



THERAPY ANIMAL PROCEDURES MANUAL

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The Douglas County School District (hereinafter referred to as “DCSD”) uses fully trained and certified therapy animal teams (handler and canine) as part of curriculum activities such as facilitating social/emotional skill building and supporting the social/emotional needs of students. This procedures manual will provide information and guidance regarding the use of therapy animals.

I. DEFINITIONS

Although therapy animals can play a vital role in a person’s well-being by providing therapeutic contact to improve physical, social, emotional, and cognitive functioning, unlike a service animal, therapy dogs are not granted access to places of public accommodation and do not have legal access rights under federal or state law. Therefore, DCSD established a process to ensure the safety of all students, visitors, staff members, and animals.

- **Animal-Assisted Intervention (AAI)**

Animal-assisted interventions are goal oriented and structured interventions that intentionally and ethically incorporate an animal, commonly a canine, in health, education and human service for the purpose of therapeutic gains and improved health and wellness. Animal-assisted therapy (AAT), animal-assisted education (AAE) and animal-assisted activities (AAA) are all forms of animal-assisted interventions. In all these interventions, the animal may be part of a volunteer therapy animal team working under the direction of a professional or may be an animal that belongs to the professional himself. ([Per Pet Partners](#))

II. ACCESS :

The purpose of bringing a therapy animal to school must be tied to improving student outcomes, which may include setting student specific goals, increasing social/emotional skill sets, and improving the general well being of the building.

The therapy animal and handler must be fully trained and certified before the Therapy Animal Request Form is submitted. The handler of the therapy animal must be an adult. Students are not permitted to bring therapy animals to school and only one animal per handler is permitted at the same time. Handlers must stay with their animal at all times, and are not allowed to hand off their animals to other personnel in their school.

Identifying participants: It is the primary responsibility of the handler to determine goodness of fit in utilizing AAI for a student, in collaboration with school support staff. Safety of all involved (e.g. student, animal, staff, etc) must be considered prior to and during the interaction. If a participant displays behaviors that may put anyone at risk, the animal will be immediately removed from the environment. Collaboration with all involved parties is encouraged to discuss use of the intervention, but the handler of the animal has the right to determine if the animal is part of the intervention.

Volunteers: Employees cannot act as a volunteer with a therapy dog in their own school during working hours (but are permitted to work in other schools as volunteers in their spare time). Handlers that are not employed within the district will provide the same paperwork and go through the same process as district employee teams. A school employee will partner with the volunteer team as point of contact to support the implementation requirements. Volunteers must be at least 18 years old and may not be a student of the school in which they are volunteering.

The following requirements must be satisfied before a therapy animal will be permitted in school buildings and on grounds:

*Please refer to the DCSD AAI-Therapy Animal Implementation Guide to support your process.

- The Animal Assisted Intervention implementation takes time to ensure every aspect is considered to guarantee the safety of everyone involved.
- Submitting the DCSD Animal Assisted Interventions - Program Request Form on the [DCSD AAI Site](#) is the first step in the approval process. Submission of the online form, including up to date mandatory documentation, is required for approval.
 - Mandatory documentation includes:
 - Therapy Dog Certification
 - [DCSD Therapy Dog Veterinarian Health Certificate](#)
 - Vaccination Record
 - Proof of Liability Insurance with Canine Coverage
 - Proof of Required Communications (Allergy, Staff, and Community)
- All therapy animals need approval for each new school year. Please complete the DCSD Animal Assisted Interventions - Program Request Form (linked above) online and submit all updated required documentation annually. It is the responsibility of the Handler to resubmit any documentation that expires throughout the effective dates of the Memorandum of Understanding. You may send any updated documentation throughout the year to an AAI committee member.
- The therapy dog certification must be from an organization that is recognized by DCSD and approved by DCSD Mental Health Leadership (see appendix).
- The certification shall remain current at all times and will need to be re-submitted if changes occur. The therapy animal and handler must be re-evaluated at least every two years by a district approved certification organization and certification must remain current and in good standing at all times.
- The handler must submit a health certificate or report of examination and appropriate vaccinations from a veterinarian licensed in the State of Colorado. Such vaccinations must be kept current and up to date at all times. A veterinarian should see the animal at least once a year.
 - The handler must submit a completed and signed copy of the [DCSD Therapy Dog Veterinarian Health Certificate](#)
 - Vaccines required (at minimum): Rabies, Leptospirosis and DA2PP (at least initial series)
 - Negative heartworm

