

THERAPY DOG PILOT PROGRAM

In December, a pet therapy team, Cricket Potter and her whippet Teddy, would like to start up a pilot program at the Lincoln Public Schools. Cricket and Teddy have gone through an extensive training program and are certified by Therapy Dog International. The team would begin by visiting the schools for a 2-hour session once each week. After a trial period, the team would consider adding a second session each week, either at Lincoln School or Hanscom Schools. During the session, Cricket and Teddy would meet with a small group of children or with an individual child for about 30 minutes per session. The therapy would focus on social/emotional needs and/or reading needs (i.e., children with reading needs reading to Teddy). Research supports the efficacy of pet therapy in addressing both types of needs within the school setting.

Teachers/specialists will recommend children whom they believe would benefit from this therapy. Permission slips would be sent home to parents/guardians to obtain approval for their children participating in this program.

The school nurse would review the health records to ensure compliance with the medical needs of children (e.g., dog allergies). To minimize the exposure of Teddy to the general school population, Cricket/Teddy would enter/exit the building at the door closest to the room where they would be working, and an effort would be made to limit and avoid movement through the hallways at class passing times.

USE OF A THERAPY DOG IN SCHOOLS

Description

The Lincoln Public Schools supports the use of Therapy Dogs in the school setting. Research has shown that therapy dogs support psychological and academic growth while increasing social skills and self-esteem in children and adolescents. 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 categorized as service animals. Therapy dogs work with students identified by the district. A therapy dog has been through training and is registered with the handler to provide support to identified activities and interactions within the school. The handler is a volunteer and owner of the dog. The handler is with the dog at all times and assumes full responsibility for the dog's care, behavior and assessment of ability to interact with students and others in the school.

Process and Procedure for Use of a Therapy Dog in School

Request for Support

- Staff will request support from a registered therapy dog for a student requiring reading or emotional support to the Principal or the Principal's designee. The staff member will complete a request form and submit it to the Principal or designee.
- The registered handler or organization providing the support will submit a form for providing service to the school
- The registered handler or organization will enter into and sign a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with the school district to assume responsibility of the therapy dog and to agree to confidentiality regarding students within the building.
- Parents/guardians will be notified and provide consent before their child works with the therapy dog and handler while at school.
- Once all forms are signed, the Principal or Principal's designee will develop a plan for the type of support requested and coordinate the times.

Training and Registration

- The handler will submit proof of registration as a therapy dog handler for each individual therapy dog they plan to bring into the school. Registration may be from such organizations as Therapy Dogs International, Dog B.O.N.E.S (Dogs Building Opportunities for Nurturing and Emotional Support), Pets and People or from any other organizations approved by the Superintendent. Organizations considered must require an evaluation of the therapy dog and handler prior to registration and on-going as required for registration.

Vaccination and Wellness of Therapy Dogs

- Proof of vaccination and wellness will be provided by the handler to the Principal or the Principal's designee. Updated vaccinations will be provided as appropriate.

Proof of Insurance & Safety

- Proof of Liability insurance for the therapy dog and handler will be submitted to the Principal or the Principal's designee. As part of the MOU, the handler or the agency will acknowledge such coverage and release of liability for the school district.
- The handler will ensure the therapy dog does not pose a health and safety risk to students, staff or other people visiting the school. The handler will only bring in one dog at a time.
- The handler will ensure appropriate collars, leashes or harnesses will be worn by the therapy dog and the handler will maintain control of the therapy dog by holding the leash while the dog is in the school or on school property unless holding onto the leash would interfere with the therapy dog's performance of work.
- Handler's shall wear a visitor's pass while in the school and any other appropriate identification provided by the registering organization.
- The handler will be responsible for the supervision and care of the therapy dog. The school district is not responsible for providing care or supervision to the therapy dog.
- The handler will follow the rules of the district while in the school building or on school property and will access only areas of the building authorized by the Principal or the Principal's designee

Allergies and Aversion

- If a student has dog/dander allergies, the handler will remove the therapy dog to a designated area assigned by the School Principal or the Principal's designee.
- If a student has an aversion or a fear of dogs, the handler will remove the therapy dog to a designated area assigned by the School Principal or the Principal's designee.

