

**NEW ALBANY FLOYD COUNTY
SCHOOLS**



"STUDENT CENTERED - FUTURE FOCUSED"

THERAPY DOG HANDBOOK

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WHAT IS A THERAPY DOG?

According to the Alliance of Therapy Dogs: “Their responsibilities are to provide psychological or physiological therapy to individuals other than handlers.”

- Stable temperaments, friendly, easy-going personalities
- They are encouraged to interact and be pet by a variety of people while they are on-duty
- Give children with learning disabilities confidence
- Owners of therapy dogs do not have the same rights as service dogs to be accompanied by the dog in establishments where they are not permitted

PURPOSE

Improve the culture and general mood of the school.

- Therapy dogs can provide many healing and positive effects including:
 - Increase in school attendance
 - Reduced stress and anxiety
 - Decreased feelings of depression loneliness, and feelings of isolation
 - Decrease in aggressive behaviors
 - Increased in socialization resulting in a sense of happiness and well-being
 - Increase in mental stimulation
- Make a connection with at-risk students, and give them a reason/incentive to come to school.
 - The emotional well-being of students is a large factor in their success. The presence of a therapy dog can give students a sense of happiness that allows them to perform better academically. Animals have been incorporated into schools in order to allow children to discuss issues of grief (Mockler, 2010). There are many children who struggle to open up to a teacher or counselor about issues that they are facing. Interaction with animals can relieve their anxiety and improve their mood (Siegel, 2004). The therapy dog will give our counselor opportunities to talk with children that otherwise wouldn't open up about their situation. Children may find comfort in talking to the dog, and in turn, be willing to share with a teacher.
 - Many children who experience emotional troubles often lack trust, and using the intervention of a dog may help the child to develop trust. Interacting with animals helps to decrease anxiety, manipulative/abusive behaviors, depression, increase self-esteem, self-worth, expression of feelings, and ability to trust (Chandler, 2001).

SERVICES/BENEFITS

Administrators, teachers, and counselors will refer students who, based on research, are likely to benefit from time spent with a therapy dog. These students include, but are not limited to:

- A. Students affected by stress and anxiety.
- B. Students needing help developing appropriate interpersonal and social skills.

- C. Students lacking motivation.
- D. Students struggling with low self-confidence and low self-esteem.
- E. Students reading below grade level.
- F. Students requiring assistance with anger management.

NAFCS SCHOOL BOARD POLICY

8390 - ANIMALS ON SCHOOL CORPORATION PROPERTY/THERAPY DOGS

The New Albany Floyd County Schools recognizes the use of therapy dogs in the classroom setting may have academic, social, and emotional benefits for students. The NAFCS School Board authorizes the presence of therapy dogs in District classrooms, subject to the provisions of this Policy and subject to Guidelines/Procedures established by the Administration.

Definitions:

***"Therapy Dog":** Therapy dogs are dogs who go with their owners to volunteer in settings such as schools, hospitals, and nursing homes for the purpose of providing affection and comfort to aid in a particular purpose, such as healing or learning. A therapy dog in a school setting serves the function of assisting students in the learning process while providing comfort and affection to specific students or to a group of students. Therapy dogs are not service dogs and do not have the same special access as service dogs. (source: American Kennel Club/AKC)*

- *Obedience tested and certified as Canine Good Citizens by the AKC, and*
- *Certified as a therapy dog (temperament tested) by an AKC Recognized Therapy Dog Organization. Therapy dogs are not "service animals" as defined by the Americans with Disabilities Act, 28 C.F.R. Part 35.*

***Reference NAFCS Policy 8390 for the complete version of this Board Policy.**

***Therapy Dog Application Process will be filled out completely and followed.**

PARENT/GUARDIAN NOTIFICATION - "OPT OUT"

The Building Principal will send out notifications via email and/or letter home to all Parents/Guardians of students in the building which hosts the dog therapy program in order to ensure full awareness of the program and to deter potential liability exposure. Parents/Guardians will be given the opportunity to have their child "opt out" of the program with proper notification.

REFERENCES

- Chandler, C.K. (2001). Animal-Assisted Therapy in Counseling and School Settings.
- Mockler, K. (2010). Pet Therapy: A New Way of Reaching Students with Additional Disabilities. *Odyssey: New Directions in Deaf Education*, 11(1), 23-24.
- Siegel, W. L. (2004). The Role of Animals in Education. *Revision*, 27(2), 17-26.