#LeadingtheWAy

West A Therapy Dog Program

Agenda

- What is a School Therapy Dog Program?
- What is the history of West A Therapy Dog Program?
- What is WA's Therapy Dog Program Design?
- Who are our Certified Therapy Dog Teams?
- What work will the dogs be doing?
- What are the Do's and Don'ts when interacting with our Therapy Dogs?

West A Therapy Dog Program

What is a School Therapy Dog Program?

- A school-based therapy dog program is a program where specially trained and certified therapy dogs and their handlers visit or work regularly in a school to support students' emotional well-being, learning, and overall school climate.

- The dogs are certified animals that interact with students in structured ways under the handler's supervision.

What are the Benefits of Therapy Dogs?

➢ Emotional Support

- Interaction with dogs lowers cortisol (stress hormone) and boosts oxytocin (feel-good hormone)
- Programs report decreased anxiety (84 % of students) and reduced symptoms of depression by ~50 % gitnux.org.

➢ Academic Support

- Reading-to-dog programs improved fluency by 12–30 % therapydogs.com+1people.com+1.
- Boosts attention, executive function, and motivation sfchronicle.com+15therapydogs.com+15balesbuddies.org+15.
- Stimulates memory and problem-solving skills

What are the Benefits of Therapy Dogs?

- **Behavioral Support**
  - Help students learn self-regulation and calming techniques
  - Reward positive behavior or participation

- **Social Skill Development**
  - Enhances social skills, empathy, classroom behavior, and peer interaction pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov+10alaskadogworks.com+10learnplaythrive.com.au+10.
  - Help shy or socially anxious students feel more comfortable

Three Types of Working Dogs

- ✓What type of dog is individually trained to perform specific, active tasks for an individual with a physical, sensory, psychiatric, or intellectual disability? Service Dog

- ✓What type of dog is trained and certified to bring comfort, affection, and stress relief to groups of people in structured settings—not for a single owner? Therapy Dog

- ✓What type of dog provides comfort, companionship, and emotional stability to a person with amental health condition or emotional disability simply by being present? Emotional Support Dog

What Work Do Dogs Perform?

- ✓ What dogs perform specific tasks directly related to a person's disability (e.g., guiding a visually impaired handler, sensing a seizure before it occurs, pulling a wheelchair, or interrupting a panic attack for someone with PTSD)? Service Dog

- ✓ What dogs interact with many individuals under the guidance of their owner/handler (e.g., visiting hospital patients, cheering up residents in nursing homes, or reducing anxiety for children in schools and libraries)? Therapy Dog

- ✓ What dog offers comfort through companionship? Emotional Support Dog

- ✓ What dogs are not required to undergo specific task training to perform medical or physical work? Emotional Support Dog

- ✓ What dogs are permitted in all public areas? Service Dog

Why Therapy Dogs in West A?

- Observed rising student stress, anxiety, depression, complexity of student disabilities and absenteeism

- Need for proactive, inclusive strategies to foster mental health

- Program History
  - Board approved on January 18, 2023
  - Partnership with Animal Friends
  - Current handlers/dogs:
    - Lisa Meehan (Wilson): Harley
    - Kristen Orndoff (McKee): Oliver

Therapy Dog Program

West Allegheny's Therapy Dog Program

- We currently have 15 certified therapy dog teams and 8 in training
- Full day program; working 2 or more days each week; 30 dogs is goal
- All dogs have been through rigorous training including earning their AKC CGC certification and Therapy Dog United (TDU) license
- All dogs are insured by three providers: District Liability Insurance, TDU liability insurance, and personal liability insurance
- All dogs have current required vaccinations
- All dogs will participate in ongoing monthly Advanced Level Obedience training as well as annual TDU re-certification
- All dogs will be continually assessed by a professional, certified dog trainer while working in our schools
- District Policy Adoption: Therapy Dogs 719 w/ associated administrative regulations

West Allegheny's Therapy Dog Program Cont.

