



Book	Policy Manual
Section	700 Property
Title	Therapy Dogs in Schools
Code	718

## **Purpose**

The Board adopts this policy to ensure that individuals with disabilities are permitted to participate in and benefit from district programs, activities and services, and to ensure that the district does not discriminate on the basis of disability.

## **Definition**

**Therapy Dog** - a therapy dog is a dog that has been individually trained, evaluated, and certified to work with its handler to provide animal-assisted activities, animal-assisted therapy, and animal-assisted interactions within the school or other facility. The therapy dog must be well-behaved and have a temperament that is suitable for interaction with students and others in a public school.

Therapy dogs are the personal property of the handler and are not owned by the district. Therapy dogs are **not** "service animals," as that term is used in the Americans with Disabilities Act.

**Handler** - a handler is an individual that has been individually trained, evaluated, and certified to work with a particular therapy dog. The handler and therapy dog must be trained and certified as a team to provide animal-assisted activities, animal-assisted therapy, and animal-assisted interactions within a school or other facility. For purposes of this policy, a handler must also be either a district employee or an approved volunteer.

**Certification** - there is presently no official and universally recognized qualification process for therapy dogs. For purposes of this policy, a therapy dog and its handler must be certified by a therapy dog certification organization recognized by the American Kennel Club. Examples of therapy dog certification organizations are:

1. Animal Friends Therapets
2. Petco Therapy Dog Certification and Training
3. Love on a Leash
4. Therapy Dogs International

## **Authority**

The Charters Valley School District supports the use of therapy dogs for the benefit of its students subject to the conditions of this policy. Research has shown that therapy dogs have several social, emotional, and academic benefits for students. Therapy dogs may reduce stress, decrease anxiety, lower blood pressure, increase a sense of connection, teach empathy and interpersonal skills, help develop social skills, increase student engagement, increase school attendance, increase motivation, and increase reading and writing levels (due to decreased learner anxiety). A therapy dog aligns with the academic, social, and behavioral goals of the district.

## **Guidelines**

The following requirements must be satisfied before a therapy dog will be permitted in school buildings or on school grounds:

1. **Request** – A handler who wants to bring a therapy dog to school must submit a written request form to the Superintendent. The request form shall be developed by the Superintendent. The request must be renewed each school year or whenever a different therapy dog is used.
2. **Registration** – The handler shall have proof of registration and certification for the therapy dog and handler from an organization that requires an evaluation of the therapy dog and handler at least every two (2) years and shall remain current and in good standing at all times. In the case of a training program, permission must be requested by the Superintendent who shall also provide guidelines and expectations for training programs.
3. **Health and Vaccination** – The handler shall submit proof from a licensed veterinarian that the therapy dog is in good health and has been immunized against diseases common to dogs. Such vaccines shall be kept current at all times. The therapy dog must be clean, well-groomed, in good health, and housebroken.
4. **Insurance** – The handler shall submit a copy of an insurance policy that provides liability coverage for the handler and therapy dog while the two are on district property.
5. **Proof of Licensure** – The therapy dog must be licensed with the local dog-licensing agency.
6. **Identification** – The handler and therapy dog must wear appropriate identification issued by the district while on district property.
7. **Control** – The handler shall ensure that the therapy dog wears a collar or harness and a leash no longer than four (4) feet and shall maintain control of the therapy dog by holding the leash at all times the therapy dog is on school property, unless holding such leash would interfere with the therapy dog's safe, effective performance of its task. The handler shall maintain control of the therapy dog at all times.
8. **Supervision and Care of the Therapy Dog** – The handler is responsible for the supervision and care of the therapy dog, including cleaning up after the therapy dog while the dog is on school property. The handler shall not leave the therapy dog unsupervised on school property at any time.
9. **Disruption** – The therapy dog must not disrupt the educational process by barking, seeking attention, or any other disruptive behavior.
10. **Authorized Areas** – 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.

11. **Allergies and Aversions** – The handler shall remove the therapy dog to a separate area, as designated by the school administrator, in such instances where any student or school employee who suffers dog allergies or aversion is present in an office, hallway, or classroom. All students and staff shall wash their hands after interaction with the therapy dog.
12. **Notification** – An annual notification shall be included in the student/parent handbook of the presence of a therapy dog to allow parents/guardians the opportunity to present any concerns to having their student interact with a therapy dog and for the district to plan for and implement any necessary accommodations.
13. **Damages and Injuries** – The handler of the therapy dog is solely responsible and liable for any damage to school property or injury to personnel, students, or others caused by the therapy dog. The handler shall fully indemnify the district for any damage to person or property caused by the therapy dog (see Insurance above).
14. **Exclusion or Removal From District Property** – A therapy dog may be excluded from school district property if a school administrator determines that:
  - a. The handler does not have control of the therapy dog;
  - b. The therapy dog is not housebroken;
  - c. The therapy dog presents a direct and immediate threat to others in the school; or
  - d. The therapy dog's presence otherwise interferes with the educational program. The handler shall immediately remove their therapy dog from school property when instructed to do so by a school administrator.
15. **Students** – Students are never to be left alone with a therapy dog; a designated handler must always be present. Dogs may be left with a non-handler adult for brief periods of time when children are not present and will not have access to the dog. When the dog is left unattended, it should be in a room or office with closed doors and no access to students and staff.
16. **Privilege** – Utilization of a therapy dog is a privilege and not a right. Authorization to bring a therapy dog into the school setting is solely within the discretion of the district, and permission may be terminated should the handler or dog behave in a way deemed unprofessional or unsafe.

### **Delegation of Responsibility**

The handler shall assume full responsibility for the dog's care, behavior, and suitability for interacting with students and others in the school while the therapy dog is on district property. Only the Superintendent, in consultation with the building principal, is authorized to permit the use of a therapy dog and handler.