

THERAPY/COMFORT DOG POLICY

PURPOSE

The Monson School District supports the use of a therapy dog in the school setting as outlined in the contents of this policy. Research has shown that therapy dogs can support psychological and academic growth in students as well as increase the social skills and self-esteem in students. The School Committee understands the educational benefits of therapy dogs, and as such wishes to provide a policy outlining the use of a therapy dog within the District. The use of a therapy dog as outlined in this policy is meant to only be for the 2024-2025 school year. In order for this policy to continue, the Committee must meet and re-vote to continue the use of a therapy dog within the District at the end of the 2024-2025 school year. Furthermore, the School Committee retains the right to revoke or alter this policy by majority vote at any time.

DEFINITIONS

Therapy/Comfort Dog: a dog who has been individually trained, evaluated and registered with his/her/their handler to provide animal assisted activities, animal assisted therapy and animal assisted interactions within a school or other facility. Therapy dogs are not "emotional support animals" or "service animals."

Handler: An individual school district staff member or volunteer who owns a therapy/comfort dog and who has been individually trained, evaluated and registered with his/her/their therapy/comfort dog to provide animal assisted activities, animal assisted therapy and animal assisted interactions within a school or other facility. No staff member whose professional responsibilities would be limited and/or changed by the responsibility of serving as a handler can serve in that capacity. Such determination will be made by the Superintendent of Schools or his/her/their designee.

Temporary Handler: An approved school district staff member who is trained to handle the therapy/comfort dog in limited circumstances for instances such as when the handler must use the restroom, or respond to a situation where it would be inappropriate for the therapy dog to be present. The temporary handler is temporarily responsible for assuring appropriate control of the therapy/comfort dog, and compliance with the requirements set out in "daily operations" below. The temporary handler is a volunteer who may also take the dog in short timeframes to help support the needs of students, but must remain in control of the dog at all times.

PROCESS

A therapy/comfort dog is the personal property of the handler and is not the property of the school district. The handler shall assume full responsibility for the therapy/comfort dog's care, behavior and suitability for interacting with students and others in the school while the therapy/comfort dog is on school/district property.

As outlined in M.G.L. c 140 § 137, the dog handler will obtain a license for the dog in the city or town where the dog is kept. The license shall be kept up to date and displayed on the dog's collar at all times.

Before a handler is permitted to bring a therapy/comfort dog in school buildings or on school property the following is required:

- Requesting use of therapy/comfort dog: A handler who wishes to bring a therapy/comfort dog to school district property shall submit a written request to the superintendent or the superintendent's designee, for approval. The request shall be submitted for approval each school year and/or whenever the handler wishes to use a different therapy/comfort dog. Such approval may be rescinded at any time at the sole discretion of the superintendent.
- Once the superintendent or the superintendent's designee approves the request, a plan for dog visits shall be developed with the principal or the principal's designee. In cases where the principal is the handler, the superintendent will assist in the development of the plan.
- Training and Registration: The handler shall submit proof of registration as a therapy/comfort dog handler with each individual therapy/comfort dog he/she/they plans to bring to the school district. Such registration shall be from a therapy/comfort dog registering organization as determined by the superintendent. Such registration shall be from an organization that requires an evaluation of the therapy/comfort dog and handler prior to registration and at least every two years and shall remain current and in good standing at all times.
- Health and Vaccination: The handler shall submit proof from a licensed veterinarian that the therapy/comfort dog is in good health and has been immunized against diseases common to dogs. Such vaccinations shall be kept current and up to date all times. The therapy/comfort dog should also have flea and tick preventative medication, receipts of which will be shown to the Superintendent as proof of such preventative medications.
- Licensing: The handler shall submit proof of licensure from the local dog licensing authority.

DAILY OPERATIONS

Once a handler has been approved by the superintendent to bring a therapy/comfort dog on school district property, such handler shall adhere to the rules of his/her/their registering organization and the following rules of the school district:

- Identification: The handler and therapy dog shall wear appropriate identification issued by the registering organization identifying them as a registered handler and therapy/comfort dog. If said organization does not issue such identification, then the handler shall purchase such. The handler shall bring only an approved registered therapy/comfort dog onto school district property and may bring only one such dog at a time. The handler shall not bring young children along to the school district when handling a therapy/comfort dog.
- Health and Safety: The handler and school nurse, in collaboration, shall ensure that the therapy/comfort dog does not pose a health and safety risk to any student, employee, or other person at school prior to the animal working with students. The therapy/comfort dog will be brought to the school district only when properly groomed, bathed, free of illness or injury and of the temperament

appropriate for working with children and others in the schools.