- All dogs will be in a harness/collar and leash under the control of the handler. They will never be off leash roaming hallways.
- In handler's classroom dogs may be off leash.
- Therapy dogs will have a rest space such as crate/bed/gated area in the handlers room/office; students will be taught not to disturb the dog while in their resting location.
- All dogs have an ID badge and TDU/WASD Scarf worn at all times.
- Therapy dogs will not go into cafeterias.
- Therapy dogs are working while at school...**not playing**
- Students with dog aversions and/or allergies will not be scheduled into a classroom where the teacher is the therapy dog handler.
- Parents may opt-out of classrooms with therapy dogs, and/or classroom visits and/or private visits with the therapy dog; this will be an annually sent to families via principal emails and the annual acknowledgment form

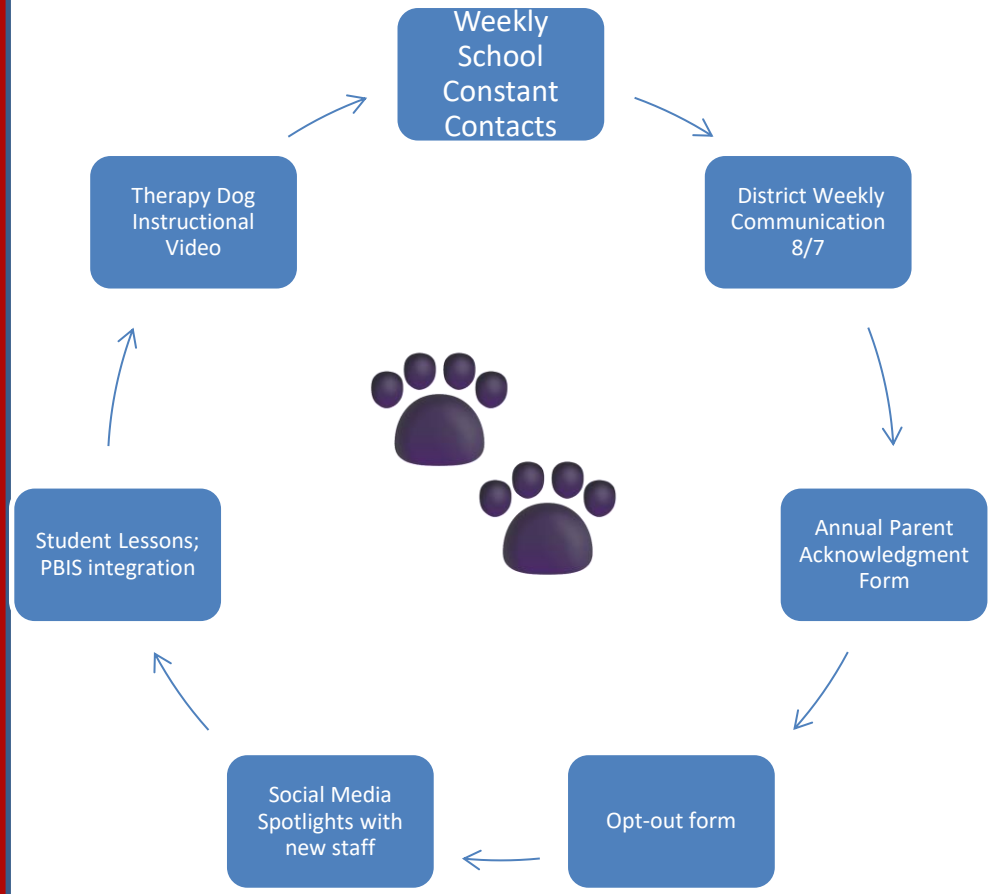
Therapy (ALL) Dog Etiquette: Do's and Don'ts