- The handler must submit a copy of the insurance policy that provides professional liability coverage for the work of the handler and therapy animal while on school property. The liability insurance coverage must be purchased privately by the handler. The usage of district funds is not permitted.
 - Insurance must cover the handler with documentation of coverage for the canine partner in a professional setting as well that explicitly indicates injuries or damage by the dog are covered (either within the policy or as an attachment)
 - Recommended minimum of \$1M
- Communication must go out to the community prior to completing the application (the animal cannot be on school grounds until the application process and a signed MOU is completed and acknowledged by Mental Health Leadership). This communication informs the community of the desire to have a therapy dog program in the building and to check for any concerns including animal allergies and fears or aversions.
 - If there are multiple therapy dog teams working in one building, each communication should include contact information for each handler/site contact.
 - Communication to school staff
 - Communication to school community
 - Communication to families with allergies
- Approval from the Building Principal and DCSD Mental Health Leadership is required before a therapy animal will be permitted in any school building. All parties will sign an MOU to complete this process. (Please only submit the request form after having all required paperwork completed and up to date)
- Once the online request has been received, the Memorandum of Understanding will be sent to the Handler for signature and acknowledgement via email.
 - Each component of the MOU must be completed prior to submitting for final approval from DCSD Mental Health Leadership.
- If a therapy animal is approved within a classroom or on campus, and a student or staff member assigned to that classroom suffers an allergic reaction to the animal, the handler of the animal must remove the animal from the school building immediately. A therapy animal shall not be permitted if the animal's presence would disturb the nature of the service, program, or activity.
- The therapy animal must not pose a health and safety risk to any student, employee or other person at school.

III. RESPONSIBILITIES

- A school community notification must be sent by the school administration to all staff members and families of the school community to inform them that a therapy animal will be authorized on site and to allow family members and staff members to voice any concerns.

- A list of students and staff members with allergies and aversions will be acquired with the collaboration of the school nurse; each such individual/family must be contacted.
 - If there is an allergic reaction or signs of aversion, the therapy animal must be removed immediately.
- Parents of children who will participate in ongoing, scheduled, and direct interventions with the therapy animal fill out and sign a permission form and return it to the school administration before the child will meet the animal for the first time, if applicable.
- Employees with a therapy animal are expected to care for and supervise their animal at all times. Handling of the animal by other employees or students is not permitted.
 - *Exception: In case of emergency, there should be a designated staff member in the building that the dog is comfortable and familiar with that can take care of the animal until the handler is available. The staff member must agree to this role and be aware of the emergency plan prior.
- Animals will not be left alone with students; the handler must be present and in control of the animal at all times.
- Only one handler per animal is permitted, if not otherwise approved by DCSD.
- It is important that the animal is allowed multiple breaks throughout the day. It is the responsibility of the handler to know when the animal may be getting tired, stressed, thirsty, or has the need to relieve itself. The animal should not work for more than two hours without a break. The school is not responsible for providing any additional staff member to care for the therapy animal.
- The therapy animal must have appropriate identification, differentiating it as a therapy animal at all times while on DCSD grounds.
 - [District required signage](#) must be displayed at the main entrance of the building.
- It is recommended to have a procedure in place for entering / exiting the building, if applicable.
- No pinch, choke, E-collars or shock collars are permitted while the therapy animal is on district property. Only positive reinforcement training techniques are recommended such as clicker or marker training.
 - DCSD supports and embraces the [Institute for Human Animal Connections \(IHAC\) Position Statement on Training Methods and Equipment for Therapy Dogs](#)
- If at any time the animal becomes overly stressed, the animal should be allowed a break and assessed by the handler to see whether it is safe to return to the session/duty. Signs of stress may include excessive tongue flicking, panting, yawning, whale eyes, repeated shake offs, walking away, or looking away.
- Prior to the first day in the building, the handler and the school leadership team must determine an appropriate area where the dog can relieve itself.
- Unless otherwise contained, Handlers must ensure that the animal is on a leash at all times, leash is held by the Handler and never left outside the presence and control of the Handler.

