CUMBERLAND COUNTY PUBLIC SCHOOLS

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School Board Member

November 10, 2026

Dear Cumberland County Public Schools Families:

Cumberland County Public Schools is pleased to share that we will be introducing a trained therapy dog to our school community. The therapy dog will be used as a resource to support student well-being and may participate in activities such as counseling, social-emotional support, reading programs, and other school-based activities designed to promote a positive and supportive learning environment.

As we introduce the therapy dog, the school division will be establishing protocols governing the dog's presence and access within our schools. These protocols will address matters such as supervision, appropriate interactions with students and staff, health and safety requirements, areas of access, and procedures for responding to individual student needs.

It is important to distinguish a school therapy dog from a service animal. A therapy dog is a dog that is trained and authorized to provide comfort, support, or other therapeutic benefits within a school setting. A therapy dog is not the same as a service animal under the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA). Service animals are individually trained to perform specific work or tasks directly related to an individual's disability and are subject to separate legal protections and requirements.

We also recognize that students and staff may have allergies, medical concerns, or a fear or discomfort around dogs. To help us plan appropriately and ensure that the therapy dog's presence is safe and supportive for all students, please notify your child's school if your child has a significant allergy to dogs, a fear of dogs, or another concern that you believe the school should consider. Families should communicate these concerns to the school as soon as possible so that appropriate accommodations and safety measures can be considered.

We appreciate your partnership as we introduce this new resource to our schools. Our goal is to ensure that the therapy dog is integrated thoughtfully and responsibly while maintaining a safe, welcoming, and inclusive environment for every student.

If you have questions or concerns regarding the therapy dog program, please contact the school board office at (804)492-4212.

Sincerely,

Mary Shores, Superintendent
Cumberland County Public Schools