Category	Do	Don't
Approaching	**DO** ask the handler for permission before greeting the dog. Let the dog smell your hand.	**DON'T** rush, run, or crowd around the dog in a big group. Do not taunt the dog or play attack.
Physical Contact	**DO** pet gently on the dog's back, chest, or sides. Remain calm when interacting with the dog. Many dogs do not like head pets.	**DON'T** hug, kiss, pull ears/tail, or put your face right up to the dog's face. Do not heavy pet or pat the dog. Do not instigate play and/or rough housing with the dog.
Body Language	**DO** use a quiet, calm voice and move smoothly around the dog.	**DON'T** make loud, high-pitched squeals, wave hands wildly, or stomp. Do not baby talk or use excited talk with the dogs.
Feeding & Treats	**DO** check with the handler first; if given a treat, place it flat on your open palm.	**DON'T** feed the dog human food, classroom snacks, or treats without permission.
Personal Space	**DO** let the dog come to you or approach calmly from the side.	**DON'T** corner the dog, loom directly over its head, or touch it while it's sleeping or eating.

What Work Will West A Therapy Dogs Perform?

- Provide reading support to students in grades K-5
- Visit life skills, autistic support and emotional support classrooms
- Provide small-group support for students with anxiety and other mental health needs
- Provide support during counseling activities
- Provide individual student support
- Support students during arrival and dismissal and hallway transitions
- Specific classroom requested visitations

West A Therapy Dog Pack Communications



McKee is excited to share some **pawsitively** wonderful news! Two additional handler-and-dog teams completed rigorous training and testing this summer to become certified therapy dog teams.

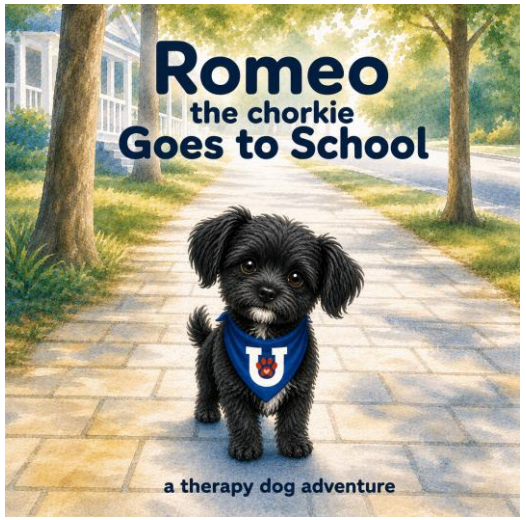
Joining Oliver, Mrs. Orndoff's therapy dog, are two new members of our McKee pack: Romeo, with Mrs. Denk; Lucky, with Mrs. Kennedy
We are also **wagging our tails** with excitement as Elvis, Mrs. Butler's dog, completes his training and prepares to join t**he pack** later this year!

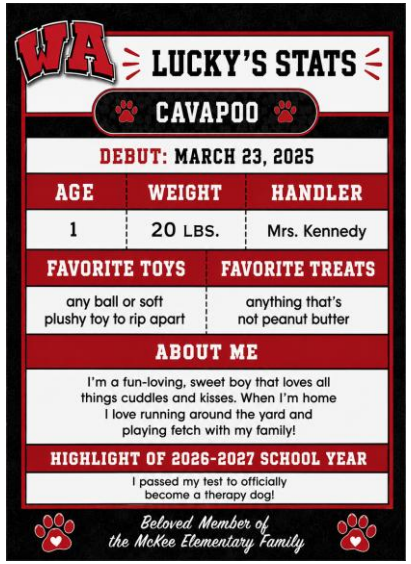
Our four-legged friends may help promote social-emotional wellness, engagement, and a sense of comfort throughout the school day.
All therapy dog interactions will be supervised by school staff and the dog's trained handler. Each dog will remain under the handler's control at all times, and **student participation will always be voluntary**. Before greeting our **furry friends,** students will be reminded to use calm bodies and voices, ask permission before petting, and follow adult directions.

We recognize that therapy dog interactions may not be the right "fit" for every student. Some students may have allergies, fears, personal preferences, or other reasons they should not interact directly with a therapy dog. If this applies to your child, please email to request that your child not participate in therapy dog interactions.

If you make this request, staff will make reasonable efforts to ensure your child does not participate in planned interactions. Please understand that therapy dogs may still be present in common areas or program spaces at designated times, so incidental visual exposure may occur.

