

West Bend-Mallard Community  
School District

Therapy Dog Handbook



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## **What is a therapy dog?**

According to the Alliance of Therapy Dogs: “Their responsibilities are to provide psychological or physiological therapy to individuals other than handlers.”

- Stable temperaments, friendly, easy-going personalities
- They are encouraged to interact and be pet by a variety of people while they are on-duty
- Give children with learning disabilities confidence
- Owners of therapy dogs do not have the same rights as service dogs to be accompanied by the dog in establishments where they are not permitted

## **Purpose**

### **Improve the culture and general mood of the school.**

- Therapy dogs provide many healing effects including:
  - o Reduced stress and anxiety
  - o Decreased feelings of depression loneliness, and feelings of isolation
  - o Decrease in aggressive behaviors
  - o Increased in socialization resulting in a sense of happiness and well-being
  - o Increase in mental stimulation

### **Make a connection with at-risk students, and give them a reason to come to school.**

- The emotional well being of students is a large factor in their success. The presence of a therapy dog can give students a sense of happiness that allows them to perform better academically. Animals have been incorporated into schools in order to allow children to discuss issues of grief (Mockler, 2010). There are many children who struggle to open up to a teacher or counselor about issues that they are facing. Interaction with animals can relieve their anxiety and improve their mood (Siegel, 2004). The therapy dog will give our counselor opportunities to talk with children that otherwise wouldn't open up about their situation. Children may find comfort in talking to the dog, and in turn, be willing to share with a teacher.
- Many children who experience emotional troubles often lack trust, and using the intervention of a dog may help the child to develop trust. Interacting with animals helps to decrease anxiety, manipulative/abusive behaviors, depression, increase self-esteem, self-worth, expression of feelings, and ability to trust (Chandler, 2001).

### **Improve literacy skills**

- Reading to dogs can eliminate the fear of judgment for many children. Many studies have shown that students are able to improve their reading ability because of the increased motivation and interest they have in reading with a dog.
- A study of the All Ears Program was conducted at the Veterinary School at the University of California-Davis, and it showed that school children that read aloud with a handler/dog team improved their reading skills by 12 percent compared to children who read with an adult only. (Paddock, 2010).

## **Methods of Implementation**

- Millie has two handlers: Mrs. Sulentic and Mr. Peppmeier. The therapy dog will be in the presence of one of the two handlers at all times. There will also be a kennel for Millie in each of their offices.
- The therapy dog will be at school at 8:00 AM to walk around and greet students on their way into school.
- Teachers can sign up with Mr. Peppmeier to have the dog come to their classroom at any time that she is available.
- Mrs. Sulentic will have the therapy dog in her office frequently to assist with counseling.
- Teachers may provide incentives for kids to spend time with dog to improve academic performance.

## **Policy (As written in the Board of Education Policy)**

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

1. The dog must be one year of age or older and have documentation of completed vaccinations from a licensed veterinarian.
2. A licensed veterinarian must approve the dog.
3. The handler/owner must keep the dog on a leash or in a kennel at all times.
4. The dog will be present at the school for the sole purpose of providing academic and/or emotional support to students.
5. The dog must have completed and have documentation of a Therapy Dog Certification program recognized by the American Kennel Club (AKC).
6. The therapy dog must be clean, well groomed, in good health, and housebroken.

## **Student/Staff Notification**

After these requirements have been met, the handler will be notified of approval. At that time, a letter from the school principal (see attached letter to parents/staff) must be sent to school families and staff notifying them that it has been recommended that a therapy dog come to school. A copy of that communication will also be forwarded to the Superintendent.

Families/staff will have ten (10) days to notify the school of any concerns. If concerns are received that could not be addressed by the school, it is the responsibility of the principal to notify the Superintendent. If no concerns are received within the communicated deadline, the Superintendent will notify the Handler that the request has been approved and the therapy dog can begin the next school day.

**Control.**

A therapy dog must be under the control of the Handler (or designee assigned by Handler) through the use of a leash or other tether unless the use of a leash or other tether would interfere with the therapy dog's safe, effective performance of its work or tasks. However, the therapy dog must be under the Handler's control at all times.

**Identification.**

The therapy dog must have appropriate identification identifying it as a therapy dog.

**No Disruption.**

The therapy dog must not disrupt the educational process by barking, seeking attention, or any other behavior.

**Health and Safety.**

The therapy dog must not pose a health or safety risk to any student, employee, or other person at school.

**Supervision and Care.**

The Handler is solely responsible for the supervision and care of the therapy dog, including any feeding, exercising, and clean up while the animal is in a school building or on school property. The school district is not responsible for providing any care, supervision, or assistance for a therapy dog.

**Authorized Area(s).**

The Handler shall only allow the therapy dog to be in areas in school buildings or on school property that are authorized by the Superintendent.

**Insurance.**

The Owner must submit a copy of an insurance policy that provides liability coverage for a therapy dog while on school property.

