital/facility is responsible for checking the handler's TDI credentials and make sure they are up to date at the time of visitation. TDI requires a current Health Record Form (see attached) from its handlers. If any of the required procedures lapses, the handler will be prohibited from visitations. This gives us the assurance that the dog has received the best possible care and is current on all its health care procedures. Our handlers are made aware when any of their credentials are due to expire.

To assure high standards of the therapy dog program, the facility agrees that only TDI certified teams will conduct therapy dog visits, with the exception of teams from other organizations who have been visiting and are still visiting.

Any disputes with TDI shall be governed by and construed in accordance with the internal laws of the State of New Jersey without giving effect to any choice or conflict of law provision or rule (whether of the State of New Jersey or any other jurisdiction) that would cause the application of laws of any jurisdiction other than those of the State of New Jersey.

If there are any problems with a dog/handler team please feel free to contact us:

[facilities@tdi-dog.org](mailto:facilities@tdi-dog.org) or give us a call at: 973-252-9800 ext. 205.

*Ursula A. Kempe*  
*President, Therapy Dogs International*

*Authorized Signature of Facility*  
*Representative*



### **What is [Therapy Dogs International](#)?**

Therapy Dogs International (TDI®) is a volunteer organization dedicated to regulating, testing and registration of therapy dogs and their volunteer handlers for the purpose of visiting nursing homes, hospitals, schools, other institutions and wherever else therapy dogs are needed.

### **Why Therapy Dogs International?**

Therapy Dogs International (TDI®) is a well-established nonprofit organization dedicated to the regulating, testing, and registering of Therapy Dogs to provide comfort and companionship by visiting hospitals, nursing homes, schools, libraries, and many other types of facilities.

- Visits are always FREE. We are supported by our dog/handler teams whose purpose it is to provide comfort to those in need.
- TDI teams are flexible and will work with an individual facility.
- All registered volunteers (collectively) of the organization are provided with excess volunteer liability insurance at a limit of \$1,000,000 per occurrence and \$3,000,000 aggregate (subject to an annual aggregate for each named organization.) This policy provides protection if the handler is liable for bodily injury or property damage arising out of the performance of their duties during their volunteer assignment. This coverage is in excess of and non contributing with any other valid and collectible insurance they may have. With a current valid registration the handler will be covered under TDI®'s Volunteer Insurance program while in service as a volunteer ( Insurance coverage applies only within the U.S. and Canada).
- TDI teams have been carefully tested by our own qualified Evaluators to ensure the well-being of those being visited.
- All dog health records are reviewed continuously and updated as recommended by the American Animal Hospital Association (AAHA)..

### **Student/Staff Notification**

After these requirements have been met, the TDI handler will be notified of approval. At that time, a letter from the school principal ([see appendix](#)) must be sent to school families and staff notifying them that it has been recommended that a therapy dog come to school. Copy of that communication will be forwarded to the Superintendent.



Families/Staff will have up to 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 principal 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.



## Plan for Implementation

The District will implement a phased-approach when introducing a dog to the building and implementing any social-emotional intervention.

### ***Phase I - Establishing Necessary Approvals***

- Get principal approval
- Review Sweet Home Central School District Therapy Dog Handbook (SHCSD TDH)
  - Complete requirements established in the SHCSD TDH
- Complete the [Therapy Dog Request Form](#) (see appendix) and attach all required documents to the form. Submission instructions are located on the form.

### ***Phase 2 - Designing the Therapy Dog Implementation Program***

- Identify a team of professionals willing to develop the therapy animal program. Consider all individuals who may be working directly with students identified for this intervention to ensure appropriate stakeholder representation.
  - Building administrators, counselors, teachers
  - Intervention service professionals (ALT, Ready Academy)
  - Family Support Center
  - Social Workers, Occupational Therapist, Physical Therapist, Speech therapists
  - Professionals willing to regularly collect and analyze data
- Team Meets to develop the Implementation Plan
  - Establish goals and objectives for the program.
  - Identify the target population for the therapy dog.
  - Develop a process for requesting a therapy dog intervention
  - Develop a plan for data collection and periodic review.
  - Develop a gradual plan for implementation that supports periodic review and allows for multiple models to be introduced as supported by data.
  - Team establishes any necessary procedures:
    - Incident Reporting Procedure
    - Assess medical risk (allergies, anxiety) for students and staff or building
- Develop appropriate communications to families and staff regarding the program, including an opportunity to provide feedback.
  - Staff Information Letter
  - Family Information Letter and FAQ (passive consent)
- Create PD to address reservations when necessary and share best practices and expectations.
  - Faculty/staff professional development (including expectations)
  - Student professional development
  - Community-based information sessions
- Complete a walk-through of the school building with administration to identify programmatic and building needs.
  - Discuss questions and concerns
  - Identify areas in the school where the animal may NOT be able to work
  - Practice any necessary protocols with the dog in the school



- Designate a person that could supervise the therapy dog in the event the handler becomes unavailable
- Identify any added cleaning procedures or supplies that may be needed
- Secure any technology needs that will increase the efficiency of implementation.

