

**Program Objectives:**

The therapy dogs shall serve as a therapeutic resource to staff, students, and the Seneca High School Dist. 160 community.

The therapy dog will assist in developing and enhancing relationships, improving school culture and school connectedness.

The program will serve to support social and emotional learning.

The therapy dog handler(s) will ensure that the services of the therapy dog program remain professional, ethical, and beneficial, and continues to align with the vision and mission of Seneca Township High School Dist. #160.

**THE USE OF THERAPY DOGS IN SCHOOL**

Seneca High School Dist. 160 supports the use of therapy dogs in the school for the social and emotional benefit of its students. Only certified therapy dogs will be considered, and those therapy dogs should be supported by the School Social Worker and other designee.

**Use of the Therapy Dog in School**

Benefits from working or visiting with a therapy dog include reduced stress, improved physical and emotional well-being, lower blood pressure, decreased anxiety, improve self-esteem and normalization of the environment, increasing the likelihood of successful academic achievement by the student(s). Examples of activities that students may engage in with a 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 therapy can be 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 function of an individual. Animal assisted therapy can also enhance existing academic and social emotional support programs for one or more students.

A therapy dog is a dog that 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 the same as “emotional support animals” nor are they “service animals” as that term is defined under the Americans with Disabilities Act. The handler(s) is an individual school district staff member who has been individually trained, evaluated, and registered with the therapy dog to provide animal assisted activities, animal assisted therapy, and animal assisted interactions within a school or other facility.

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.

The handler shall be solely responsible for the supervision and humane care of the therapy dog, including any feeding, exercising, and cleaning up after the therapy dog while the therapy dog is in the school building or on school property. The handler shall not leave the therapy dog unsupervised or alone

on school property at any time. The therapy dog may be left in the care of the designee. It is beneficial to have two trained handler(s) within the building.

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

**Health and Safety:** The Board of Education shall ensure that the 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 therapy 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 dog is not in an enclosed space such as a classroom or office. A leash shall be used during student interactions 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.

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

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

### **Therapy Dog Housing and Care**

The School District recognizes a primary handler as the primary caretaker of the therapy dog. The primary caretaker is responsible for providing housing, shelter, feeding, and general animal care throughout the duration of the program. The School District recognizes a co-handler that will care for the dog in the event the primary handler is away on business, meetings, vacation, or other absence from school. Both the primary and co-handler must attend the accredited handler training program as provided by the animal training facility. Only trained handler(s) are able to care for the therapy dog.

### **Allergies and Aversions**

If a student has dog/dander allergies, the handler will remove the therapy dog from the area and notify the school principal.

If a student has an aversion or fear of dogs, the handler will remove the dog from the area, and notify the school principal.