**Exclusion or Removal from School.**

A therapy dog may be excluded from school property and buildings if the Superintendent determines that:

1. A Handler does not have control of the therapy dog;
2. The therapy dog is not housebroken;
3. The therapy dog presents a direct and immediate threat to others in the school; or
4. The animal's presence otherwise interferes with the educational process. The Handler shall be required to remove the therapy dog from school premises immediately upon such a determination.

**Allergic Reactions.**

If any student or school employee assigned to a classroom in which a therapy dog is permitted suffers an allergic reaction to the therapy dog, the Handler of the animal will be required to remove the animal to a different location designated by the principal.

### **Additional Policy Notes**

- Mr. Peppmeier will be responsible for cleaning up any accidents that Millie has in the school building.
- Millie will go to the bathroom in a specified area on the southeast side of the softball field. Each time, Millie will be cleaned up after by her handler.
- If neither of the two handlers are at school, Millie may not be in the school building.
- Millie will be in the presence of one of the two handlers at all times.
- All parents will be required to sign a waiver on behalf of their children to allow them to interact with Millie.
- In the unlikely event of a bite, the handler has liability insurance to cover any damages.

### **Guidance for Staff**

- Staff should be open-minded to the dog about the benefits that she can provide to their classrooms.
- All teachers will have a sign on their door that indicates to the handler whether or not they currently want the dog in their room.
- Teachers may also sign up on Mr. Peppmeier's schedule to have Millie visit their classroom, with no limit on the amount of time she may be in a classroom.
- At times, the handler may call a classroom to see if it is a good time to have Millie come into the classroom.
- No more than three students should be interacting with Millie at one time. Enforce this policy with your students. It may be appropriate to dismiss students one at a time to pet and interact with Millie.
- It is important that staff is able to identify situations where it would be unsafe for a student to interact with the dog. Millie will be able to help calm upset students down; however, in the event of extreme outrage, it may be unsafe for the student to interact with Millie.

### **Guidance for Students**

- No more than three students should be interacting with Millie at one time.
- When approaching Millie, meet her with an open palm to allow her to sniff you.

## West Bend-Mallard Therapy Dog

West Bend-Mallard will be implementing a therapy dog program beginning the 2020 - 2021 school year.

Research has shown that therapy dogs in schools can help build strong social emotional skills in students. A therapy dog presence has also been shown to reduce anxiety, help students work through anger management concerns, reduce bullying tendencies, and address other personal and social issues that all of our developing students deal with. There are specific goals of the therapy dog program:

- Increase empathy and compassion in all students
- Help students connect with something in the school setting and reduce anxiety
- Improve academic performance, while increasing confidence and self-esteem

Our therapy dog will be certified through the Alliance of Therapy Dogs (ATD). To belong to the Alliance of Therapy Dogs, the dog must be tested and evaluated by a Certified ATD Evaluator. A dog must be a minimum of one (1) year old and have a sound temperament. Each dog must pass an ATD temperament evaluation for suitability to become a certified Therapy Dog. The test also includes the evaluation of each dog's behavior around people in a variety of settings.

ATD has specific guidelines to meet cleanliness grooming requirements. The WBM therapy dog is from the most hypoallergenic line of Goldendoodles, and will be brushed and bathed as needed and professionally groomed on a regular schedule as needed. ATD also requires regular veterinarian checks for registered Therapy Dogs along with regular evaluations to maintain certification.

*Please complete the form below acknowledging your preference as to whether you wish your child to have contact with the West Bend-Mallard Therapy Dog.*

=====  
=====

Student's Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Grade: \_\_\_\_\_

I understand that my child may have incidental or student-initiated contact with the school therapy dog. I understand that the Therapy Dog may be in my child's room and may be part of the counseling process. I understand that this permission form will remain "active" during the years my child attends WBM. If I should change my mind regarding my child's interaction and participation with the Therapy Dog, I understand I must provide this in writing to the school office.

Yes, my child may have incidental and/or initiated contact with the WBM Therapy Dog during the years my child is enrolled at West Bend-Mallard.

No, my child may NOT have contact with the West Bend-Mallard Therapy Dog.

Due to Allergies

Fear of Dogs

Other

Parent Signature: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

If you have questions please contact Paul Peppmeier, Principal, at [ppeppmeier@west-bend.k12.ia.us](mailto:ppeppmeier@west-bend.k12.ia.us).

## References

Alliance of Therapy Dogs. *What is the difference between a therapy dog and a service dog?*. March 12<sup>th</sup>, 2017. Retrieved from <https://www.therapydogs.com/service-dog-vs-therapy-dog/>

Animals & Society Institute. *Effects of reading with adult/tutor therapy dog teams on elementary students' reading achievement and attitudes*.  
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Mockler, K. (2010). Pet Therapy: A New Way of Reaching Students with Additional Disabilities. *Odyssey: New Directions in Deaf Education*, 11(1), 23-24.

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Siegel, W. L. (2004). The Role of animals in Education. *Revision*, 27(2), 17-26.