### ***Phase 3 - Implementation***

- Implementation expectations:
  - Begin intervention with fewer days per week (gradual increase to more days per week)
  - Identified target classrooms for intervention (gradual increase)
  - Team will review progress toward goals
  - Team will identify any additional data, surveys needed
  - Team will develop a map of lessons or topics to be addressed during the program to ensure progress toward goals
- Consideration for expectations:
  - Individual counseling sessions
  - Small group counseling sessions

### ***Phase 4 - Complete Therapy Dog Request Form Annually for Renewal***

## **Proposed Methods of Implementation with Kristina Pinkowski**

- Therapy dogs, Kaia and / or Jersey will be in the presence of Kristina Pinkowski at all times. There will also be a designated spot for them in her classroom.
- The therapy dog can be at school to walk around and greet students on their way into school.
- Teachers, counselors, administration can sign up with Mrs. Pinkowski to have the dog come to their classroom, office, designated area at any time that she is available.
- Mrs. Pinkowski will have the therapy dog in her classroom frequently to provide students with academic and/or emotional support.
- Teachers may provide incentives for students to spend time with therapy dogs to improve academic performance.



## Guidance for Staff

The use of the therapy dog in the classroom is intended to provide students with emotional, relational and psycho/social benefits that ultimately impact classroom performance and academic success. The use of the therapy dog in the classroom should not be disruptive. It is important that staff understand the program and are willing participants in the program to ensure maximum benefits and progress toward the overall goal. The following are some general guidelines for staff:

- Staff should be advised on proper interaction with a therapy dog.
- Staff should be open-minded to the dog about the benefits that s/he 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 on the Owner/Handler's schedule to have the Therapy Dog visit their classroom.
- It is important that staff communicate directly with the handler to identify situations where it would be unsafe for a student to interact with the dog. The Therapy Dog 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 the Therapy Dog. If you have questions or concerns about this, please notify the Owner/Handler prior to introducing the dog to a situation in unrest.

## Guidance for Students

- Students will be educated on safe interactions with therapy dogs.
- Student interaction with the Therapy Dog will happen at handlers discretion.



## Evaluating the Success of the Program

- Monitoring and evaluation of outcomes are dependent on the intended goals of the program
  1. Improve the culture and general mood of the school.
  2. Improve the connection with at-risk students to improve behavior and attendance
  3. Improve positive learning experiences
- Tools Used for Data Collection (Multiple measures must be used; qualitative and quantitative data must be collected)
  1. Pre/Post Questionnaires/surveys designed to:
    - Measure the social-emotional wellbeing of students who work with therapy dogs
      - Including, but not limited to: effort, participation, social awareness, confidence, engagement and belief in their power to succeed.
  2. Pre/Post Direct Observations of targeted behaviors
  3. Existing school data (e.g., learning progress, discipline referrals, attendance records)
- Other factors that need to be considered:
  1. Best practice supports that a students' perspective is gathered quarterly to ensure that any individual concerns are promptly addressed.
  2. Dog handlers and teachers must be cognizant of students' reactions to the dog and be prepared to provide any support.
  3. Ongoing collaboration and communication links between the dog handler and teachers are necessary to ensure any concerns are promptly addressed and to facilitate effective implementation (e.g., discussion of materials, individual students' needs, etc.).

Grové, Christine, et al. "Therapy Dogs in Educational Settings: Guidelines and Recommendations for Implementation." *Frontiers in Veterinary Science*, vol. 8, 2021, <https://doi.org/10.3389/fvets.2021.655104>.



## Plan for Gathering Feedback

The district task force will be identified to meet annually and review any procedural or system changes/suggestions. Any necessary revisions of the handbook will be submitted to the Board of Education each year.

The District retains discretion to exclude or remove the therapy dog from its property if:

- a. The therapy dog becomes out of control and/or the animal's handler does not effectively control the animal's behavior.
- b. The therapy dog's presence or behavior fundamentally interferes in the functions of the school.
- c. The therapy dog poses a direct threat to the health or safety of others that cannot be eliminated by reasonable modifications.
- d. TDI (Therapy Dog International) mandates dogs are not allowed to visit public or private facilities.



# Appendices



## Sweet Home Central Schools *Therapy Dog Program*

### Appendices

- A. [Staff Notification Letter](#)
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FAQs
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## Staff Notification Letter

Dear (SCHOOL NAME) faculty and staff,

I hope this letter finds you and your family well. (SCHOOL NAME) is excited to announce that a Therapy Dog Intervention Program is coming to our school to promote social/emotional well-being and academic improvements. Therapy Dog Intervention Programming is a part of goals-based interventions, in which the Therapy Dog intervention will be used when specific criteria are met. Data will be collected and regularly analyzed during this intervention, similarly to all other building-based interventions.

As we all now recognize, during the unexpected and challenging times of the COVID-19 Pandemic, and the horrific shootings in our schools and community, our school needs to continue to focus on the health and wellness of our students. Introducing a Therapy Dog Intervention Program is yet another way we will be able to provide this mental health support. All lessons using the Therapy Dog will be designed using research-based best practice and interventions will be matched with the needs of the students.

A Therapy Dog is a dog who is specially trained and certified and registered to work together with its Owner/Handler to provide the emotional support of students. Therapy dogs are not "service animals," according to the American Disabilities Act. Instead, therapy dogs are individually trained and certified/ registered to provide appropriate interaction with students and others at school. Research has demonstrated that therapy dogs can contribute to mental and emotional development that we feel will support our students.

The Therapy Dog program will begin with individual and small group visits with the certified, registered Owner/Handler in a controlled environment. Surveys will be given to students throughout the program to ensure a positive interaction while addressing mental-emotional needs. During this ongoing program, students will have multiple opportunities to visit the therapy dog throughout the week. As we collect more data and need, we will be increasing the amount of time with the therapy dog.

Thank you for your anticipated cooperation and support for the Animal Assisted Therapy Program in our building. If you have any questions regarding this program, please contact the district administration.

## Parent/Guardian Informational Letter and FAQs

**Therapy Dogs in the Sweet Home Central School District**

**Parents and Guardians Information Letter and FAQs**



Dear Parents & Guardians,

We would like to inform you that your child's school is participating in a therapy dog intervention. This is a wonderful opportunity for our school community. Research has shown that therapy dogs support psychological growth and increase social skills and self-esteem in children and adolescents. Therapy dogs have been trained to provide emotional support, positively impacting learning, social emotional functioning and communication skills. This letter is intended to provide initial notice of the plan to include a therapy dog in our schools. On behalf of everyone at your child's school, thank you in advance for your anticipated cooperation and support of this therapy dog intervention.

**1. Who is the dog at my child's school?**

\_\_\_\_\_ is a \_\_\_\_\_, who has completed and been registered with Therapy Dogs International (TDI). The therapy dog's handler is \_\_\_\_\_.

**2. What does a therapy dog do at school?**

The dog has many different jobs at school. The therapy dog will be working with students. The dog will also work with their handler to provide assistance for students including, but not limited to, effort, participation, social awareness, confidence, engagement and belief in their power to succeed.

**3. I am worried about allergies. Is this concern being considered?**

**The dogs are wiped down prior to visit to help reduce dander and allergens.**

Despite being a hypoallergenic dog, the handler coordinates with our school nurse to be aware of students who have allergies. Please reach out if additional concerns are present.

**In all of the classrooms in SHCSD there is a High-efficiency air particulate (HEPA) air filtration / air purifier running 24/7 which helps to reduce allergens. According to [United States Environmental Protection Agency](#), this type of air filter can theoretically remove at least 99.97% of dust, pollen, mold, bacteria, and any airborne particles with a size of 0.3 microns.**

**4. My child is afraid of dogs. What should I do?**

Please contact \_\_\_\_\_ if your child has an aversion to dogs. There are several rules that our dog and handlers follow at school to ensure that all our students and staff feel safe.

**5. Whom do I contact with questions?**



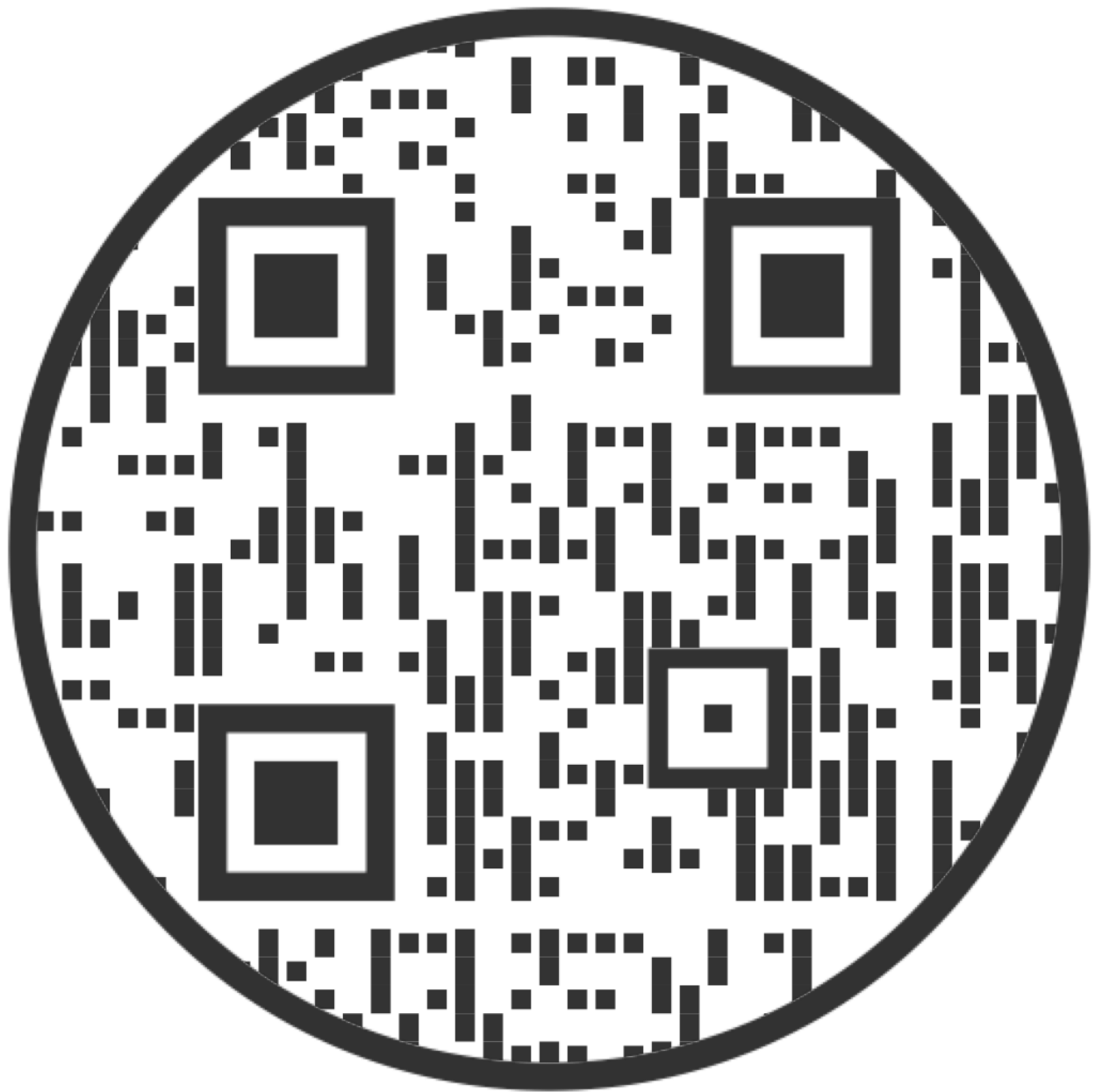
Please contact **Kristina Pinkowski** if you are interested in learning more about these programs and how they may help your child. She can be reached at **1-716-250-1297** or by email at [kpinkowski@sweethomeschools.org](mailto:kpinkowski@sweethomeschools.org)

**6. What do I need to do if I do not want my child to work with the therapy dog at school?**

If you have any reservations and do not want your child to participate in the Therapy Dog program, please use the link below to access the Opt-out form. If you are unable to access the link, please contact the individual identified above.

<https://forms.gle/Q4Cf6mGtCfyhjUDZ6>





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opt out therapy dog



## Parent/Guardian Permission Slip

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 Sweet Home Schools. 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 Sweet Home School's Therapy Dog during the years that my child is enrolled Sweet Home Schools.

☐ No, my child may NOT have contact with the Sweet Home School's Therapy Dog.

☐ Due to Allergies      ☐ Fear of Dogs      ☐ Other

Parent Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

If you have questions please contact Kristina Pinkowski @ 1-716-250-1297 or [kpinkowski@sweethomeschools.org](mailto:kpinkowski@sweethomeschools.org)



# Program Guidelines

The school district supports the use of therapy dogs by teachers or other qualified school personnel ("Owner") for the benefit of its students subject to the conditions of this policy.

**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 teacher or employee and are not owned by the school district.

**Therapy Dog Standards and Procedures.** 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 therapy dog request form is an appendix of this handbook. 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 and Therapy Dog International (TDI) Certificate 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. It remains the owner/handler's responsibility to maintain current certifications and immunizations and to submit these to the District in a timely fashion.
- **Control.** A therapy dog must be under the control of the owner/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 owner's control at all times. The only exception to this rule is during such time the dog is participating in an exhibition exercise.
- **Identification.** The therapy dog must have appropriate identification identifying it as a therapy dog. TDI provides each certified dog with a yellow TDI tag that must be worn at all times. The owner/handler must also carry his/her TDI identification at all times.



- **No Disruption.** As part of the screening process, the handler must be able to demonstrate the ability to gain control of the dog at any time using a calm voice or gesture.
- **Health and Safety.** The therapy dog must not pose a health and safety risk to any student, employee, or other person at school. (The dog must be clean and well-groomed at all times.)
- **Supervision and Care of Therapy dogs.** The Owner/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. The dog must be supervised by the Owner/Handler at all times when the dog is with or interacting with another person.
- **Authorized Area(s).** The Owner / Handler shall only allow the therapy dog to be in areas in school buildings or on school property that are authorized by school district administrators. The dog must remain on a leash at all times unless the handler is doing an exercise with the dog for training or education purposes. Upon completion of such activity, the dog must be immediately leashed.
- **Insurance.** The Owner must submit a copy of an insurance policy that provides liability coverage for the therapy dog while on school property.



- **Exclusion or Removal from School.** A therapy dog may be excluded from school property and buildings if a school administrator determines that:
  - a) A handler does not have control of the therapy dog;
  - b) The therapy dog is not housebroken;
  - c) The therapy dog presents a direct and immediate threat to others in the school;  
or
  - d) The animal's presence otherwise interferes with the educational process.
  - e) At the request of an administrator for any reason. The dog must not enter the building again until both the administration and the handler have come to a resolution.

The owner shall be required to remove the therapy dog from school premises immediately upon such a determination.

- **Allergic Reactions.** Prior to the dog being introduced to any school building, the Owner/Handler must request a list of students and staff in the room/ building with allergies to dogs. Appropriate accommodations will be made to prevent allergic reactions. However, if any student or school employee assigned to a classroom in which a therapy dog is permitted suffers an unexpected 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. Prior to therapy dogs entering buildings, school nurse will be notified that a therapy dog is on site.
- **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.

