

LEHIGHTON AREA SCHOOL DISTRICT THERAPY DOG ADMINISTRATIVE PRACTICES AND PROCEDURES



2024-2025

Questions regarding this handbook may be directed to the curriculum office of the Lehigh Area School District at 610-377-4490.

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General Policy and Procedures

HISTORY OF THE PROGRAM

A survey conducted by the American Psychological Association found many teens reporting being overwhelmed or depressed because of their high stress levels. Overall, U.S. teenagers report feeling more stressed-out than adults do.

According to the National Alliance on Mental Illness, four million children and adolescents in this country suffer from a serious mental disorder that causes significant functional impairments at home, at school and with peers. Of children ages 9 to 17, 21 percent have a diagnosable mental or addictive disorder that causes at least minimal impairment.

Suicide is the third leading cause of death in youth ages 15 to 24. More teenagers and young adults die from suicide than from cancer, heart disease, AIDS, birth defects, stroke, pneumonia, influenza and chronic lung disease combined. Over 90 percent of children and adolescents who commit suicide have a mental disorder.

Within the Lehigh Area School District, many students struggle with mild to severe forms of mental health concerns. While some students have been identified and provided services within the school and community, many go unidentified. After careful consideration of ways to reach all students, it was determined that a Therapy Dog would help to meet these goals through impacting students in three interconnected areas: improving mental health of students, providing social benefits that are unique to interactions with animals, and decreasing barriers to learning.

PRIMARY GOAL OF THE PROGRAM

The Therapy Dog will be utilized with students and staff within the school setting, many of whom experience mental illness (ex. Anxiety & Depression), Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), Autism, English as a Second Language, Intellectual Difficulties, and more mild forms of mental health issues within the educational setting. The goal is to lessen their stress and anxiety during activities occurring during the school day. With decreased anxiety, students may be able to focus and engage in classes better, feel more comfortable to open up to counselors and teachers, and find comfort and connection within the school environment. This program will potentially improve overall feelings and allow for more effective progression through the learning process.

BENEFITS

Overall: Research has demonstrated that the use of animals used in Animal Assisted Therapy (AAT) have had tremendous benefits when used in that modality. For the purpose of the school, however, the Therapy Dog will be used for Animal Assisted Activities (AAA). Additional goals for the successful AAA visits include:

- Increase communication skills
- Foster trust
- Reduce anxiety and ease stress
- Reduce isolation and loneliness
- Allow for self-regulation
- Improve self-esteem and feelings of self-worth
- Improve socialization
- Increase attentiveness and engagement
- Acquire skills of acceptance and being non-judgmental
- Reduce inappropriate social behavior
- Improve physical and psychological wellbeing
- Build kindness, compassion, and empathy in students

PUBLIC ACCESS

The Therapy Dog is not a service dog, in that he/she is not providing services to one particular person. As such, he/she has more limitations to public access than traditional service dogs. He/she has public access to the facility with which he/she is connected; that is the Lehigh Area School District. He/she may only access other public establishments if in training (i.e. to learn a new cue).

SERVICES PROVIDED BY THE THERAPY DOG

Scheduled classrooms within the school: The Therapy Dog will be utilized throughout the District and will maintain a schedule throughout the school day. Any teacher/staff member may request the presence of the Therapy Dog during an individual or group meeting/classroom session. However, the dog must be with a Primary or Secondary Handler. Within the classroom setting, the dog may be used simply as a calming presence or may be used to interact with students and assist with educational material. The dog will only be permitted to interact with those participants who feel comfortable, keeping in mind the possibility of fear and/or allergies.

Counseling/Nursing/special situations: The Therapy Dog will be best utilized with students/staff who are particularly withdrawn, depressed, and anxious or otherwise experiencing some heightened emotions. With the dog's presence, he/she may experience a decrease in stress levels which may allow the individual to remain calm, feel more at ease, and potentially be more willing to discuss issues and needs; this allows the staff member to better identify appropriate resources and solutions. For the safety of the Therapy Dog, he/she shall NOT be used in instances where an individual is currently in a state of escalation and aggression.

The Therapy Dog may be included as part of public sponsored events by Lehigh Area School District to raise awareness of mental health issues impacting children and teenagers. Through these events, it will show that the District is invested in not just educating students but is equally invested in addressing their mental health as well.

HANDLING AND CARE

Therapy Dog Team: A team consisting of Mrs. Mary Figura (Assistant to the Superintendent) and the caretakers, Brad Haupt and Christina Haupt, will provide the framework for programming and scheduling that involves the Therapy Dog.

