

**I. OVERVIEW**

The Elkin City Schools Board of Education supports the use of therapy dogs in accordance with the terms of this policy. The Board of Education acknowledges research findings that confirm the physical, social, cognitive, emotional, and environmental benefits resulting from the use of therapy dogs, including enhancing psychological development, improving social skills, and increasing self-esteem. Research confirms that working or visiting with a therapy dog can reduce stress, improve physical and emotional well-being, lower blood pressure, decrease anxiety, improve self-esteem, improve the educational environment, and increase the likelihood of successful academic achievement. Examples of activities in which students may engage with a therapy dog include petting and/or hugging the dog, speaking to the dog, giving the dog simple commands to which, the dog is trained to respond, and reading to the dog.

**II. CLASSIFICATIONS**

- A. Therapy Dog. A therapy dog is a dog individually trained, evaluated, and registered by an approved therapy dog training organization to provide animal assisted activities and interactions within a school or other facility. Therapy dogs are not “emotional support animals” or “service animals.”
- B. Therapy Dog Handler. A therapy dog handler is an individual school district employee who has been individually trained, evaluated, and registered to provide animal assisted activities and animal assisted interactions within a school or other facility.

**III. THERAPY DOG STANDARDS**

- A. The school district shall acquire ownership of a properly trained and certified therapy dog. The school district shall be responsible for the therapy dog’s care and shall designate the individual school district employee to serve as the therapy dog handler. The therapy dog shall be registered with a recognized therapy dog organization approved by the Superintendent. The therapy dog handler shall be trained and registered as a therapy dog handler by a recognized therapy dog organization approved by the Superintendent.
- B. The Superintendent shall approve any request for use of the therapy dog. Following approval of such request, a plan and a schedule for visits by the therapy dog shall be developed with the school’s principal.
- C. The therapy dog shall be in good health and free of any disease common to dogs. The therapy dog handler shall submit proof from a licensed veterinarian of the dog’s health and current immunizations.

- D. The therapy dog shall wear appropriate identification issued by the registering organization identifying it as a therapy dog.
- E. The therapy dog handler 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 having the temperament appropriate for working with children and others in the schools. The principal (or his/her designee) shall alert all staff, students, and parents/guardians of the expected presence of the therapy dog.
- F. The therapy dog 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 on school district property except when holding such leash would interfere with the therapy dog's safe and effective performance of its work or tasks. However, the therapy dog handler shall maintain control of the therapy dog at all times and shall not tether the therapy dog to any individual or object.
- G. The therapy dog handler shall be responsible for the supervision and care of the therapy dog, including feeding, exercising, and cleaning up after the therapy dog. The school district shall be responsible for all costs incurred in the supervision and care of the therapy dog.
- H. The therapy dog handler shall ensure that the therapy dog has access to only such areas of a school buildings or other school property that have been authorized by school district administrators.
- I. The therapy dog handler shall remove the therapy dog to a separate area designated by the school administrator in the event a student or other person who suffers dog allergies or other aversions to the dog is present in an office, hallway or classroom. The therapy dog handler will consult with the school principal and school nurse to discuss any expected allergies and steps that will be taken to limit, if necessary, a therapy dog's access to certain building areas.
- J. The school district is responsible for any damage to school property or injury to students, staff, or others caused by the therapy dog.
- K. The therapy dog may be excluded from school property if a school administrator determines that the therapy dog handler does not have control of the therapy dog, that the therapy dog is not housebroken, that the therapy dog presents a direct and immediate threat to others in the school, or the therapy dog's presence otherwise interferes with the educational program. The therapy dog handler shall

immediately remove the therapy dog from school property when instructed to do so by a school administrator.

- L. The Superintendent shall develop administrative regulations for implementing this policy.

Adopted (ECS Exclusive Policy): January 24, 2022