## Handler Code of Ethics



1. Handlers should evaluate their dog's health and attitude before each working day.
2. The handler/owner must keep the dog on a leash. The only exception to this rule is during an exhibition exercise.
3. Be aware and courteous of the places your dog is welcome or allowed in each facility. Students should be taught to "smile and wave" (or other quiet greetings) at the dog in the hall or other less-structured environments to alleviate disruption of students' attention and conduct.
4. Handlers/designated adults will always clean up after the dog, inside or outside the facility.
5. Give verbal commands firmly and calmly and praise the dog for exemplary behavior.
6. Students are NEVER to be left alone with a dog; a designated adult must always be present. When the dog is left unattended, it should be put in a crate with the door latched or in a room or office with the door closed.
7. Treats must be provided by the handler and given to the dog in the presence of the handler.
8. Always be alert to signs of stress in the dog. Some signs of stress may be:
  - a. Excessive panting
  - b. Dog jumps or climbs on handler for security
  - c. Dog hides behind handler
  - d. Shaking or tremors, or ears and tail pressed closed to body
  - e. Yawning and changes in facial expression
  - f. Dog looks for doorway or other escape route
  - g. Noticeable change in behavior and/or desire to socialize.
9. Be aware of small items dropped on the floor and do not allow the dog to rummage through trash containers.
10. Use the "Leave it!" command if this situation arises.
11. When working with disabled persons, the designated adult will assist in commanding and handling the dog.
12. All Sweet Home Central Schools handlers/designated adults will follow the district guidelines to ensure the safety of their dogs and students; in addition, following these guidelines will help provide for the appropriate hygiene and veterinary care for their dogs, ensuring a long and healthy certified assistance dog team relationship.
13. Handlers should have their ID badge with them or accessible while working with their dog.
14. If a dog is approved for use in a school a poster should be hung in the room or office where the dog is kept to identify it as a dog area and to alert others that a dog may be present.
15. If on a "dog day" you are asked to go to another building you need to contact that building and let them know you have the dog and gain permission to enter with a dog.
16. Handler should have an alternate safe place or person to leave the dog with, in the event that a student or parent is uncomfortable with a dog being present.



# THERAPY DOG REQUEST FORM

(To be completed by the handler)

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
School Building

## Owner/Handler Information:

|          |        |                                                                      |
|----------|--------|----------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Name:    |        | Are you the:<br>OWNER                  HANDLER                  BOTH |
| Address: |        |                                                                      |
| City:    | State: | Zip:                                                                 |



|            |            |            |
|------------|------------|------------|
| (C) Phone: | (H) Phone: | (W) Phone: |
|------------|------------|------------|

### Dog Information:

|                                                                           |                         |                                     |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------|-------------------------------------|
| Name:                                                                     | Breed:                  | Age:                                |
| Good Citizen Certification (date)                                         | TDI Registration (Date) | Immunizations up-to-date?<br>YES NO |
| COMMENTS: (Additional trainings, comments about above information, etc.)  |                         |                                     |
| Does the dog have a tag that indicates that s/he is a therapy dog? YES NO |                         |                                     |

### Veterinarian Information:

|          |        |                                   |
|----------|--------|-----------------------------------|
| Name:    |        | Name of Practice (if applicable): |
| Address: |        |                                   |
| City:    | State: | Zip:                              |
| Phone:   | Fax:   | Email (if applicable):            |

I have submitted the following documents to district office:

- Therapy Dogs International (TDI) certification.
- Health record for the dog (heartworm, vaccinations, yearly physical).
- A copy of the owner's canine (endorsement) liability insurance policy.
- A [memorandum of understanding](#) completed by the administration.



## Request for Use of a Therapy Dogs in School (Board Policy #)

Sweet Home Central School District allows for approved therapy animals to be permitted in schools and other buildings for the benefit of students as outlined in Policy \_\_\_\_ Therapy Dogs. Individuals who wish to bring a therapy animal to school must complete this request form and obtain approval from the building principal and District Superintendent /Designee prior to bringing any therapy animal on Sweet Home Central School District property. This form must be completed and approved each school year in which an individual requests to bring a therapy animal to Sweet Home Schools.

### OWNER/HANDLER INFORMATION:

|                             |                              |
|-----------------------------|------------------------------|
| Owner/Handler Name:         |                              |
| Owner/Handler Address:      |                              |
| Owner/Handler Phone Number: | Owner/Handler Email Address: |

### THERAPY ANIMAL INFORMATION:

|                                                                           |             |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------|
| Animal Name:                                                              | Animal DOB: |
| Animal Type/Breed:                                                        |             |
| Animal Veterinarian (Address and Phone Number):                           |             |
| School(s)/Building(s) Animal will be in:                                  |             |
| Name of Activity:                                                         |             |
| Role of Animal in School (including dates/times/locations of activities): |             |



Provide a description of the direct connection to the academic program or demonstrated therapeutic purpose for having the therapy animal in school:

**REQUIRED THERAPY ANIMAL CERTIFICATION:**

|                                                          |                             |
|----------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------|
| American Kennel Club's Canine Good Citizen Certification |                             |
| Animal/Handler Certification Organization:               |                             |
| Animal/Handler Certification Date:                       | Certification Renewal Date: |

**REQUIRED DOCUMENTATION (to attach with this form):**

- Photo of therapy dog and handler;
- Copy of Owner/Animal certification for therapy duties;
- Animal vaccination records, and certification from veterinarian that animal is in good health and has been spayed or neutered;
- Proof of licensure from the local licensing authority (when applicable);
- Copy of insurance policy that provides liability coverage for the work of the Owner/Handler and therapy animal while the two are on school district property.

