THERAPY DOGS IN SCHOOL

Policy Code: **4203/5021/7273**

The Board supports the use of therapy dogs for the benefit of its students, staff, school communities, subject to the conditions of this policy.

I. DEFINITIONS

A "therapy dog" is a dog (1) owned by a third-party or staff member; (2) that has been individually trained, evaluated, and registered by an approved Therapy Dog training organization recognized by insurance organizations with their handler to provide animal assisted activities and animal assisted interactions within a school or other facility; and (3) engages in animal assisted activities and interactions for the benefit of others. Therapy dogs are not "service animals" as defined in Board Policy 4202/5029/7272. A therapy dog is the personal property of the handler and is not the property of the school district.

"Animal assisted activities" and "animal assisted interactions" are non-goal-driven interactions where the specific content of the visit is spontaneous and is meant to provide motivational, educational, and/or recreational activities that enhance the quality of life. Examples of "animal assisted activities" or "animal assisted interactions" that students/staff may engage in with a therapy dog include petting and/or hugging the dog, speaking to the dog, giving the dog simple commands that the dog is trained to respond to, and reading to the dog.

A "handler" is an individual school district staff member or volunteer who owns a therapy dog and who has been individually trained, evaluated, and registered with their therapy dog to provide animal assisted activities and animal assisted interactions within a school or other facility.

II. REQUIREMENTS FOR THERAPY DOGS AND HANDLERS

A. Responsibility. The handler shall assume full responsibility for the therapy dog's care, behavior, and suitability for interacting with students and others in the school while the therapy dog is on school district property. The handler shall also assume full responsibility and liability for any damage to school property or injury to district staff, students, or others in the school caused by the therapy dog.

B. Training and Registration. Any therapy dog permitted to come on to a school campus or facility owned by Buncombe County Schools shall be registered with a recognized therapy dog organization to the satisfaction of the Superintendent. The registration shall remain current and in good standing at all times.

C. Health and Safety. Any therapy dog permitted to come onto a school campus or facility owned by Buncombe County Schools shall be in good health and free of any disease common to dogs. The handler shall ensure the therapy dog does not pose a health and safety risk

to any student, employee, or other person at school and that the therapy dog is brought to school district property only when properly groomed, bathed, free of illness or injury, and of the temperament appropriate for working with children and others in the schools. The building administrator will alert all staff, students, and families of the expected presence of the therapy dog.

D. Identification. The therapy dog shall wear appropriate identification issued by the registering organization identifying it as a therapy dog.

E. Control. The handler shall ensure the therapy dog wears a collar or harness and a leash no longer than four feet and shall maintain control of the therapy dog by holding the leash at all times that the therapy dog is on school district property within common areas of the school buildings, including during breaks, unless holding such leash would interfere with the therapy dog's safe, effective performance of its work or tasks. However, the handler shall maintain control of the therapy dog at all times and shall not tether the therapy dog to any individual or object.

F. Supervision and Care. The handler shall be solely responsible for the supervision and humane care of the therapy dog, including any feeding, exercising, and cleaning up after the therapy dog while the dog is in a school building or on school property. The handler is responsible for ensuring that the therapy dog is given necessary opportunities to relieve itself in areas designated for such by the building administrator. The handler shall not leave the therapy dog unsupervised or alone on school property at any time. The therapy dog should be contained in the office/classroom area either by gate or a crate structure when not performing therapy duties. The school district is not responsible for providing any care, supervision, or assistance to the therapy dog.

G. Authorized Area(s). The handler shall ensure the therapy dog has access to only such areas of the school buildings or properties that have been authorized by school district administrators.

H. 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 aversions to the dog, and has made such allergies or aversions known, is present in an office, hallway, or classroom. The handler will meet with the school principal and nurse to discuss any expected allergies and steps that will be taken to limit, if necessary, a therapy dog's access to certain building areas.

III. PROCEDURES PRIOR TO DOGS COMING TO SCHOOLS

A. Request

A handler wishing to bring a therapy dog on school district property shall submit a completed written request form to the Superintendent or the Superintendent's designee, for approval. The request shall be submitted for approval each school year. Such approval may be rescinded at any

time at the sole discretion of the Superintendent. Once the Superintendent or the Superintendent's designee approves the request, a plan and schedule for dog visits shall be developed with the school's principal or designee. In developing a plan and schedule for a therapy dog, the principal may not permit the therapy dog to be on campus on a daily basis.

B. Submissions Prior to Coming to Schools

The handler shall submit to the Superintendent or their designee:

- proof from a licensed veterinarian of the dog's health and current immunizations;
- proof of licensure from their local dog licensing authority; and
- proof of registration as a therapy dog handler with each individual therapy dog they plan to bring to a school or facility owned by Buncombe County Schools.

IV. EXCLUSION OR REMOVAL FROM SCHOOL DISTRICT PROPERTY

A therapy dog may be excluded from school property if a school administrator determines that (1) the 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 therapy dog's presence otherwise interferes with the education program as determined by the building administrator or Superintendent. The handler shall immediately remove their therapy dog from school property when instructed to do so by a school administrator.

Adopted: