



RED RIVER VALLEY SCHOOL DIVISION DIVISION SCOLAIRE VALLÉE de la RIVIÈRE-ROUGE

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Pet Therapy Program Guidelines

Purpose

Pet therapy is a research based practice to support students who are struggling. Research shows that pet therapy can benefit students psychologically and physiologically. Many students living with sensory and anxiety issues as a result of disorders such as Autism Spectrum Disorder, Alcohol Spectrum Disorder, Down Syndrome, Anxiety Disorder, as well as many other disorders, struggle with positive interactions with their surroundings and peers. Trained dogs can reduce anxiety so that students can interact with peers, adults, their environment and the curriculum. A trained dog and handler can help children build confidence, empathy and responsibility while providing comfort and security.

In Red River Valley School Division, the dog handler must be a teacher or clinician who has completed certification through St. John Ambulance Association. The teacher or clinician will have experience in providing positive behavior support to students. The teacher/clinician is not only responsible for handling the dog but is also responsible for collaborating with school teams in regards to the student's programming.

Criteria

- All therapy dogs are to be certified and temperament tested by St. John Ambulance Association.
- The therapy dog handler and the dog shall be trained and regulated by the St. John Ambulance Association.
- All dogs must have all current vaccinations.
- Written permission from parents or legal guardians is required for students to be involved in pet therapy.

Role of Student Services

- The Student Services Administrator is informed of Pet Therapy Programs in the Red River Valley School Division.
- The Student Services Administrator is responsible to maintain all pertinent records regarding the pet, including vaccinations, illness, age, and training.

Role of School Administrator

- Administrators are involved in the student specific plan and approve the use of dog therapy in the student's program. Other team members involved in the planning may include parents, resource teacher, guidance counselor, classroom teacher and clinicians.
- Administrators inform staff if a therapy dog will be present in the school.
- Administrators will notify staff and students with allergies that the therapy dog will be in a specific room.
- Administrators will establish a location where pet therapy can take place.
- Administrators will create a plan for managing the therapy dog before and after the program.

Role of Dog Handler

- The dog is to be under the care of the therapy dog handler at all times during the program.
- After the program is complete, the dog handler is responsible for following the plan as outlined by the administrator.
- The dog handler will ensure that supplies for hand washing are available.
- The dog handler will control the therapy dog so that the therapy dog will not lick individuals, touch any toys or supplies.