

Instruction

THERAPY DOGS

6163.33 (a)

Statement of Policy

Service animals. The Fairfield Board of Education (the “Board”) complies with all applicable federal and state laws prohibiting the exclusion of any person from any of its educational programs or activities, or the denial to any person of the benefits of any of its educational programs or activities because of a disability, subject to the conditions and limitations established by law. Accordingly, the Board shall make reasonable modifications to its policies, practices, and procedures to permit an individual with a disability to use a service animal on school property and/or at school-sponsored programs or activities in accordance with Title II of the Americans with Disabilities Act (“ADA”), applicable state laws.

Therapy dogs. The Board also permits individuals to apply for approval to bring a therapy dog onto school property, in accordance with the requirements of this policy.

I. Definitions

- A. “Therapy Dog Handler” is an individual who is responsible for the supervision and control of a therapy dog on school property or at a school-sponsored activity.
- B. “Therapy dog” is a dog that has been individually trained and certified to work with its owner or handler to provide emotional support, well-being, comfort, or companionship to Fairfield students. Therapy dogs have been trained to provide emotional support which positively impacts reading skills, emotional functioning, and communication skills. In addition, the use of therapy dogs may decrease anxiety, improve self-esteem, and increase overall academic achievement in students. Therapy dogs are not "service animals."

II. Therapy Dog Access to Board Property, Programs, and/or Activities

The following procedures must be used before a therapy dog will be allowed in school buildings or on school grounds:

- A. Request for therapy dog access: At the request of the Principal or Principal's designee, a therapy dog handler who wishes to bring a therapy dog to Fairfield Public Schools’ property for specialized programming or special circumstances shall submit a

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completed written request form to the Superintendent or Superintendent's designee, for written approval.

- B. Training and certification: The therapy dog handler shall submit proof of registration as a therapy dog handler with each therapy dog he or she plans to bring to Fairfield Public Schools. Such registration shall be from an organization that requires an evaluation of the therapy dog and handler prior to registration and on-going evaluation as required for registration. The certification must remain current at all times.
- C. License and vaccination: The therapy dog handler must submit proof of current licensure from the local licensing authority and proof of the therapy dog's current vaccinations and immunizations from a licensed veterinarian.
- D. Identification: The request for approval for access for a therapy dog must describe the manner in which the therapy dog will display appropriate identification as a therapy dog at all times while on school property or at a school-sponsored activity.
- E. Insurance. The therapy dog handler must submit a copy of an insurance policy that provides liability coverage for the therapy dog while on school property, naming Fairfield Public Schools as an additional insured on the policy.
- F. Annual approval: A request shall be submitted for approval each school year and shall be specific to the individual therapy dog described in the request form. If a handler wishes to bring a different therapy dog onto school property, a separate request for approval must be filed.
- G. Revocation of approval: Such approval may be revoked at any time at the sole discretion of the Superintendent.
- H. Visitation plan approval: Once the Superintendent or designee approves the request, a written plan for therapy dog visits shall be developed with the Principal or Principal's designee, who shall have the discretion to specify the time, place, and manner of any visits and who must account for potentially impacted students.

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- I. The Principal or Principal's designee shall notify parents of students who may have access to the therapy dog not less than one week prior to the therapy dog visiting the school to ensure the individual needs of all students may be accommodated prior to the therapy dog entering the school.

III. Management of Therapy Dogs; Responsibilities of Handlers and Liability

- A. A therapy dog must harnessed, leashed, or tethered while on school property or at a school-sponsored program or activity. A therapy dog must be under the control of the therapy dog handler at all times while on school property or at a school-sponsored program or activity.
- B. All therapy dogs must be housebroken.
- C. Therapy dogs are the sole responsibility of their handlers, who must take appropriate precautions to prevent damage or injury to persons or property from the actions of their therapy dogs. The Board shall not be responsible for the care or supervision of therapy dogs, including but not limited to the cost of veterinary care, supplies or equipment; provision of food and/or water; walking the therapy dog; responding to the therapy dog's toileting needs, including accidents; and/or grooming the therapy dog. Accordingly, handlers are liable for any harm, damage, or injury caused by the therapy dog to students, staff, visitors, and/or property to the same extent other individuals who cause harm, damage or injury to persons or property are responsible for such harm, damage or injuries.
- D. Handlers shall ensure that therapy dogs comply with all generally applicable state and local animal control and public health requirements, including, but not limited to vaccinations, registration, and/or licensure requirements.
- E. All therapy dogs should be kept clean and groomed to avoid shedding and dander, where possible. All therapy dogs should be treated for, and kept free of, fleas and ticks.

IV. Exclusion and/or Removal of a Therapy Dog

Therapy dogs may be excluded at any time as determined at the discretion of the Superintendent, the Principal or any other responsible administrator of the Fairfield Public Schools. Reasons for removal include, but are not limited to:

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- a. The therapy dog handler does not have control of the therapy dog;
- b. The therapy dog is not housebroken;
- c. The therapy dog presents a threat to others; or
- d. The animal's presence otherwise interferes with the educational process.

V. Conflicting Disabilities

In the event that an individual has an allergy significant to qualify as a disability or has another disability that conflicts with the presence of a therapy dog, the individual (or his/her parent/guardian) shall immediately notify a building administrator or the school official in charge of school-sponsored programs or activities. In such cases, the therapy dog shall be excluded.

Legal References:

State Law:

Conn. Gen. Stat. § 22-339b
Conn. Gen. Stat. § 46a-44
Conn. Gen. Stat. § 46a-64

Federal law:

Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990, 42 U.S.C. § 12101 *et. seq.*
28 C.F.R. § 35.104
28 C.F.R. § 35.136
28 C.F.R. § 36.302(c)

Adopted 11/28/2023

Fairfield Public Schools

Request for Access for Therapy Dog

The request shall be submitted to the Superintendent or designee for approval each school year and/or whenever the handler wishes to use a different therapy dog. ("Handler" indicates the dog's handler, whether employee or non-employee.)

Name of handler _____

Handler address _____

Handler email _____ Handler phone number _____

Name and breed of dog _____

School locations where the dog will be used _____

Please describe, in detail, what the dog will do at the school _____

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 on-going evaluation as required for registration. It must remain current at all times.)
- 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 therapy dog while on school property, naming Fairfield Public School District as an additional insured on the policy.
- Description of the identification that the therapy dog will display (e.g. vest, etc.).
- In addition to the attached forms, the therapy dog handler attests that he/she has read and understand the requirements of this policy 6163.33.

Therapy Dog Handler's signature _____ Date _____

Principal's signature _____ Date _____

Superintendent's
(or designee's) signature _____ Date _____