Exclusion or Removal from the School or District Property

The handler will be asked to leave the school grounds or terminate services if:

- The handler does not have control of the therapy dog.
- The therapy dog is not housebroken
- The therapy dog presents a threat to others in the school
- The therapy dog interferes with the educational program in the school
If asked by District Administration, the Principal or Principal's designee, the handler will remove the dog from school property immediately.

The Principal or Principal's designee will provide all documentation to the Administrator of Student Services for final approval.

Staff Request for Use of a Therapy Dog

Name of Staff Member:

Date:

Name of Student:

Grade of Student:

Does the student have any known allergies (please check with school nurse)? Yes/No

Does the student have any known fear of dogs or animals? Yes/No

Brief reason for request:

Handler Request to Use a Therapy Dog in School

Name of Handler:

Name of Organization/Affiliation

Handler Contact Information

Email:

Phone Number:

Date:

Name of Dog:

Breed of Dog:

School where the dog will be used:

Number of hours in the school setting per day/week:

Please attach the following:

1. Proof of registration as a therapy dog handler and dog to be used (registration should be current and within the last two years).
2. Proof from the veterinarian that the dog is in good health and has up-to-date immunizations.
3. Copy of insurance policy providing liability coverage for the work of the handler and therapy dog while on school property

Handlers Signature:

Date:

Principal's Signature:

Date:

Administrator for Student Services Signature:

Date:

Parent/Guardian Permission to Participate with a Therapy Dog and Handler

Dear Parents/Guardians,

Your child has been invited to participate in the Therapy Dog Program within the school setting. Therapy dogs are trained to work with children in schools to promote social-emotional wellness, communication skills, and to increase academic performance in reading. The handler is the owner of the dog and both have been through a training program to become registered to perform this service.

Below is a permission form for you to complete and return to the teacher if you would like your child to participate in this unique opportunity.

Sincerely,
Mary Emmons
Administrator for Student Services
Lincoln Public Schools

Name of Parent/Guardian:
Name of Child:

I, _____, parent/guardian of _____
give my permission for participation with the therapy dog the district has approved to provide support to my child. The reason for this support may include a focus on social-emotional skills and/or reading needs.

Signature of Parent/Guardian

Date

Dear Parents & Guardians,

I am writing to inform you that the Lincoln Public Schools will be piloting a therapy dog program in our school district this year. Therapy Dogs International will be providing the dog and trainer to the district. This is a wonderful opportunity for our school community. Research has shown that therapy dogs support psychological growth and increase social skills and self-esteem in children and adolescents. Therapy dogs have been trained to provide emotional support, positively impacting reading progress, emotional functioning and communication skills. If your child is selected to participate in the pilot, you will receive a separate letter with more specific information about the therapy dog and the program along with a consent form giving permission for your child to participate. We understand this information may be important to you if your child has been diagnosed with any allergies to certain animals or if your child is fearful of dogs.

The Lincoln Public Schools will be providing additional information to answer questions and to advise all members of the school community as to the involvement and goals of therapy dogs in school. As noted above, this letter is intended to provide initial notice of the plan to include a therapy dog in school, in the event that your child has any allergies related to animals. In that regard, please note that school personnel will remain vigilant to ensure that all school buildings continue to be adequately cleaned and ventilated.

Should you have any questions at this time, please feel free to contact this office. We look forward to working with you as this pilot program is implemented. On behalf of everyone in the Lincoln Public Schools, I thank you in advance for your anticipated cooperation and support of this therapy dog pilot program!

Sincerely,
Mary Emmons
Administrator for Student Services