Certification/Handlers: A full time Therapy Dog will be provided by Firefly Farm Kennels, LLC. Certified Therapy Dogs are bred for optimal temperament to work with children, in public settings and in facilities where stress levels run high. Lehigh Area School District has two Primary Handlers and additional Secondary Handlers who accompany the dog to scheduled/requested classrooms and school settings. The Secondary Handlers are teachers/staff members interested in using the Therapy Dog as a tool within their classroom/school settings. The Therapy Dog will only be handled by trained handlers and will wear a vest indicating his/her status as a working dog. Primary and Secondary Handlers are as follows:

Primary Handlers/Owners: Brad Haupt and Christina Haupt (hereinafter “Primary Handlers”)

Secondary Handlers: To be determined consisting of teachers and support staff

Training: The Primary Handlers have been trained and certified through Alliance of Therapy Dogs, Inc. In addition, Alliance of Therapy Dogs, Inc. will recertify the Primary Handlers after the first six months, after the first year, and then annually ongoing. The Primary Handlers will provide training to the Secondary Handlers upon completion of each of their own recertification.

Harness: The Therapy Dog should wear his/her harness and therapy patch any time he/she is working in public. It should be clean and well maintained.

Living Accommodations: The Therapy Dog will live with his/her Primary Handlers. A second Primary Handler will be trained and certified as a backup, if needed, for vacations and/or emergency situations.

Therapy Dog program sustainability: If the Primary Handlers that are currently housing the Therapy Dog are to leave employment at the district, the Therapy Dog will remain in their ownership. If the district needs to secure a new Therapy Dog, or the current Therapy Dog nears retirement, the district administration, the school board, and the Therapy Dog team will reevaluate the need for a Therapy Dog as well as district and community resources to fund the Therapy Dog. If deemed appropriate, the Therapy Dog program will continue with the goal of obtaining a new Therapy Dog approximately six months prior to the initial Therapy Dog’s retirement to provide some overlap of service.

Exit/Retirement Plan: Retirement of the Lehigh Area School District Therapy Dog will be a joint decision between Alliance of Therapy Dogs, Inc., the primary veterinarian, LASD, and the Primary Handlers housing the dog.

Health Care and General Maintenance: Veterinary care for the Therapy Dog will be provided by:

Dr. Dawn Mriss
Lehighton Animal Hospital
246 North 6th Street
Lehighton, PA 18235
610-377-5574

The Alliance of Therapy Dogs, Inc. requires the Owner/Primary Handler to maintain the health of the dog with daily exercise and good nutrition.

OWNERSHIP/ADMINISTRATION/LIABILITY INSURANCE FUNDING:

The Primary Handlers are the owners of the Therapy Dog. The Lehighton Area School District will use the services of the Therapy Dog as a support for student mental health services, and claim no ownership of the Therapy Dog. Liability insurance is covered by both the Primary Handlers and the Lehighton Area School District. The projected expenses, including training, supplies, veterinary and grooming costs, will be at Primary Handlers' expense with assistance from the Lehighton Area School District for District supplies.

Budget for Therapy Dog program: Thanks to Firefly Farm Kennels, LLC and the support of the Primary Handlers there is no cost for the Therapy Dog besides related District supplies and insurance. These costs have been written into the PCCD Grant for the first two years of the program. Community partnership donations of additional supplies will be accepted.

SCHOOL ACCOMMODATIONS

1. Teachers and staff shall be trained on the proper use and purpose of the dog. This will include the potential for encountering the dog throughout their workday and proper behavior in the school while the dog is in "work" mode.
2. Teachers and staff shall be informed of the difference between "work" mode and "social" mode.
 - a. Work mode shall be indicated by the presence of the vest worn by the dog indicating its position as a Lehighton Area School District Therapy Dog. During this mode, personnel will be asked to check with the Handler before petting or interacting with the dog in order to assist in allowing the dog to focus on the job at hand.
 - b. Social mode shall be indicated by the absence of the vest. Social mode shall occur when the dog is not working. The Primary Handler, with assistant and coordination from the backup and Secondary Handlers, shall ensure the dog has ample social times as well as work time throughout the workday.
 - i. During social mode, personnel will be encouraged to interact with the dog.
 - ii. Due to the health and maintenance of the dog, personnel are asked to refrain from providing treats to the dog.

- c. The certified Handler shall not allow the dog to enter any area where she is not welcome, including any “No Dog” zones.
 - d. The certified Handler shall not relinquish custody of the dog at any time during the workday to an individual except a backup or Secondary Handler.
 - e. The dog shall not be permitted to have the run of the office or school during social mode.

3. If any personnel would like to provide a treat or toy for the Therapy Dog, please request must be approved by the primary. Please note that rawhides of any kind, BBQ bones, soft, latex squeaky toys, flimsy stuffed toys, rope toys, and frisbees are prohibited.

4. A crate and/or dog bed will be located in each of the District buildings at a place to be determined for use during off duty time. The Handlers will maintain the crate/bed for cleanliness and structural soundness. A secondary dog bed will be located in the Primary Handler’s room to provide for an additional space for the dog to have down time.

5. The Therapy Dog will be fed in the morning prior to the work day; he/she will only require a water bowl in the primary and backup Handlers’ offices, maintained on trays to catch any spills. This will be available throughout the day to provide proper hydration to the dog. These bowls and trays shall be emptied and cleaned on a daily basis.

