What is the Goal of the Facility/Therapy Dog Program?

The goal of the program is to support students that may be experiencing a barrier to learning (e.g., anxiety, depression, post-traumatic stress disorder, Autism, English as a Second Language, Intellectual Difficulties, and more mild forms of mental health issues) within the educational setting. The goal is to lessen their stress and anxiety during activities occurring during the school day. With decreased anxiety, students may be able to focus and engage in classes better, feel more comfortable to open up to counselors and teachers, and find comfort and connection within the school environment. In doing so, this will potentially improve overall feeling and allow for more effective progression through the learning process.

What are some of the possible benefits of the Facility/Therapy Dog program?

Facility/therapy dogs provide an immediate, tangible option to support students and staff to remove barriers to education. Facility/therapy dogs help to create positive physical health, mental health, and social benefits. In a school setting, therapy dogs are used for Animal Assisted Intervention (AAI). Animal-Assisted Intervention has been shown to correlate with increased social and emotional learning (SEL) and thus partners with MCCSC’s goal of increasing SEL among its student population.

Therapy dog benefits could include:

• Provide emotional and physical support
• Increase communication skills
• Fostering trust
• Reducing anxiety and ease stress
• Reduce isolation and loneliness
• Provides pleasure and affection
• Model and teach kindness and compassion
• Improves self-esteem and feelings of self-worth
• Improve socialization
• Increase in attentiveness and engagement
• Acquiring skills of acceptance and being non-judgmental
• Reduction in inappropriate social behavior
What are the Benefits of Animal Assisted Intervention (AAI)?

**Physical** - interaction with animals reduces blood pressure, provides tactile stimulation, assists with pain management, gives motivation to move, walk, and stimulates the senses.

**Social** - interactions with animals provide a positive mutual topic for discussion among peers, promote great self-esteem and well-being, and focused interaction with others.

**Cognitive** - spending time with an animal stimulates memory, problem-solving, and game playing.

**Emotional** - time spent with an animal improves self-esteem, acceptance from others, and lifts mood.

**Environmental** - animals in facilities decrease the feeling of a sterile environment and lifts mood.

Addressing Possible Objections to Having a Therapy Dog at MCCSC

**Allergies:** It is understandable that individuals would question the effects that having a dog at school would have on allergies. According to the Asthma and Allergy Foundation of America, “Pet allergens are even in homes and other places that have never housed pets. This is because people can carry pet allergens on their clothing.” ([www.aafa.org](http://www.aafa.org))

Just as students who come to school with dust, mold, or pollen allergies will encounter allergens within our schools, those coming to school with a pet allergy are going to encounter pet dander in our schools whether or not a dog is working in the school. This is due to a large number of families having pets in their homes and therefore animal dander on their clothing anytime they enter the building.

The AAI program at MCCSC recognizes the need to reduce the effects of allergens within the school and would act in the following ways:

- The dog will be brushed and wiped down each day before coming into the school to help reduce animal dander.
- The dog will be given regular baths to help reduce animal dander.
- The dog is fed quality food to help him maintain healthy skin, thus reducing animal dander.
- The dog will not be taken into classrooms in which a parent has indicated a dog allergy and requested their child not have contact with the animal.
Liability

The owner is solely responsible and liable for any damage to school property or injury or harm to personnel, students, or others, or property, caused by the therapy dog. The owner may be charged for damage, injury or harm caused by the therapy dog. Owner must provide proof of liability insurance.

Animal Care and Pet Waste:

The dog must be clean, well groomed, in good health, housebroken, and immunized against diseases common to dogs. The owner must submit proof of current licensure from a local licensing authority and proof of the dog's current vaccinations and immunizations from a licensed veterinarian. The owner is solely responsible for the supervision and care of the therapy dog, including toileting (clean-up and proper disposal of waste), feeding, water, etc.

Training and Education:

The owner must submit the American Kennel Club's Canine Good Citizen Certification or its equivalent as determined by the Superintendent or designee. The certification must remain current.

Guidelines for Facility/Therapy Dogs in School:

- The dog must be under the control of the owner at all times.
- The dog must not disrupt the educational process by barking, seeking attention, or any other disruptive behavior.
- If the dog becomes aggressive or poses a threat to others, the Director of Health and Safety must be informed immediately. The application approval may be reconsidered.
- The owner is solely responsible for the supervision and care of the dog, including toileting (clean-up and proper disposal of waste), feeding, water, etc.
- The owner will not allow the dog outside of designated (approved) areas.
- Transportation of the dog to and from school is the responsibility of the owner. Facility/therapy dogs are not permitted in/on school-owned or leased vehicles.
- If a student or school employee assigned to a classroom or area in which a dog is permitted suffers an allergic reaction to the facility/therapy dog, the owner will be required to IMMEDIATELY remove the animal to a different location designated by an administrator.
- The owner is solely responsible and liable for any damage to school property or injury or harm to personnel, students, or others, or property, caused by the therapy dog. The owner may be charged for damage, injury or harm caused by the dog.
(INSERT SCHOOL NAME) will be implementing a facility/therapy dog program. Research has shown that facility dogs in schools can help build strong social emotional skills, reduce anxiety, help individuals work through anger management concerns, reduce bullying tendencies, and address other personal and social issues that all of our developing students deal with during this time. There are specific goals of the facility dog program:

- Improve social skills between peers
- Establish positive relationships between adults and peers
- Increase empathy and camaraderie within the school community
- Help students connect with something in the school setting and reduce anxiety
- Improve academic performance, while increasing confidence and self-esteem

Please understand that any student may have incidental or student-initiated contact with the dog as the dog will be in the hallways, office, and/or classrooms throughout the day. If you do NOT want your child to have contact with the facility dog due to allergies, fear, or other reasons, please communicate this with __________. If you do not contact us, this allows your student to interact with the dog during the school day. However, if you should change your mind, you may always contact __________.

We thank you for your understanding, communication, and cooperation regarding our excitement to bring this facility dog into our school!