

THERAPY DOGS

Background

Good Spirit School Division is committed to the delivery of high quality educational programs, supports, and services that allow students with diverse needs to maximize their learning and achievement. The Division recognizes that the use of therapy dogs can be beneficial to student learning and well-being in the right circumstances and with careful planning. Research supports the use of therapy dogs in the following areas: anxiety, self-regulation, trauma, social skills, compassion and empathy, self-esteem, and motivation to move. Responding to the needs of students in these areas can lead to improved cognitive performance, memory, and problem solving.

“Therapy Dog” is a dog that has been certified by St. John’s Ambulance Therapy Dog Program or another nationally certified program to provide support and services as outlined above.

Procedures

1. Before approving the presence of a Therapy Dog in the school the Principal shall, in consultation with the Student Services Coordinator and the Director or Designate, make enquiries as to whether or not the introduction of the Therapy Dog into the school will affect the medical restrictions of other students in the school
2. The Division is not responsible for any fees or costs associated with the Therapy Dog.
 - 2.1. If the presence of a Therapy Dog will affect other students and staff with medical restrictions, then the principal will need to determine how the accommodations of all staff and students can be best achieved.
 - 2.2. The principal and Therapy Dog Handler will complete Form 332-1, School and Therapy Dog Agreement, as part of the planning prior to the dog beginning to provide therapy services in the school.
 - 2.3. The Therapy Dog Handler will be part of all planning as to the services the dog will provide in the school.
 - 2.4. The Therapy Dog Handler will be considered the Handler at all times and in control of the Dog when it is in the school.
 - 2.5. The Therapy Dog handler will train staff and students as to how to appropriately interact with the dog.

3. The Therapy Dog Handler must:
 - 3.1. Accept all liability that might be incurred as a result of the behaviour of the Therapy Dog while being present at a school;
 - 3.2. Provide proof of appropriate insurance coverage through St. John's (third party liability coverage of not less than \$2,000,000) for any damages caused by the Therapy Service Dog or any damages or injuries caused to the Therapy Dog, and shall provide proof of coverage annually;
 - 3.3. Participate in an annual review of the presence of the Therapy Dog at the school;
 - 3.4. Provide up-to-date proof of vaccinations and licensing of the Therapy Dog annually;
 - 3.5. As part of planning, make arrangements for the Therapy Dog to visit the school to familiarize it with the school site.
4. Considerations and limitations include:
 - 4.1. The school division may impose reasonable conditions or restrictions relating to:
 - 4.1.1. Restricting the presence of the Therapy Dog to specific areas in the school;
 - 4.1.2. Exclusion from access to specific areas where required by other laws (i.e., food preparation areas)
 - 4.2. The right for a Handler to be accompanied by a Therapy Dog does not apply if the Handler is not in control of the behavior of the Therapy Dog. The Therapy Dog will also be denied access to the school if it:
 - 4.2.1. Is not clean or has an offensive odor
 - 4.2.2. Urinates or defecates in inappropriate locations
 - 4.2.3. Vocalizes unnecessarily: barking, growling, howling, whining
 - 4.2.4. Shows aggression toward people
 - 4.2.5. Solicits or steals food or other items
 - 4.3. The agreement to have a Therapy Dog in school may be terminated by the Division if the dog's certification and/or licensing is not up to date.
5. The Principal and Therapy Dog Handler will complete Form 332-2 Therapy Dog Planning Checklist, to ensure all factors have been considered and planned for prior to the Dog being present in the school with students.
6. The completed agreement, insurance, and related documentation will be retained on file at the school and submitted to the Superintendent of Education responsible for Student Services.
7. The Principal will initiate annual reviews of the agreement and receipt of necessary documentation.

Reference: St. Johns Ambulance Therapy Dog Program
Service Dog Administrative Procedure 331