6. Toileting will be done by a trained Handler in grassy areas throughout the District determined by buildings and grounds; the Handler is required to clean up waste left by the dog and dispose of it properly. Other suitable and appropriate areas may be utilized as long as the area is cleaned up.

7. The Primary Handlers will take the Therapy Dog for a walk on a daily basis.

- 8. The Primary Handler shall take proper hygienic measures to ensure the cleanliness of the dog in order to minimize any dander or residual hair that may be left by the dog and to maintain overall good health. This shall include:
 - a. The maintenance of an area designated as a “No Dog Zone”. This will provide a room free of dog allergens for meetings or other functions.
 - b. On a daily basis: Brushing of the dog’s coat to minimize shedding.
 - c. On a weekly basis: Brushing of the dog’s teeth with toothbrush and paste formulated for dogs.
 - d. Three times a year: The Therapy Dog will be taken to the groomer for trimming of nails, deshedding and a thorough cleaning
 - e. On a monthly basis:
 - i. Shampooing of the dog with dander treating products.
 - ii. Provide heartworm medication and flea and tick treatment.
- e. Special pet wipes can also be utilized to refresh the dog’s coat in between bathing.
- f. Regular vacuuming of the certified Handler’s office and any other area frequented by the dog.

9. The Primary Handler shall utilize Lehighon Animal Hospital to maintain proper hygiene of the dog as well as immunizations and any other health concern(s) related to the dog. Regular grooming can occur at any animal grooming facility.

10. A Google Calendar will be created to allow access and scheduling of the Lehighon Area School District Therapy Dog and all requests and reservations must have the approval of the Primary Handlers and administration.

11. The Primary Handlers and administration will have final authority regarding the use of the Lehighon Area School District Therapy Dog.

12. The Superintendent, Dr. Christina Fish and Assistant to the Superintendent, Mary Figura will be updated on the use of the Therapy Dog within the School District setting. They reserve the right to make final determinations regarding the proper use of the dog within the school setting. The certified Handlers shall adhere to all rules, policies and procedures set forth by the Superintendent and Assistant to the Superintendent.

PUBLIC/VISITORS ACCOMMODATIONS:

1. The certified Handlers will take appropriate actions to minimize contact with those who express their fear or show distress in the dog's presence. *Always ask a person first if they want contact with the dog.*

2. In the event any party enters an area where the dog is present and has fear or expresses that he/she is allergic to the dog, the dog will be removed from the area. In the case that the dog is in the guidance/nurses office, the door to the Handler's office will be closed during the duration of the visitor's time in the guidance/nurses office in order to minimize contact with the animal.

ORIENTATION AND TRAINING-SECONDARY HANDLERS

Secondary Handlers may not take control of the Therapy Dog until they have completed the Orientation and Training and individual Public Access Test (#8 and #9 below) conducted by a Primary Handler or staff person/volunteer from the Alliance of Therapy Dogs, Inc.

The orientation Packet for Secondary Handlers will include: Primary Handler Contacts, Lehighon Area School District Therapy Dog Program – Policy, Practices and Procedures Manual, Reading Your Dog-Stress and Body Language, How to Hold a Leash, and Toys and Treats

Training Agenda

1. Emergencies
 - Contacts
 - Location of First Aid Kit
2. Review of Policy and Procedure Manual
3. Reading your Dog-Stress and Body Language
4. Holding a Leash

5. Feeding/Treating/Handling by Non-Handlers
6. Access to Water
7. Cues-Verbal and Hand (Verbal and Hand cues might change slightly for a specific dog):
 - Name and Watch
 - Eliminate on Command (Potty)
 - No
 - Off
 - Okay
 - Kennel Up
 - Eat
 - Vest
 - Let's Go
 - Sit
 - Come
 - Down
 - Place
 - Leave It
 - Load Up
 - Fetch
 - Tug
8. Greetings

SUPPLIES LIST-START UP

- Folding Crate (for office and travel)
- Dog food
- Dog beds
- Leash
- Soft chairs for visiting with dog
- Extra treat pouch for Secondary Handlers
- Poop bags (one for each treat pouch)
- Water dishes Portable/fold up water dishes
- Trays for under water dishes
- Pet wipes for dog's coat
- Toys
- Lint brushes

EMERGENCY CONTACTS & INFORMATION

For health related emergencies, the veterinarian is the first contact

Primary Handlers: Brad Haupt; Cell: _____; LASD ext.: _____

Christina Haupt; Cell: _____ : LASD ext.:

Secondary Handlers: TBD (may be up to 15 staff members)

Alliance Therapy Dogs, Inc.

Name:

Phone:

Email:

Veterinarian:

Dr. Dawn Mriss

Leighton Animal Hospital

246 North 6th Street

Leighton, PA 18235

610-377-5574

Animal Poison Control Center: 1-888-426-4435