

SALEM SCHOOL DISTRICT
Salem, Connecticut

Instruction

LIVE ANIMALS IN THE CLASSROOM: THERAPY DOGS

The Board of Education (Board) supports the use of therapy dogs by teachers or other qualified school personnel (“Owner/Handler”) for the benefit of its students subject to the conditions of this policy.

Definitions

Therapy Dog: A “therapy dog” is a dog that has been individually trained and certified/registered 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. Therapy dogs are individually trained and certified/registered to provide appropriate interactions with students and others at school. 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.

Owner/Handler: The individual who owns the dog and is responsible for caring and supervising the therapy dog, which includes toileting, feeding, grooming, and veterinary care. The District is not obligated to supervise or otherwise care for a therapy dog.

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

Training and Certification. 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 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.

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

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 school district is not responsible for providing any care, supervision, or assistance for a therapy dog.

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 school district administrators.

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

Owner/Handler Responsibilities

The therapy dog's owner, who must be an employee of the District, is responsible for the handling of the therapy dog. Therapy dogs are not the property of the District. The owner, as the therapy dog's handler, must adhere to the following requirements:

1. The District requires that a therapy dog be under the control of the Owner/Handler at all times. The District requires that a therapy dog shall have and use a harness, leash, or other tether at all times.
2. The Owner/Handler must abide by current city/town, county and state ordinances, laws, and/or regulations pertaining to licensing, vaccination, and other requirements for animals. It is the Owner's/Handler's responsibility to know and understand these ordinances, laws and regulations. The District has the right to require documentation of compliance with such ordinances, laws and/or regulations, which may include a vaccination certificate.
3. The Owner/Handler is required to clean up after and properly dispose of the animal's waste in a safe and sanitary manner. The Owner/Handler must always carry sufficient equipment to clean up the animal's waste.
4. The Owner/Handler agrees to abide by all equally applicable District policies such as assuring that the animal does not unduly interfere with the routine activities of the District.
5. The District's personnel shall not be required to provide care or food for any therapy dog including, but not limited to, removing the animal during emergency evacuation for such events as a fire alarm.
6. The Owner/Handler must possess proper insurance 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:

1. The therapy dog does not possess the required training/certification for performing therapy dog duties;
2. The therapy dog's presence results in a fundamental alteration of a district program, service or activity;
3. A Handler does not have control of the therapy dog;
4. The therapy dog is not housebroken;

5. The Owner/Handler does not comply with the Owner/Handler's responsibilities set forth above; or
6. The therapy dog presents a direct and immediate threat to others in the school.

The Owner/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 Owner/Handler of the animal will be required to remove the animal to a different location designated by an administrator.

Damages to School Property and Injuries. The Owner/Handler 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 while on school property.

Parent Notice. The Superintendent or his/her designee shall ensure that parents are notified in writing prior to the therapy dog being permitted to enter a District building. Such notice may be electronic.

Therapy Dog in Training. This policy shall also be applicable to therapy dogs in training that are accompanied by a bona fide trainer.

(cf. 1250 – Visits to the Schools)

Legal References: Connecticut General Statutes

10-221 Boards of education to prescribe rules, policies and procedures.

46a-42 Mobility impaired person.

46a-44 through 46a-64 Public accommodations and transportation, admittance to. (Access of guide and assistance dogs to modes of public transportation and in places of public accommodation.)

Section 504 and the Federal Vocational Rehabilitation Act of 1973, 20 U.S.C. 706(7)(b), 29 U.S.C. 705 (20), 794, 34 C.F.R. pt. 104; G.S. 130A-185, 168 article 1, 168A-3 through -7.

American Disability Act 42 U.S. C12101 *et seq.*, 28 C.F.R. pt. 35.