The Owner/Handler assumes full and sole responsibility and liability for any damage to school property or injury to others while on school property that is caused by the therapy animal.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Owner/Handler Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

For SHCSD Use Only:



Building Principal: \_\_\_\_\_ Approves \_\_\_\_\_ Denies

\_\_\_\_\_  
District Superintendent/Designee

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

## Owner/Handler Statement of Understanding

I, \_\_\_\_\_ owner / handler of \_\_\_\_\_ have read and understand the **Sweet Home Central School District Therapy Dog Handbook** and I agree to abide by the terms of the guidelines stated in this handbook. I understand that if the therapy dog is out of control, not housebroken, presents a direct and immediate threat to others in the school, or otherwise interferes with the educational process, the school district may exclude or remove my therapy dog from its property.

I agree to be responsible for any damage to school property or injury to personnel, students, or others caused by the therapy dog. I agree to indemnify, defend, and hold harmless the school district from and against any and all claims, actions, suits, judgments and demands brought by any party arising on account of, or in connection with, any activity of or damage caused by my therapy dog.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Owner Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

### APPROVALS

\_\_\_\_\_  
Building Principal

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Superintendent

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

*Note: This form/agreement must be renewed annually and prior to the start of each subsequent school year, or whenever a different therapy dog will be used.*



## **Sweet Home Central Schools Therapy Dog Owner/Handler Guidelines**

*(Please read and sign. Applications will not be accepted without this signed agreement.)*

As the therapy pet's owner and handler, I understand and agree that:

- I am responsible for all of my dog's actions at all times, including but not limited to financial or physical injury.
- I will consider the safety of other people and pets at all times.
- I will maintain my Therapy Dog International (TDI) certification updated annually (December).
- My dog will be clean, neatly groomed and healthy on each visit.
- My dog will be parasite-free and up to date on all state required vaccinations.
- I will remember at all times that my dog and its actions as well as my behavior, actions, and attitude represent Kenmore-Town of Tonawanda UFSD in the eyes of the public.
- I agree to abide by all of the guidelines outlined in the Sweet Home Central Schools Therapy Dog Program Handbook, Guidelines and District Policy, including any revisions.
- I understand that participation in the Therapy Dog Program is voluntary.
- If at any time my pet and/or I can no longer do this work due to age, illness, disability or behavior problems, I will stop the work and will notify Sweet Home Central Schools leadership to make a determination on whether my pet and/or I are suitable to continue with visits.
- I understand and agree that the Sweet Home Central Schools Therapy Dog Program team has the complete discretion to disallow my pet or me to continue as a participating member.
- I agree that if I do not or cannot abide by Sweet Home Central Schools Therapy Dog Program, procedures and guidelines (including any revisions), I will not be allowed to use my dog for the program.
- I give Sweet Home Central Schools permission to use my photograph and the photograph of my pet for the purposes of education or promotion of Sweet Home Central Schools Animal Assisted Therapy Program

By signing the Therapy Dog Application Form, I am acknowledging I have read and agree to comply with the above.



## Sweet Home Central Schools Therapy Dog Contact Log

Therapy Dog's Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Breed: \_\_\_\_\_ Age: \_\_\_\_\_

Handler's Name: \_\_\_\_\_

School Building: \_\_\_\_\_

| Date | Time | Location | Participants | Goal for Session | Comments |
|------|------|----------|--------------|------------------|----------|
|      |      |          |              |                  |          |
|      |      |          |              |                  |          |
|      |      |          |              |                  |          |
|      |      |          |              |                  |          |
|      |      |          |              |                  |          |
|      |      |          |              |                  |          |
|      |      |          |              |                  |          |
|      |      |          |              |                  |          |



# Elementary Screening Tools

Students will use this link / QR Code to complete the questionnaire pre and post their interaction with therapy dog

<https://forms.gle/PHZ3rdqbQmiZxxNJ9>

Working with the dog helps me feel happy: \*

☐ never ☐ sometimes ☐ never ☐ sometimes

☐ always ☐ always



I feel accepted and liked at school today \*



☐ No



☐ Maybe



☐ Yes

**The QR codes can be made into cards for students to quickly scan with their Ipads**





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## Elementary Student Screening Tools



## Secondary Screening Tools

Students will use this link / QR Code to complete the questionnaire pre and post their interaction with therapy dog: <https://forms.gle/nTi3fnNP8ojrPFwP7>

Based upon whether this is their BEFORE or their AFTER their interaction with the therapy dog it will take them to the appropriate questions.

