

Therapy Dogs

The Hitchcock County School District supports the use of therapy dogs by teachers or other qualified school personnel (“Owner”) for the benefit of its students subject to the conditions of this policy.

Therapy Dog. A “therapy dog” is a dog that has been individually trained and certified 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. 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.

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 form to a principal or superintendent. The request form is attached to this policy. The request must be renewed each school year or whenever a different therapy dog will be used.

Training and Certification. The 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.

Exclusion or Removal from School. A therapy dog may be excluded from school property and buildings if a school administrator determines that:

- (1) A handler does not have control of the therapy dog;
- (2) The therapy dog is not housebroken;
- (3) The therapy dog presents a direct and immediate threat to others in the school; or
- (4) The animal's presence otherwise interferes with the educational process.

The Owner 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 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 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.

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