Individuals with Disabilities Act, 20 U.S.C. 1400 *et seq.*

28 C.F.R. Parts 35 & 36, "Nondiscrimination on the Basis of Disabilities in State and Local Government Services; Final Rules"

1st Reading: August 22, 2001

Policy Adopted: September 26, 2001

Revised Policy 1st Reading: July 20, 2009

Revised Policy Adopted: August 17, 2009

Revised Policy 1st Reading: September 11, 2023

Revised Policy Adopted: October 2, 2023

Therapy Dog Request Form

Name of Owner: _____

Mailing Address: _____

Contact Number: _____

Therapy Dog Breed: _____ Age: _____ Weight: _____ Color: _____

Please provide a brief description of the services or functions the Therapy Dog will be providing:

School(s) visiting: _____

Day(s) of visiting: _____

By signing below, I am affirming that I have read and understand the _____ School District's Therapy Dogs policy. I will abide by the terms of this policy. I understand my Therapy Dog may be excluded from a District building or District property if any of the following occur, including, but not limited to:

1. The Therapy Dog does not possess the required training/certification for performing therapy dog duties;
2. 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;
3. The Owner/Handler does not have control of the Therapy Dog;
4. The Therapy Dog is not housebroken;
5. The Therapy Dog presents a direct and immediate threat to others in the district building or on school property; or
6. The Therapy Dog's presence otherwise interferes with the educational process.

I understand I am responsible for any and all damage to district property or personal property, and any injuries caused by my Therapy Dog. I also understand that the district is not responsible for any costs related to my Therapy Dog. I agree to indemnify, defend, and hold harmless the 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.

The following documentation must be included with this request form:

1. Proof of annual vaccinations;
2. Documentation of state and/or city/town licensure of my Therapy Dog;
3. Documentation from an accredited agency pertaining to my Therapy Dog's training; and
4. Proof of insurance.

Once approved, proof of notice to parents/guardians of school/class where the Therapy Dog will be is required to be submitted prior to entering the building.

Therapy Dog Owner Signature

Date

Superintendent Signature

Date

Sample Letter to The School Community
(School Letterhead)

Date

Dear Parent/Guardian:

This letter is to inform you that, effective (date), there will be a Therapy Dog in our school. The dog will be in the school (times/days). Dates and times may change as required without further notice.

Therapy dogs are interactive dogs trained to work for an Owner/Handler to provide emotional support, well-being, comfort, or companionship to District students. The presence of a Therapy Dog can decrease anxiety and provide a level of comfort that enables students to work through a variety of challenging issues.

(Name of dog) is a highly trained and fully certified therapy dog, and we are thrilled to have (him/her) become a member of our school community. If you have any questions about (name of dog), please feel free to contact me.

There will be information sessions at the school to integrate (name of dog) into our daily routines and all of our staff and students will be instructed as to the proper procedures regarding the Therapy Dog.

If you have any specific concerns regarding the presence of the Therapy Dog in the school, please contact me. Thank you for your understanding, support, and interest.

Sincerely,

Principal

cc: Superintendent of Schools

Sample Letter to The Families of Children in the Class(es)
(School Letterhead)

Date

Dear Parent/Guardian:

This letter is to inform you that, effective (date), there will be a Therapy Dog in our school assisting our students, and the Therapy Dog will be present in your child's class.

Therapy dogs are interactive dogs trained to work for an Owner/Handler to provide emotional support, well-being, comfort, or companionship to District students. The presence of a Therapy Dog can decrease anxiety and provide a level of comfort that enables students to work through a variety of challenging issues.

(Name of dog) is a highly trained and fully certified therapy dog, and we are thrilled to have (him/her) become a member of our school community. If you have any questions about (name of dog) please feel free to contact me.

There will be information sessions at the school to integrate (name of dog) into our daily routines and all of our staff and students will be instructed as to the proper procedures regarding the Therapy Dog.

If you have any specific concerns regarding the presence of the therapy dog in your child's class, please contact me.

Thank you for your understanding, support, and interest.

Sincerely,

Principal

cc: Superintendent of Schools

SAMPLE SIGN TO BE POSTED ON EACH ENTRY DOOR TO THE SCHOOL IS AVAILABLE ON
THE NEXT PAGE

NOTICE:

There is a working
THERAPY DOG
in this school today

