

## **Instruction**

### **Use of Certified Therapy Dogs in Schools**

The Bethel Public School district supports the use of certified therapy dogs for the benefit of its students subject to the conditions of this policy. Benefits from working or visiting with a certified therapy dog include reduced stress, improved physical and emotional well-being, lower blood pressure, decreased anxiety, improved self-esteem and normalization of the environment, increasing the likelihood of successful academic achievement by the student. Examples of activities that students may engage in with a certified therapy dog include petting and/or hugging the dog, speaking to the dog, giving the dog simple commands that the dog is trained to respond to and reading to the dog.

Animal Assisted Activities and Animal Assisted Interactions are non-goal-driven interactions where the specific content of the visit is spontaneous and is meant to provide motivational, educational and/or recreational activities that enhance the quality of life.

Animal Assisted Therapy is a goal-driven intervention which is directed and/or delivered by a health, human or education service professional and is meant to improve physical, social, emotional and/or cognitive functioning of an individual.

A certified therapy dog is a dog who has been individually trained, evaluated and registered with his/her 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."

A handler is an individual school district staff member or volunteer who owns a certified therapy dog and who has been individually trained, evaluated, certified and registered with his/her therapy dog to provide animal assisted activities, animal assisted therapy and animal assisted interactions within a school or other facility.

A certified therapy 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 dog's care, behavior and suitability for interacting with students and others in the school while the therapy dog is on school district property.

### **Certified Therapy Dog Standards and Procedures**

The following requirements must be satisfied before a certified therapy dog will be allowed in school buildings or on school district property:

**Request:** At the request of the principal or the principal's designee, a handler who wishes to bring a certified therapy dog to school district property shall submit a completed written request form to the Superintendent or the Superintendent's designee, for approval. (The request form is attached to this policy.) The request shall be submitted for approval each school year and/or whenever the handler wishes to use a different therapy 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.

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**Training and Certification:** The handler shall submit proof of certification and registration as a certified therapy dog handler with each individual therapy dog he or she plans to bring to the school district. Such registration or certification will be from an approved therapy dog organization as determined by the superintendent. These therapy dog organizations will require an evaluation of the therapy dog and handler prior to certification and that the team 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 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.

**Licensing:** The handler of the dog shall submit proof of licensure from the local dog licensing authority.

**Insurance:** The handler must submit a copy of an insurance policy that provides liability coverage for the work of the handler and certified therapy dog while the two are on school district property. Once a handler has been approved by the superintendent to bring a therapy dog on school district property, such handler shall adhere to the rules of his/her certifying and registering organization and the following rules of the school district:

**Identification:** The handler and therapy dog shall wear appropriate identification issued by the certifying and registering organization identifying them as a certified handler and therapy dog. The handler shall bring only certified therapy dogs 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 dog.

**Health and Safety:** The handler shall ensure that the certified therapy dog does not pose a health and safety risk to any student, employee, or other person at school and that the therapy dog is 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 certified therapy dog wears a standard collar, gentle lead or harness. Prong or choke collars are not acceptable. The handler uses a standard, non-elastic leash no longer than six feet and shall maintain control of the therapy dog by holding the leash at all times that the therapy 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 dog at all times and shall not tether the therapy dog to any individual or object.

**Supervision and Care of Certified Therapy Dog:** The handler shall be solely responsible for the supervision and humane care of the certified therapy dog, including any feeding, exercising, and cleaning up after the therapy dog while the therapy dog is in a school building or on school property, shall not leave the therapy dog unsupervised or alone on school property at any time and shall limit the therapy

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dog's work to two consecutive hours at a time without a break. The school district is not responsible for providing any care, supervision or assistance to the therapy dog.

**Authorized Area(s):** The handler shall ensure that the therapy dog has access to only such areas of the school buildings or properties that have been authorized by school district administrators.

**Allergies and Aversions:** The handler shall remove the certified therapy 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.

**Recordkeeping:** All handlers shall sign themselves and their certified therapy 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 dog upon arrival and sign him/her out on their departure.

**Photographs:** The handler shall not take any photographs of students or staff without first obtaining a photo release.

**Fees and Gratuities:** The handler provides visits with his/her certified therapy dog on a voluntary basis. They shall not charge a fee for the work they perform with the therapy dog, shall not borrow money or personal items or receive any personal gratuity, gift or tip. During the visit students, staff or other visitors shall refrain from feeding the therapy dog. Any special dog treats can be given directly to the handler.

**Multiple Certified Therapy Dogs on Site:** The handler shall confirm whether or not there will be any other therapy dog(s) on site prior to scheduling any visit with a certified therapy dog and shall take steps with appropriate staff to ensure that the dogs do not engage inappropriately while on school property. When multiple certified therapy dogs are engaged in a planned activity on school district property, the handlers shall ensure that the dogs have an opportunity to greet each other prior to entering the school building. Once inside the building, the handlers shall ensure that the dogs are each on a standard, non-elastic leash no longer than six feet, given work space at least eight feet from each other and are given no opportunity for contact or socialization with each other while working.

**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 certified therapy dog.

**Exclusion or Removal from School District Property:** A certified therapy dog may be excluded from school district property if a school administrator determines that: (1) The handler does not have control of

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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 therapy dog's presence otherwise interferes with the educational program. The handler shall immediately remove his/her therapy dog from school property when instructed to do so by a school administrator.

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#### Bethel Public Schools Request to use Therapy Dog in School

*Board of Education Policy 6213 governs the use of certified therapy dogs in schools. The request shall be submitted to the Superintendent of Schools (or Designee) for approval each school year and/or whenever the handler wishes to use a different therapy dog.*

Name of Handler:	
Handler Address:	
Handler Phone Number:	
Handler Email:	
Name of Dog:	
School where the Dog used:	
Please describe, in detail, what the dog will do at the school.	

Please attach the following to this form:

- Proof of registration as a therapy dog handler with the individual therapy dog to be used (Note: Such registration shall be from an organization that requires an evaluation of the therapy dog and handler prior to registration and at least every two years)
- 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 and up to date all times.
- Proof of licensure from the local dog licensing authority.
- 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's Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Principal's Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Director of Finance & Business Operations  
(Superintendent's Designee)

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date