- If the therapy animal program request is approved, a series of planning steps should take place to ensure a smooth transition for the entry of the therapy animal to the environment. It is recommended to introduce the animal slowly over a period of days/weeks (please see the implementation guide for specifics).
- The school administration will confirm whether there will be any other therapy and/or service animal(s) on site prior to scheduling any visit with a therapy animal and must work with appropriate staff to ensure that the animals do not engage improperly while on school property. When multiple therapy animals are engaged in a planned activity on school district property, the handlers must ensure that the animals have an opportunity to prepare to work around one another prior to entering the school building.
 - Therapy dogs should not interact and/or have physical contact with each other and/or other working animals while working.
- If the animal is exhibiting any signs of illness, then it may not come to the school building. Symptoms could include but are not limited to; vomiting, diarrhea, open wounds, ear infections, or any pain or distress in excess of normal aches that could affect the animal's behavior.
- The handler shall not charge a fee for the work they perform with the therapy animal or accept monetary items for the work of the therapy animal. Students may elect to bring a gift (i.e. toy) for the therapy animal, if they so choose.
- The handler is the primary advocate and voice for the therapy animal. The handler will have final say and determine which students and/or staff with whom the therapy animal may interact. If there is a history of violence and/or mistreatment of an animal, the team supporting the student will make the handler aware and determine if the intervention is appropriate for that individual.
 - If a safety concern towards the therapy animal is presented, the handler and therapy animal will immediately exit the interaction. Interventions will be discontinued at the discretion of the handler until safety can be ensured.
- If an injury occurs as a result of a therapy dog interaction, follow district procedures. Contact DCSD Risk Management, Stephanie Crawford and the building principal for guidance immediately.
 - Ensure Safety
 - Contact your school principal and/or supervisor immediately
 - For injury of a staff member, complete a school incident report and Workman's Comp report, if needed
 - For injury of a student or non-staff member, complete a school Incident Report
 - For injury of an animal, contact your veterinarian
 - The handler will work with those involved and with the administrators of their professional liability coverage
 - The handler will file a claim with their liability agency, if necessary
 - Inform the DCSD Mental Health Leadership and the AAI Committee via email of the incident, as soon as possible

IV. THERAPY ANIMAL PUBLIC APPROPRIATENESS

- The animal must be clean, well-groomed and must be free of parasites
- The animal may not urinate or defecate in inappropriate locations
- The animal must have identification that they are working and a certified therapy animal: e.g. vest, harness, bandanna, leash ID, etc

V. BEHAVIOR

The therapy animal should not:

- Seek attention or disturb students or school personnel (jumping on legs, furniture without prompting, etc..)
- Vocalize unreasonably by barking, growling, or whining;
- Show aggression towards people or other animals;
- Beg or steal food or other objects from students or school personnel
- Disturb the normal course of business

VI. EXCLUSION OR REMOVAL FROM DISTRICT FACILITIES

A therapy animal will be excluded from the school district property if the school principal and/or the district determines that:

- The handler brought the animal to school without submitting appropriate paperwork and signing an MOU with the school administration and DCSD Mental Health Leadership
- The therapy animal is not under the control of its handler
- The therapy animal is not housebroken
- The therapy animal presents a direct and immediate threat to others in the school
- The therapy animal presence otherwise interferes with the educational program
- The therapy animal is not on a harness, leash or tether at all times

