



THERAPY DOGS IN SCHOOLS

Background

Therapy dogs are interactive dogs trained and certified to work for a handler to provide affection, comfort and love to many people in many different settings. The presence of a therapy dog can decrease anxiety and provide a level of comfort that enables students to work through a variety of challenging issues. Their responsibilities are to provide psychological or physiological therapy to individuals other than their handlers. It is important to note that therapy dogs are **not** service dogs. Service dogs are trained to perform tasks to ease their handlers' disability, helping them to attain safety and independence.

Definitions

Child Certified Therapy Dog Team This refers to a handler and dog team that have successfully passed the tests and monitored visits necessary to be certified to work with children as well as adults. In British Columbia, this certification can be granted only from a recognized therapy organization (e.g. St. John's Ambulance therapy dog program, Companion Paws therapy program, Vancouver Eco Village therapy dog program).

Therapy Dog A dog that works with its owner/handler as a team to improve a student's physical, social, emotional, or cognitive functioning. A therapy dog can be useful for educational and motivational effectiveness for participants.

The Handler An adult dog handler that was part of the certification process for the therapy dog. The adult dog handler must accompany its therapy dog at all times.

Procedures

1. Criteria for Use of Therapy Animals in Schools:

- 1.1 The therapy dog and handler must be trained and annually certified by one of these recognized training schools:
 - St. John's Ambulance Therapy Dog Program;
 - Companion Paws Therapy Program; and
 - Vancouver Eco Village Therapy Dog Program.
- 1.2 The introduction of the service dog to a school community must not create barriers to students' learning.

2. Application

A handler who wishes to apply to use their therapy dog must provide the following information:

- 2.1 Provide a letter to the school district requesting the therapy dog admittance;
- 2.2 Provide a certificate of training for the therapy dog and handler from an organization approved by the Canadian Kennel Club Association;

- 2.3 Accept responsibility for the actions of the therapy dog by signing a school district release of liability;
- 2.4 Attain and provide the school district with a copy of liability insurance that covers possible injuries or property damage; and
- 2.5 Annually, provide the school district with proof of a municipal dog license, proof of annual re-certification from the appropriate agency and proof of up-to-date vaccinations provided by a doctor of veterinary medicine confirming the service dog is in good health.

3. School District/School Responsibilities

- 3.1 Consult with the handler, safe school's coordinator and director of learning support services, to determine:
 - 3.1.1 The purpose and function of the therapy dog;
 - 3.1.2 The role/duties of the therapy dog handler;
 - 3.1.3 Arrangement for the therapy dog and handler team to visit the school or worksite outside of regular hours in order to familiarize it with the building prior to commencement of service;
 - 3.1.4 A timetable for the introduction of the therapy dog to the school/class; and
 - 3.1.5 Rules of conduct around the therapy dog put together for students, staff and the public.

4 Notifications

- 4.1 The following letters shall be forwarded to all students or colleagues, to inform:
 - 4.1.1 Of the arrival of the therapy dog, its purpose, rules and regulations regarding the existence of the therapy dog. (Form 154-1 Therapy Dogs in Schools – Letter to the School Community);
 - 4.1.2 The other students or colleagues where the therapy dog will be present to elicit information concerning allergies or extreme phobias. (Form 154-2 Letter to the Families of Children in the Class(es); and
 - 4.1.3 Inform all staff including teachers, education assistants, custodians, support staff, volunteers and health and safety representatives of the presence of the therapy dog(s). (Form 154-3 Notice: Therapy Dog in School Today).

5. Removing or Excluding a Therapy Dog

The school district may limit, remove or exclude from school facilities or property, any therapy dog that no longer is meeting the annual certification of the recognized training school, is no longer deemed necessary for the original therapeutic intent or for reasons that may include: aggression, allergies, accidents, or interference with teaching.

6. Restrictions and Off-Limits for Therapy Dogs

The determination to restrict the access of a therapy dog to specific programs or areas of the school facility will be on a case-by-case basis.

7. Conflict Resolution

Employees, students/parents of a student with medical issues that are impacted by dogs (such as respiratory diseases) should contact the school principal or their supervisor if they have a concern about exposure to a therapy dog.

The school principal in collaboration with the director of learning support services or, in the case of an employee, the director of human resources and/or the supervisor and, if necessary, a representative from the accredited organization, will facilitate a process to resolve the conflict that considers the needs/accommodations of all persons involved.

Related Forms: [Form 154-1 Therapy Dogs in Schools – Letter to School Community](#)
[Form 154-2 Therapy Dog – Letter to the Families of Children in the Class\(es\)](#)
[Form 154-3 NOTICE – Therapy Dog in School Today](#)

Related Procedures: OP 430 School Volunteers/Volunteer Team Coaches