- **Control:** The handler shall ensure that the therapy/comfort dog wears a collar or harness and a leash no longer than four feet and shall maintain control of the therapy dog by holding the leash at all times that the therapy/comfort dog is on school district property, including during breaks, unless holding such leash would interfere with the therapy dog's safe, effective performance of its work or tasks. However, the handler shall maintain control of the therapy/comfort dog at all times and shall not tether the therapy/comfort dog to any individual or object. There will be three approved "temporary handlers" in the school building at all times for instances when the handler must use the restroom or respond to a situation where it would be inappropriate for the therapy/comfort dog to be present.
- **Supervision and Care of Therapy/Comfort Dog:** The handler shall be solely responsible for the supervision and humane care of the therapy/comfort dog, including any feeding, exercising, and cleaning up after the therapy/comfort dog while the therapy/comfort dog is in a school building or on school property. The handler shall not leave the therapy/comfort dog unsupervised or alone on school property at any time and shall limit the therapy/comfort dog's work to two consecutive hours at a time. The school district is not responsible for providing any care, supervision or assistance to the therapy/comfort dog.
- **Authorized Area(s):** The handler shall ensure that the therapy/comfort dog has access to only such areas of the school buildings or properties that have been authorized by school district administrators and is specified in the aforementioned "Plan" provided by the superintendent.
- **Allergies and Aversions:** The handler shall remove the therapy/comfort dog to a separate area as designated by the school administrator in such instances where any student or school employee who suffers dog allergies or aversions is present in an office, hallway or classroom. The therapy/comfort dog shall at no time be permitted in the school cafeteria or areas where food is prepared.
- **Recordkeeping:** Volunteer handlers shall sign themselves and their therapy/comfort dog in upon arrival at any school and shall sign both out on departure from the building. Handlers who are school district staff shall sign in their therapy/comfort dog upon arrival and shall sign out their therapy dog upon departure.
- **Photographs:** The handler shall not take any photographs of students or staff with the therapy/comfort dog without first obtaining a photo release.
- **Fees and Gratuities:** The handler shall not charge a fee for the work he/she/they perform with the therapy/comfort dog, shall not borrow money or personal items or receive any personal gratuity, gift or tip, such as money or jewelry from students in the district.
- **Multiple Therapy/Comfort Dogs on Site:** The District has not approved the use of multiple therapy/comfort dogs on site at this time. Such approval will be subject to School Committee approval and vote.
- **Damages and Injuries:** The handler shall assume full responsibility and liability for any damage to school property or injury to district staff, students or others in the school caused by the therapy/comfort dog.

Exclusion or Removal from School District Property:

A therapy/comfort dog may be excluded from school district property if a school administrator or superintendent or his/her/their designee determines that: (1) The handler does not have control of the therapy/comfort dog; (2) The therapy/comfort dog is not housebroken; (3) The therapy/comfort dog presents a direct and immediate threat to others in the school; (4) The therapy/comfort dog's presence otherwise interferes with the educational program; or (5) Any other unforeseeable reason at the discretion of the superintendent. The handler shall immediately remove his/her/their therapy/comfort dog from school property when instructed to do so by a school administrator or the superintendent or his/her/their designee.

Serving as an owner/handler cannot interfere with the daily professional responsibilities/expectations of the staff member in his/her/their assigned role. Such determination will be made by the Superintendent of Schools or his/her/their designee.

At the beginning of every school year, a form will go out to all student parents/guardians along with the emergency contact information forms, indicating whether students have any health conditions that could be exacerbated by contact with a dog, or any history of trauma or fears with respect to dogs. This information will be used in determining the access to spaces within the school building that the dog will have.

COMPLAINTS

All complaints, issues and/or concerns regarding use of a therapy dog must be immediately reported to, and documented by, the superintendent, or his/her/their designee for prompt investigation and attention.

Monson Public Schools

Request for In-School Educational/Therapeutic Use of Therapy Dog

Per Monson School District Policy IMG-B, the use of a therapy dog for educational and/or therapeutic purposes must adhere to the following requirements:

Written Request

___Handler proposing such use must submit a written request to the superintendent. Request must include:

- ___proposed start date of introduction of the therapy dog into the school setting
- ___acknowledgement of requirement to submit new request for use of therapy dog to be received by the superintendent or his/her/their designee no later than August 1st preceding the new school year
- ___acknowledgement that any approved use of a therapy dog may be rescinded at any time by the superintendent or his/her/their designee
- ___acknowledgement that a plan for the use of the therapy dog, according to the provisions set forth in the Monson School Committee Policy IMG-B must be developed in concert with the superintendent or his/her/their designee

Plan Requirements

___Handler must submit proof from a licensed veterinarian that the therapy dog is in good health and has been immunized against diseases common to dogs*

- Such vaccinations shall be kept current at all times*

___Handler must submit proof to the superintendent or his/her/their designee that dog has received flea and tick medication*

___Handler must submit proof of licensure from the local dog licensing authority according to the rules and provisions of that local authority*

___Handler must submit a copy of an insurance policy that provides liability coverage for the work of the handler and therapy dog while the two are on school district property*

___Handler and therapy dog shall wear appropriate identification by the registering organization identifying them as a registered handler and therapy dog

___Handler must identify a temporary designee to provide supervision of the dog during circumstances in which it is neither possible nor appropriate for the dog to accompany the handler and/or staff members that may substitute as a handler that has volunteered for the position. ***All documentation will be housed with the handler at the school site and is available upon request.**

Submitted By:

Name of Handler

Date

Approved By:

Superintendent

Date