

PELHAM SCHOOL DISTRICT POLICY

IMGB - THERAPY DOGS IN SCHOOL

Category: Optional

1. General Policy

The Board recognizes that specially trained therapy dogs can serve an important role in our schools, provided that the proper controls are in place. Therapy dogs work with their human handler (often the dog's owner) in clinical settings, including schools, where they provide comfort and affection in the course of their work. Therapy dogs are trained to be comfortable in new environments and to interact with different people. They have a calm temperament, are unfazed by unfamiliar noises and movements, are comfortable being handled, and love people. A therapy dog can provide a valuable sense of reassurance, joy, or calmness to people experiencing stressful, lonely, or depressing situations in their life. The School Board authorizes the Superintendent or the Superintendent's designee to allow appropriate staff to make a therapy dog available to students during the school day only as provided in this policy.

This policy is not intended to, and does not, allow students, parents, or staff to bring emotional support or comfort animals onto District property. Individuals who bring onto District property an animal that does not meet the definition of a service animal under policy IMGA or that has not been approved under this policy or Board policy IMG, shall be asked to remove the animal from District property. Repeated violations may result in disciplinary or legal action.

2. Definitions

- a. Service animals. See Board policy IMGA.
- b. Therapy Dog. A dog that has graduated from an assistance dog training program affiliated with Therapy Dogs International or a similar nonprofit organization which adheres to high training standards. Such a graduate dog has been trained specifically for the purpose of providing emotional support, well-being, comfort, or companionship. Therapy dogs are the personal property of a District employee or volunteer and are not owned by the District. Therapy dogs do NOT meet the definition of "service animals" under Board policy IMGA or the Americans with Disabilities Act.
- c. Therapy Dog Handler. An employee of the School District or volunteer who has received training and passed an evaluation from Therapy Dogs International or a similar nonprofit organization for handling a specific therapy dog and who oversees the care of that specific therapy dog for the entire time the dog is on District property.

3. Minimum Standards Required for Presence of a Therapy Animal

- a. A therapy dog will be permitted in school buildings or on school grounds during the school day only after approval has been given by the Superintendent/designee.
- b. District employees will not receive any additional pay, stipend, or compensation for providing the therapy dog or for being the handler and/or the owner of the

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therapy dog. In the case where a volunteer serves as the handler, they will not receive any compensation from the District.

- c. Supervision and care of the approved therapy dog is solely the responsibility of the therapy dog handler(s) and the District staff who request approval for a therapy dog.
- d. The therapy dog handler assumes full responsibility and liability for any damage to District property or injury to District staff, students, or others while the therapy dog is on District property.
- e. The therapy dog handler maintains an insurance policy that provides liability coverage for the therapy dog while on District property.
- f. The therapy dog is clean, well-groomed, in good health, housebroken, and current on all vaccinations and immunizations.
- g. The therapy dog displays appropriate identification indicating it is a therapy dog at all times while on District property.
- h. The therapy dog remains under the control of the therapy dog handler(s) at all times, which requires the therapy dog to be attached to the therapy dog handler by means of a leash or harness whenever the therapy dog is on District property and outside of the approved location.
- i. A student only schedules or attends a session with the therapy dog after the student's parent/guardian, or the student if over eighteen (18) years of age, provides written authorization for the student to use the services of a therapy dog.

4. Aggressive or Defensive Behavior

An act of aggressive or defensive behavior by a therapy dog shall result in:

- a. An immediate end of the student's current session with the therapy dog;
- b. The prohibition of any further interactions between the therapy dog and students for the remainder of the school day; and
- c. Exclusion of the therapy dog from District property until the Superintendent or designee completes an investigation and authorizes the therapy dog's return.

The handler must provide a verbal report to the Principal as soon as possible of any act of aggressive - including vocalizations such as growling - or defensive behavior by a therapy dog toward a human. This also includes any aggressive or inappropriate behavior by a student toward a therapy dog. The handler must submit a full written incident report to the Principal before the close of the following school day.

5. Allergic Reactions

No student, including those with a known allergy to dogs, will have any sessions with the therapy dog without the specific written authorization of the student's parent/guardian, or the student if over eighteen (18) years of age.

If a student demonstrates symptoms of an allergic reaction during or after a session with the therapy dog, the student will be referred immediately to the school nurse and the

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parent/guardian will receive written notification of the possibility of their student's allergy. Either the parent or the school can decide that the student shall not have any future sessions with the therapy dog.

The school must provide alternative activity to those unable to interact with the dog due to allergies.

6. Therapy Dog Proposal

- a. **Requirements.** Any individual seeking to bring a therapy dog into a school building or onto other School District property during the school day must submit a written proposal to the Superintendent/designee addressing each of the following areas:

1. **Goal** - The anticipated goals for and intended uses of the therapy dog. The work or tasks performed by a therapy dog must be:
 - a. directly beneficial to students and
 - b. directly related to the tasks the dog has been trained and certified on. Examples of these tasks include, but are not limited to,
 1. supporting students who are learning to read
 2. visiting classrooms before assessments;
 3. providing a source of comfort.
 - c. never to include tasks for the purposes of the law and or as a crime deterrent in the schools.
2. **Location Information** - The location for the therapy dog to be kept when the therapy dog is on campus.
 - a. Appropriate access to the outdoors to permit the handler and therapy dog to enter and exit the building with minimal disruption;
 - b. Ample space away from intake for the building or room ventilation system or an independent ventilation system;
 - c. Non-porous surfaces, including carpet-free floors, for easy hair removal, cleaning, and sanitation.
3. **Certification and Vaccination**
 - a. The certification the proposed therapy dog has received, including the training required to receive the certification;
 - b. The credentials of the certification providers;
 - c. Satisfactory evidence of appropriate temperament of the proposed therapy dog (e.g., AKC Temperament Test or other temperance evaluation(s);
 - d. The credentials of the temperance evaluator(s);
 - e. The current certification of the dog as a therapy dog and credentials of the certification provider.
 - f. Proof demonstrating the therapy dog is current on all vaccinations.
4. **Handler**
 - a. The names and roles of the individual(s) who will be responsible for handling the therapy dog;

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- b. Training obtained by the proposed handler(s) and the credentials of the providers of the handler's training;
- c. Proposed schedule for the handler(s) to provide necessary care for the therapy dog, including exercise, feeding, watering, bodily functions, and any cleanup resulting from caring for the dog; and
- d. Proof of an insurance policy that provides liability coverage for the therapy dog while on District property.

5. **Students**

- a. The set(s) of students whom the therapy dog is intended to serve and/or to whom the dog will be available;
- b. Proposed training (including materials) to be provided to students on the appropriate behavior and treatment of the therapy dog and the consequences for inappropriate treatment of the therapy dog;

2. **Administrative Discretion.** The Superintendent/designee may reject the proposal if:

- a. The proposal does not include sufficient information regarding each of the requirements above, or does not otherwise meet the requirements of this policy;
- b. The Superintendent/designee does not perceive any educational benefit to be achieved based on the information contained in the proposal;
- c. The Superintendent/designee believes that the time required to meet the needs of the therapy dog is inconsistent with the assigned duties of the school employee either proposed as the therapy dog's handler or in whose class/activity the therapy dog would be present; or
- d. The proposal is otherwise inconsistent with the needs of the school or school building.

3. **Approval.** The approval of a proposal must be in writing with the proposal attached, and with any additional requirements or modifications imposed by the Superintendent/designee. The written approval is required before the therapy dog may be present in school, or on School District property, during the school day.

7. **Notice**

The Superintendent must ensure annual advanced notice of this policy is provided to staff, students, and parents.

District Policy History:

Adopted: June 19, 2024