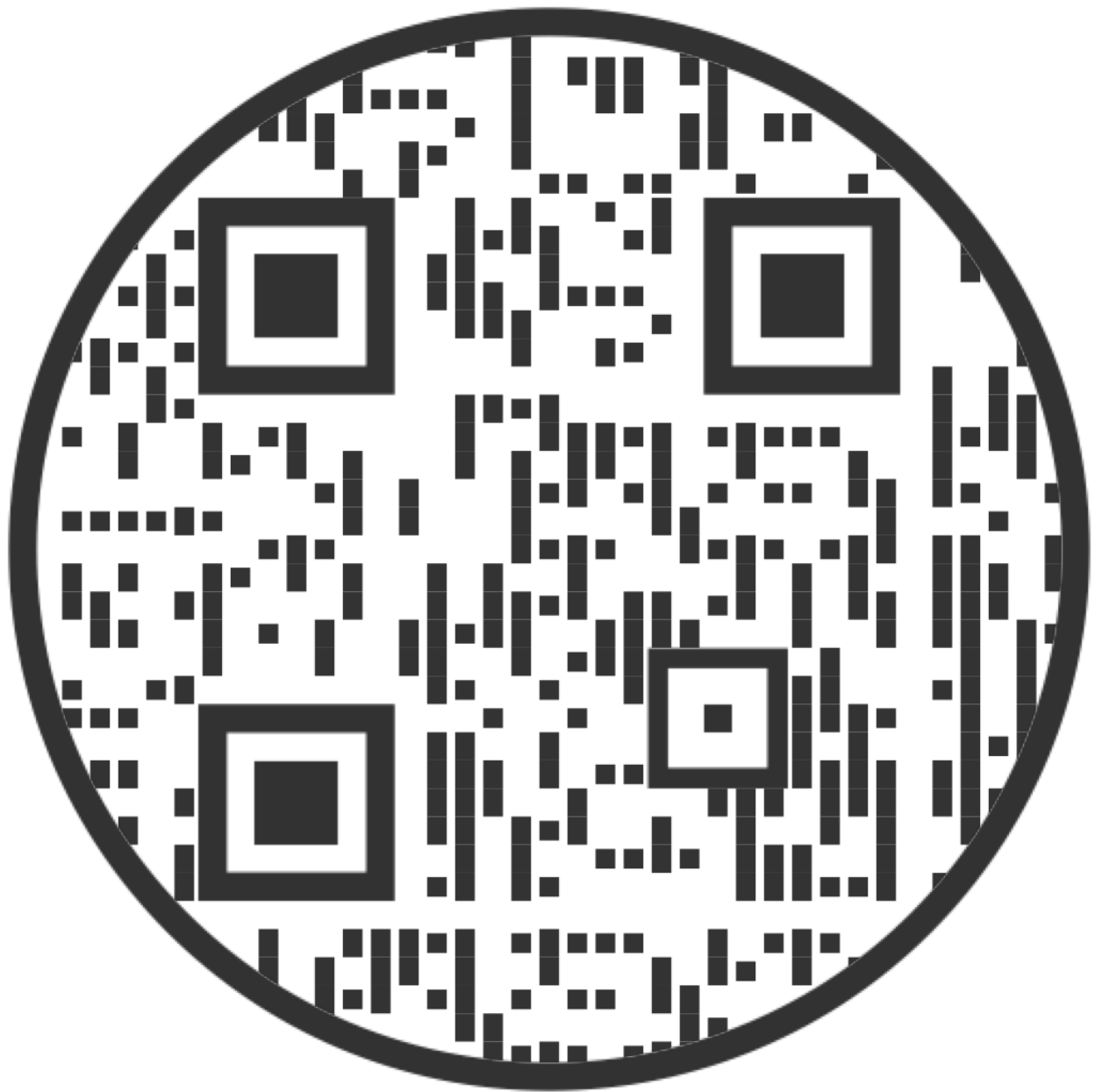
### Pre-Questionnaire:

- In the last seven days, I have felt stressed, worried, anxious, or sad.
- In the last seven days, I have been unable to control my worry
- In the last seven days, I have had trouble focusing and or concentrating
- In the last seven days, I have felt anxious about being at school or a specific class
- In the last seven days, I have had trouble attending or participating in school / class

### Post- Questionnaire:

- I feel worried, anxious or sad..
- I am unable to control my worry..
- I am anxious about being at school or a specific class
- My desire to be at school or in class has increased.
- I am having trouble focusing & concentrating.
- Any other information you would like to share





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## Secondary Students Screening Tool



# (Example) High School Website Introduction

**(Each school can have its own introduction, featuring pictures & the biography of the Therapy Dog International dog / handler who volunteers for their building)**



We are writing to introduce you to our newest staff members, who will be joining us at Sweet Home High School this school year. Kaia and Jersey are twins! They are two and half year old female, white English Labradors that have been through rigorous obedience training, including a 3 week board and train for additional certifications. They have passed all the required testing and evaluations for AKC Canine Good Citizens, AKC Community Canine, AKC Therapy Dog Title & the Therapy Dog International certifications. For the past year and half, Kaia & Jersey do routine weekly therapy dog work at Canterbury Woods Assisted Living, and visits at the Buffalo VA Medical Center and with the Down

Syndrome Parents Group of WNY. They are also involved in competitive obedience classes, agility training and dock diving as well.

They are so excited to be a part of the Sweet Home School Community. We wanted to share some information about the benefits of having a therapy dog in school as well as answer some potential questions and explore some concerns you may have:

## **Benefits of Having a Therapy Dog in Schools:**

- Increased self-esteem and positive interactions between staff and students.
- Decreased blood pressure and increased physical stimulation.
- Increased memory and problem solving skills.
- Increase in positive mood; places students at ease and increases openness/socialization with others.
- Studies have shown an Increase in student reading skills when they are given opportunities to read to an accepting, non-judgemental audience ie. a therapy dog.



