

Therapy Dogs in Schools

The school district recognizes the use of therapy dogs has academic, social, and emotional benefits for students and staff. The Board authorizes the presence of therapy dog teams on school district property subject to the following provisions.

A. Certification

Proof of training and certification for the dog/handler team by a formal Dog Assisted Therapy organization, such as Love On A Leash (LOAL), Pet Partners (formerly Delta Society), Therapy Dogs International, Inc. (TDI), Alliance of Therapy Dogs (A.T.D.), or another formal organization approved by the Superintendent is required. A copy of the certification document(s) will be kept on file in the Central Office and on-site, preferably with the building principal and the dog handler (if the handler is a district employee).

B. Care

The handler shall be solely responsible for the supervision and care of the therapy dog, including any feeding, exercising, and cleaning up while the therapy dog is on school property.

C. License and Tags

All therapy dogs must meet local, county, and/or state license or permit regulations. It is required that therapy dogs have an owner identification tag in addition to a badge or other identifiers provided by the certifying agency. If an employee or outside provider approved by RSU 9 is bringing a dog to the school, a copy of the certifying badge/tag will be provided to Central Office, with another copy to be kept with the building principal.

D. Health

All therapy dogs must comply with local, county, and state vaccination and health requirements.

E. Liability

A copy of a current insurance policy that provides liability coverage for the therapy dog team must be provided by the certified handler and kept on file at the Central Office, with the building principal and the dog handler if they are a district employee.

F. Allergies and Aversions

The handler shall ensure the therapy dog will be in an assigned or separate area in instances where any student or school employee who suffers dog allergies or aversion is present.

G. Notification

Parents/guardians will be notified that a certified therapy dog may be on school grounds. Parents/guardians will be afforded the opportunity to notify school staff of any concerns. Information or concerns should be directed to the building principal and the handler of the dog.

H. Signage

Proper signage will be placed at the entrance to any RSU 9 district building in which a therapy dog is working.

I. Recordkeeping

Handlers will sign their therapy dog in upon arrival and sign them out on their departure.

Adopted: March 27, 2012

Revised: February 28, 2023

Example of Permission Slip

Dear Parents and Guardians:

A new social worker has joined the Academy Hill School team this school year.

Her name is Sofie Mattens and she has seven years of experience working in an elementary school setting.

Ms. Mattens and her dog Rose have completed an official training and certification process. As part of the training, Rose received her "K9 Good Citizen" certificate through the American Kennel Club, and then they both earned "Pet Therapy Team" certification through Love On A Leash in March of 2019.

Research has shown that therapy dogs support psychological and academic growth, while increasing social skills and self-esteem in children and adolescents. Therapy dogs have been trained to provide emotional support which positively impacts reading skills, emotional functioning and communication skills. In addition, the use of therapy dogs may decrease anxiety, improve self-esteem and increase overall academic achievement in students.

We are very excited about the opportunity to have Rose work at our school! As a therapy dog team, Rose will always be in the presence of Ms. Mattens. Students might get in contact with Rose when walking in the hallway or working directly with Ms. Mattens.

Please read the attached permission form and return it to your child's teacher or to the school office.

Feel free to contact Ms. Mattens with any comments, concerns or questions you may have at smattens@mtbluersd.org or give a call at 207-645-4488.



Complete the permission slip below, check what is applicable and return to school:

Name of Parent/Guardian: _____

Name of Child: _____ Teacher: _____

I give permission for the above child to participate with the therapy dog team. This may occur within a small group, in my child's classroom, or individually with the certified therapy dog team (dog and handler).

Please check one: Permission: YES NO

My child is anxious around dogs: YES NO

My child has dog allergies: YES NO

If circled yes for allergies, please send in medical forms documenting the allergy

Signature of Parent

Date

Electronic permission:

https://docs.google.com/forms/d/e/1FAIpQLSfalWq8VjTeyf2IIZ8ZPeskpj7U4I9xDt2vIzDfMA7U_0WHQw/viewform?usp=sf_link

October 2022

Example of letter home

Dear Families,

This year, dogs and their handlers will be participating in school activities. Dogs may greet students in the morning, listen to students read, and take roles in social-emotional learning (SEL) groups, among other activities. My black lab, Sal, will resume working here on 10/31/22.

There are numerous benefits to having dogs around while kids learn. They include:

- Reading to dogs helps students practice with a non-judgmental audience.
- Working with and around dogs relieves stress - and is fun!
- Reading to dogs is much more motivating for kids than reading to teachers.
- Playing games that include directing a dog's actions help build impulse control, empathy, and self-confidence.

Please sign below if you DO NOT want well-trained dogs and their handlers around your child at school this year.

Please know that we fully understand not all people are “dog people” and will not bring dog/handler teams around children that are uncomfortable.

Also, if your child has an allergy or fear of dogs please tell us on the bottom of this letter and return it so I can be aware and we can plan accordingly.

Warmly,
Liza Folk, PALs Clinical Social Worker

P.S. If you and your dog want to volunteer for this, please contact me to talk about your availability and interests. We will also discuss training and certification.

Questions / Comments? lfolk@mtbluersd.org or 778-4821

___ My child is allergic to dogs and CAN be near them with these precautions:

___ My child is allergic to dogs and CANNOT be around them at all.

___ My child is *uncomfortable* with dogs or ___ My child is *scared* of dogs.

___ I **do not** want my child to participate in activities that include dogs.

Your child's name: _____

Parent/Guardian Name: _____

Parent/Guardian Signature: _____