

Therapy/Emotional Support Dogs in Schools

The Hanover Public Schools supports the use of Therapy/Emotional Support Dogs in the school setting. Research has shown that Therapy/Emotional Support Dogs support psychological and academic growth while increasing social skills and self-esteem in children and adolescents. Therapy/Emotional Support Dogs have been trained to provide emotional support which positively impacts reading skills, emotional functioning and communication skills. In addition, the use of Therapy/Emotional Support Dogs may decrease anxiety, improve self-esteem and increase overall academic achievement in students.

Therapy/Emotional Support Dogs are not categorized as service animals. Therapy/Emotional Support Dogs work with students identified by the district. A Therapy/Emotional Support Dog has been through training and is registered with the handler to provide support to identified activities and interactions within the school. The handler is with the dog at all times and assumes full responsibility for the dog's care, behavior and assessment of ability to interact with students.

Therapy/Emotional Support Dogs are family owned pets with the demonstrated temperament and obedience skills to make social/ emotional support visits. Although a Therapy/Emotional Support Dog is a valued companion serving an important purpose, it is not considered a service animal under the law and therefore is not mandated to serve as a service animal in the Hanover Public Schools. However, as outlined in this policy, there are situations in which a therapy/ emotional support dog may be permitted into the school.

Specific permission will be obtained through a formal process from the superintendent in conjunction with the school principal in order for a Therapy/Emotional Support Dog to enter a Hanover Public School building and to interact with Hanover Public School students or staff. This formal process may include documentation from a medical or mental health professional and/or as part of the 504 plan. Seeking permission applies to any member of school community: students, teachers, administrators, and other staff.

The therapy dog owner must provide written proof of training and endorsement as a handler of said animal by a Therapy/Emotional Support Dog organization, a current certificate of insurance of the owner, proof of all vaccinations required by Massachusetts Law signed by a practicing veterinarian, and copies of identification tags for the therapy dog.

Therapy dogs must be leashed at all times and the endorsed handler must be holding the leash at all times.

Exclusion or Removal from School District Property: A Therapy/Emotional Support Dog may be excluded from school district property if a school administrator determines that the dog poses a threat to the health or safety of students and staff and/or detracts from educational programs of the school. The handler shall immediately remove his/her therapy dog from school property when instructed to do so by a school administrator.

[Legal References:](#) ADA (2010) and US Code of Federal Regulations: USC 35.136 & 36.302