Therapy animals may not be on district property if the following occurs:

- No therapy animal is allowed to be kept at school, in a classroom, an office or a public area that may negatively affect the health of any student or employee who must use that area
- No therapy animal is allowed to be kept on school property overnight
- The handler shall immediately remove his/her therapy animal from the school property when instructed to do so by the school principal or school administration
- Even if all paperwork for a therapy dog is submitted and evaluated, it is ultimately up to the Building Principal to decide if a Therapy Dog Program in their building is viable

NOTE

If an animal is not approved as a “therapy animal” by DCSD Mental Health Leadership or if an employee fails to go through the process required to determine if an animal is a therapy animal, then the animal will be considered a “pet” and is not allowed on district property. Owners/Handlers are personally liable for any damages to district property or for any harm to an individual while on district property or grounds. The animal will be removed immediately from school, if applicable.

For additional questions and/or information, please contact Stephanie Crawford-Goetz @ sacrawford@desdk12.org.

School Resource Officers

SRO therapy dogs are utilized during school hours by School Resource Officers as part of their law enforcement agency and are assigned to support opportunities for interactions between students and officers.

The SRO Therapy Dog Program provides psychological and emotional support to students in conflict situations or to students with behavioral and emotional disabilities. The program also facilitates positive school climate, culture, and relationships. The canine is utilized by School Resource Officers from local law enforcement agencies while on duty at school. The dog assists with the reduction of anxiety and anger in a public place or child victimization and recovery, increases communication, produces social interactions, helps to stabilize positive mood and stimulates cognitive response. It can also assist First Responders in case of emergency to decrease anxiety and to decrease signs of stress and PTSD.

*The SRO therapy dog program is overseen by DCSD Risk Management and the representative law enforcement agency.

DCSD Recognized & Approved Therapy Animal Certifications

- **Professional Therapy Dogs of Colorado (PTDC)**
 - Certification available for all school professionals (mental health, teachers, administrators, etc).
 - PTDC offers pre-screenings to evaluate where your dog is in the process. They also include a 2 day seminar in which the handler learns more about the implementation process and ways to keep both therapy dogs and clients safe
 - Offers continued support/consultation for handlers and their therapy animal
 - Do not provide liability insurance
 - Cost = \$400 (includes pre-screen, 2 day workshop, manual, test and certification)
 - Recertification every two years = \$75
 - www.professionaltherapydogsofcolorado.com

- **Krieger Dogs**
 - Available for all school professionals (mental health, teachers, administrators, etc)
 - Does not provide liability insurance
 - Certification available to teams that have utilized their training program
 - Cost = \$70/session (number of sessions varies)
 - <https://kriegerdogs.godaddysites.com/>

- **Faithfully K9 Service Dog and Dog Training**
 - Available for all school professionals (mental health, teachers, administrators, etc)
 - Does not provide liability insurance
 - Certification available to teams that have utilized their training program
 - Cost = \$85/session (number of sessions varies)
 - www.faithfullyk9.com

- **Freedom Service Dogs**
 - Placement of a certified facility dog available for mental health professionals (School Social Workers, School Psychologists, Counselors) or public safety professionals.
 - Facility dog placement with a fully certified facility dog
 - Application required
 - Handler will participate in a week long training program prior to bringing their therapy dog home
 - Cost = Currently no initial costs
 - Handlers will be responsible for all costs after placement (e.g. ongoing vet fees and care, etc)
 - Applicants will be placed on a waitlist. Current wait is 1.5 to 3 years and is dependent on dog availability and fit to role
 - <https://freedom servicedogs.org/facility-dogs/>

- **Canine Companions**

- Placement of a certified therapy dog available for all school professionals (mental health, teachers, administrators, etc)
- Therapy dog placement with a fully certified therapy dog
 - Application required
 - Handler will participate in training and certification requirements with organization
- Cost = \$3,500 adoption fee, \$100 certification
 - CC covers liability insurance fees, provides vest and ongoing support
 - \$30 recertification fee each year
- <https://canine.org/service-dogs/our-dogs/therapy-dogs/>

* Please reach out to the [DCSD AAI Committee](#) if you or your organization would like to be included as one of our recognized and approved certifications. DCSD supports and embraces the [Institute for Human Animal Connections \(IHAC\) Position Statement on Training Methods and Equipment for Therapy Dogs](#)

Options for Professional Liability w/ Therapy Dog/Canine Coverage

- **Healthcare Providers Service Organization (HPSO)**
 - Healthcare professionals (Counselors, Occupational Therapists, Social Workers, Speech Language Providers, Physical Therapists, Nurses, Psychologists)
 - Offers professional liability with an elected canine therapy coverage
 - Must also request a written document/letter that states coverage will also be provided for the therapy dog in a professional setting
 - <https://www.hpso.com/>
- **Preferra**
 - Healthcare professionals (Counselors, Occupational Therapists, Social Workers, Speech Language Providers, Physical Therapists, Nurses, Psychologists)
 - Offers professional liability with an elected canine therapy coverage
 - <https://preferrainsurance.com/>
- **Business Insurers of the Carolinas**
 - Offers Professional Liability Coverage with canine coverage with an approved certification and/or membership (AAAIP, Alliance of Therapy Dogs)
 - This is available for district employees who may not qualify for the above options (e.g. teachers, administrators, classified staff, etc)
 - <https://www.business-insurers.com/therapy-animal-handlers>

Volunteer Organizations

If you are interested in partnering with a volunteer team to visit your school regularly or for a one time event, we collaborate with the following organizations:

- **Pet Partners & Denver Pet Partners**

- “Pet Partners’ mission is to improve human health and well-being through the human-animal bond. As a leader in the field, Pet Partners is continuously evolving to meet the diverse needs of global communities, with innovative programming, activities, and educational opportunities that are centered around the human-animal bond. Humans and animals share a deep, innate connection, and we believe that through the human-animal bond we can improve the physical, social, and emotional lives of more people and communities.”
- Per Pet Partners, their certification is only for volunteer purposes and is not to be utilized in a professional role.
- <https://petpartners.org/>
 - To request a visiting team, complete the [CONTACT FORM](#)
- <https://denverpetpartners.org/>
 - To request a visiting team, contact Susan Horecki
 - susanhorecki@denverpetpartners.org

- **Canine Companions**

- “Canine Companions is a non-profit organization that enhances the lives of people with disabilities by providing highly trained service dogs and ongoing support to ensure quality partnerships. While our mission is to provide highly trained service dogs to people with disabilities, we believe the dogs released from our program can still have an incredible ripple effect in the world through their work as therapy dogs. With this goal in mind, we created this program to certify our amazing dogs to have an opportunity to provide support and comfort to members of our community.”
- <https://canine.org/service-dogs/our-dogs/therapy-dogs/>
- Request a Canine Companion Certified Therapy Dog Team to visit your school: [HERE](#)

DCSD School and District Events

If a school would like to request that DCSD therapy dogs be present at an event, please follow the following guidance: [☰ DCSD Therapy Dog Event Guidance](#)

DCSD Crisis Response Support

The DCSD Crisis Team will work with the building principal and therapy dog handlers to determine if a therapy dog is an appropriate support during a crisis response. Please refer to the following guidance.

[☰ DCSD Animal Assisted Interventions & DCSD Crisis Team Partnership](#)

DCSD Crisis Support for the Death of a District Therapy Dog

The DCSD Crisis Lead Responder and the DCSD AAI team will work with the handler and their school administration in the event of a therapy dog death. The following procedures will be followed: [☰ Therapy Dog Crisis Response Protocol](#)