IMGB THERAPY DOGS & OTHER THERAPY ANIMALS

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The Regional School Unit 1 Board of Directors supports the use of therapy dogs by teachers or other qualified school personnel or contracted services provider (“Owner”) for the benefit of its students subject to the conditions of this policy. The Board wishes to make clear that a student’s access to a therapy dog is considered an educational opportunity/privilege, and not an educational right.

DEFINITIONS

Therapy Dog: A “therapy dog” is a dog that has been individually trained and certified to work with its Owner to provide emotional support, well-being, comfort, or companionship to school-aged students. Therapy dogs are not “service animals” as that term is used in the American with Disabilities Act. The dog must be well behaved and have a temperament that is suitable for interaction with students and others in a public school setting. Therapy dogs are personal property of the owner and are not owned by the School Department.

Owner: An individual who owns the therapy dog and who guarantees the therapy dog has been properly trained, certified, vaccinated, and who insures the animal against all potential liabilities. An owner must be either an employee of the district or a contracted service provider. The owner is limited to having one trained therapy dog on school grounds at any given time.

THERAPY DOG STANDARDS AND PROCEDURES

The following requirements must be satisfied BEFORE a therapy dog will be allowed in school buildings or on school grounds within the RSU 1 Schools:

Request: An Owner who wants to bring a therapy dog to school must submit a written request form to a principal and/or the superintendent for approval. The request must be renewed each school year. The request must also be renewed whenever a different therapy dog will be used.

Training and Certification: The Owner must submit the American Kennel Club’s Canine Good Citizen Certification or its equivalent as determined by the Superintendent. The certification must remain current at all times.

Health and Vaccination: The therapy dog must be clean, well groomed, in good health, housebroken, and vaccinated against diseases common to dogs. The Owner must submit proof of current licensure from the local licensing authority and proof of the therapy dog’s current vaccinations from a licensed veterinarian.

Control: A therapy dog must be under the control of the owner through the use of a leash or other tether. The therapy dog must be under the Owner’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 deemed disruptive.

Health and Safety: The therapy dog must not pose a health and safety risk to any student, employee, or other person at school. A “health” risk may be defined to include both physical and mental health. The interpretation of what poses such a potential risk is left up to the building Principal or his/her designee and is not subject to appeal. A therapy dog will not be brought into a classroom if a student in that classroom has a documented health risk related to dogs. 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 Owner of the animal will be required to remove the animal to a different location designated by the administrator. Cleaning procedures will be followed whenever a therapy dog occupies a shared space in the building.

Supervision and Care of Therapy Dogs: The Owner 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 Owner shall only allow the therapy dog to be in areas within school buildings or on school property that are authorized by school district administrators.

Damages to School Property and Injuries: The Owner of a 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.

Insurance: The Owner must submit a copy of an insurance policy that provides liability coverage for the therapy dog while on any school property in an amount determined by the Superintendent.

EXCLUSION OR REMOVAL FROM SCHOOL

A therapy dog may be excluded from school property and buildings if a school administrator determines that:

A handler does not have control of the therapy dog;

The therapy dog is not housebroken;

The therapy dog presents a health and safety risk as defined above;

The therapy dog presents a direct and immediate threat to others in the school; or

The animals’ presence otherwise interferes with the educational process.

The Owner shall be required to remove the therapy dog from school premises immediately upon such a determination by school administration.

Other certified therapy animals will be considered if endorsed by the Maine Department of Education for this purpose. The same approval procedures will be utilized.

Cross Reference: IMG – Animals in Schools
IMGA – Service Animals in Schools

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