

# POLICY

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Instruction

## SUBJECT: THERAPY DOGS

The Ogdensburg City School District supports the implementation of a Therapy Dog pilot-program for the social and emotional benefit of its students. This pilot-program will begin with the 2023-2024 school year, be reviewed throughout the year, and a determination will be made to continue or discontinue the program by July 1, 2024. During the pilot-program a therapy dog will be allowed at each of the three school buildings, under the supervision of its handler.

**Therapy Dog** - A therapy dog is a dog trained to provide affection and comfort to students in the Ogdensburg City School District. The most important characteristic of a therapy dog is its temperament. A good therapy dog must be friendly, patient, confident, at ease in all situations, and gentle. Therapy dogs must enjoy human contact and be content to be petted and handled, sometimes clumsily. A therapy dog's primary job is to allow unfamiliar people to make physical contact with it and to enjoy that contact. Therapy dogs are not considered trained service dogs as described by the Americans with Disabilities Act. It is the expectation of the Ogdensburg City School District, to the extent possible, that the following minimal standards be satisfied:

1. A therapy dog will be clean, well groomed, and not have an offensive odor.
2. A therapy dog will not urinate or defecate in inappropriate locations.
3. A therapy dog will not annoy any member of the student body or school personnel by seeking attention.
4. A therapy dog will not vocalize unnecessarily.
5. A therapy dog will not show aggression towards people or other animals.
6. A therapy dog will not solicit or steal food or other items from the student body or school personnel.
7. A therapy dog will not interfere in any way with the educational process.
8. A therapy dog will not pose a health or safety threat to any student, school personnel, or other persons.

Therapy dogs are independently owned by school employees and must meet the standards of health as prescribed by veterinarians at the owner's expense. With the potential exception of required training for accreditation, the Ogdensburg City School District bears no financial responsibility for the care or feeding of the animal.

\*It is understood that therapy dogs are trained animals and may need retraining/owner intervention to correct certain behaviors.

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Therapy dogs in the school setting will be recommended by the Superintendent and approved by the Board of Education. Prior to approval the owners will provide:

1. Current proof of required inoculations, vaccination and/or immunizations from a licensed veterinarian.
2. Proof of health (such as a current certificate of health from a veterinarian)
3. Visible cleanliness of the dog with no sign of fleas/ticks or other health hazards such as intestinal parasites.
4. A visually healthy, alert, happy and not grossly over or under weight dog.
5. Proof of a physical and stool sample analysis. (Annually)
6. A copy of the owner's current homeowner's policy, renter's policy, or policy from an organization with appropriate liability coverage relating to animal/pet ownership.

These requirements must be met and minimally provided on an annual basis and at the request of the District.

All therapy dogs and owners will be tested and accredited by Therapy Dogs International (TDI), American Kennel's Club (AKC) or a comparable authority as determined by the Superintendent. With a valid certificate and while "working" at the school under the owner's supervision, the District's liability insurance will serve as secondary coverage.

The owner of the dog is solely responsible for the supervision and care of the therapy dog, including any feeding, exercising, and clean up while the animal is in the school building, on school property or acting as a representative of the school in any location. The District is not responsible for providing any care, supervision, or assistance for the therapy dog.

The owner of the therapy dog is solely responsible and liable for any damage to school property or injury to students, personnel, or other persons caused by the therapy dog. The owner indemnifies the school against all losses, claims, damages, liabilities, causes of action and expenses (including attorney fees) related to personal injuries to any person or pet or property damage resulting directly or indirectly from having the therapy dog at school.

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If any student or school employee assigned to the location in which the 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 and appropriate location.

The owner will provide a plan to be approved by district administration for:

- Restrictions on the length of time a dog can “work”
- Length and number of needed outdoor breaks
- Access to water and food
- Clean-up and disposal of waste
- Designated “home area” for the therapy dog with proper ventilation, space where stress and disturbance are minimized
- Cleaning and disinfection schedule of the “home area”
- A plan of action for fire drills and emergency events
- Use and sign-out of the therapy dog for use by other staff members
- Basic training for other staff members who sign-out and utilize the therapy dog. This
- “Basic Training” course must be completed by all staff members before they are able to utilize the therapy dog without the owner present.

At any time and for any reason the District Administration can suspend the use of the therapy dog on school property especially if it is determined that:

1. The owner does not have control of the therapy dog
2. The therapy dog presents a direct and immediate danger to others in the school
3. The animal’s presence interferes with any aspect of the educational process or operations of the District.
4. The BOE policy is not being adhered to.

Upon notification, the owner will be required to immediately remove the therapy dog from school premises.

**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 dogs.

**Bite Protocol** – If a therapy dog bites a person or another animal, the dog will not be allowed back on school property. The building principal will document the incident, withdraw approval of the application, and send a letter to the dog handler.

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The Building Principal shall notify parents and staff on an annual basis regarding the presence of therapy dogs in the school building.

*Adopted by the Ogdensburg City School District on: **January 17, 2023***