**Concerns and Considerations:**

- Therapy dogs will be groomed regularly. Additionally, they will be wiped with an allergen / dander reducer prior to entering buildings; which is suitable for students with allergies. Each classroom has been equipped with a HEPA air filtration / purifier system
- Therapy dogs will only interact with students who want to work with them. This is to be mindful of students that may not like dogs or have a fear of them. Research has shown that work with therapy dogs often decreases one's fear of animals.
- Therapy dogs will be on a leash, wear a collar with ID tag, and under the supervision of a certified handler when they are on school grounds; they will not be free to roam.
- Kaia & Jersey live with Ms. Kristina Pinkowski on a full-time basis. They are up to date on vaccination records, registered with the town, socialized with children and adults on an ongoing basis and are groomed regularly.
- Therapy dogs will have access to water and be given multiple opportunities to be brought outside for bathroom breaks during the day.
- Therapy dogs will be slowly acclimated to the school environment before being utilized in classrooms for any extended period of time.

We are extremely excited to welcome Kaia & Jersey and other Therapy Dog International Dogs to the Sweet Home Team and believe that their influence will be an extremely positive one for staff and students. The plan is to start the therapy dogs on a schedule approximately two days a week. Additional days may be considered in the future depending on how well the initial schedule works. If you have any additional questions or concerns, please feel free to reach out to me directly. Additional information can be found in the Board Policy listed on the district website. Lastly, please be on the lookout for updates on Kaia & Jersey's journey on the Sweet Home School District's Facebook and Twitter pages. Thank you for your continued support.

(signature)



## Social Media / School Newspaper

- At both the elementary and secondary levels, this can be student centered, student created and student managed.

## Further Education / Opportunity

- This program opens the door to work with students who want a future career working with animals.
- Opportunities include, but are not limited to:
  - Animal behavior
  - Animal training
  - Animal nutrition
  - Veterinary medicine
  - Dog grooming
- [ERIE 1 BOCES / Harkness / Ken-Ton](#) offers an Animal Science program; which exposes students to careers in the veterinary and animal management fields. This program teaches basic and advanced skills in nutrition, health and disease, animal handling and restraint, grooming, pet first aid and medical terminology
- Opportunities for guest speakers, trainer demo's, field trips, etc...



## Classroom Door Sign

Signs can be made for classroom doors when a therapy dog is present.

*THERAPY  
DOG IN  
ROOM*



## Legal References / Other School Boards Policies

- Legal Ref: [Agriculture and Markets Law §108; NYS Therapy Dog Working Group](#) (10/2018)
- Americans with Disabilities Act

### **Sample Copies of Existing Approved School Board Policies**

- [Williamsville Central School District](#)
- [Kenmore Town of Tonawanda UFSchool District](#)
- [Monroe One Boces](#) (25 O'Connor Rd, Fairport, NY 14450)
- [Wheatland-Chili Central School District](#) (13 Beckwith Avenue, Scottsville, NY 14546)
- [Southern Columbia Area School District](#)
- [Rumson Borough Central School District](#)
- [Canastota Central School District](#)

**There are so many other school districts locally and across the country that have implemented successful therapy dog programs in their district.**

## Letters of Support



Kathryn Barillari - Director of Special Education Sweet Home Central Schools

Anne Nowak - Director Family Support Center

Dr. [Keli Koran Luchey](#) - Mental Health Crisis Counselor

Lisa Floriano - Special Education / Inclusion Classroom

Kristy Neeson - Speech Pathologist / Inclusion Classroom

There have been numerous POSITIVE, supportive conversations with faculty and staff members regarding implementing therapy dogs in our district

## Contact Information in other Schools

Cindy Lee  
**CEO, OLV Human Services**  
790 Ridge Road  
Lackawanna, NY 14218



Cell # 1-585-297-2319

Patricia Busch, **LMSW**  
**Kenmore East High School**  
Certified School Social Worker  
716-874-8402 ext. 22531  
[pbusch@ktufsd.org](mailto:pbusch@ktufsd.org)

Tracy Spagnolo, **Assistant Superintendent for Instruction & Student Services**  
**Kenmore East High School**  
[tspagnolo@ktufsd.org](mailto:tspagnolo@ktufsd.org)  
Phone: 874-8400 ext. 20333  
Fax: 874-8624

Kelly White, **Assistant Superintendent for Curriculum, Leadership and Instruction**  
**Kenmore-Town of Tonawanda Union Free School District**  
1500 Colvin Blvd.  
Buffalo, NY 14223  
(716) 874-8400 ext. 20333  
[kwhite@ktufsd.org](mailto:kwhite@ktufsd.org)



## AKC Educator Resources

The American Kennel Club (AKC) has a great education program for all grades.

<https://www.akc.org/public-education/educator-resources/>

The following program is currently being done this year in the 8th grade 15:1 class at Kenmore East High School with Mrs. Patricia Busch. The [AKC Canine Character Education Program](#) is a complete character education unit that is designed for schools. The goal of this program is to provide schools with a quality character education program that results in measurable improvement in student behavior and peer relationships. For many years, schools have attempted to teach children about character traits that they feel will help them to become responsible citizens in our community.

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Anamosa School Board Policy

[https://simbli.eboardsolutions.com/SB\\_ePolicy/SB\\_Exhibit.aspx?PC=0606.10-E\(1\)&Sch=150085&S=150085&T=A&C=0600&Z=E&St=ADOPTED&RevNo=1.01&PG=6&SN=true](https://simbli.eboardsolutions.com/SB_ePolicy/SB_Exhibit.aspx?PC=0606.10-E(1)&Sch=150085&S=150085&T=A&C=0600&Z=E&St=ADOPTED&RevNo=1.01&PG=6&SN=true)

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