Therapy Dog Learning Tools for Students

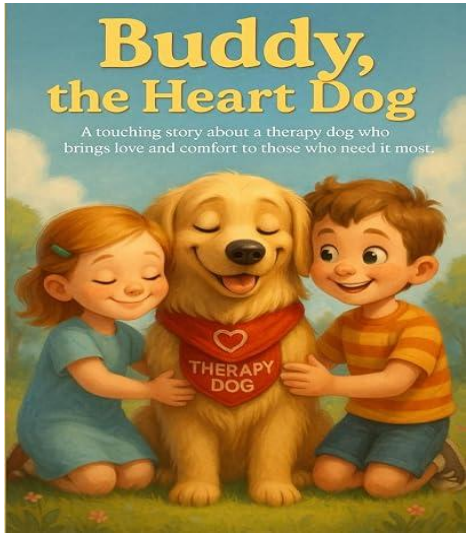


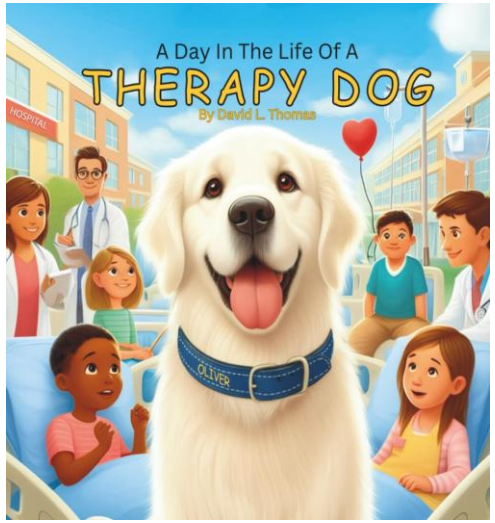


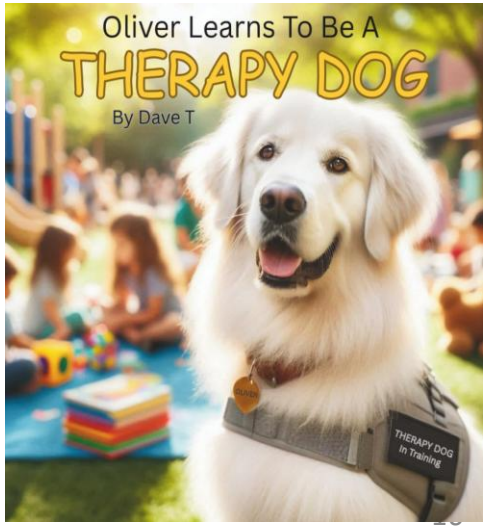
Elementary School Pawsitive Student Videos:

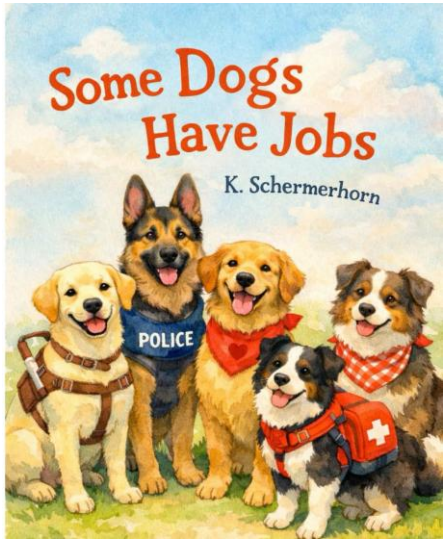
- Do's and Don'ts
- What is a therapy dog?
- How many therapy dogs are there?
- Is a therapy dog a service dog?
- Who needs therapy dogs?
- What makes a good therapy dog?
- Where do therapy dogs work?
- How do therapy dogs help children?
- How do you become a therapy dog?
- What is the difference between service, therapy and emotional support dogs?
- Therapy dog trading cards
- Theme songs for each dog with a music video (great for morning announcements!)

Therapy Dog Learning Tools for Students









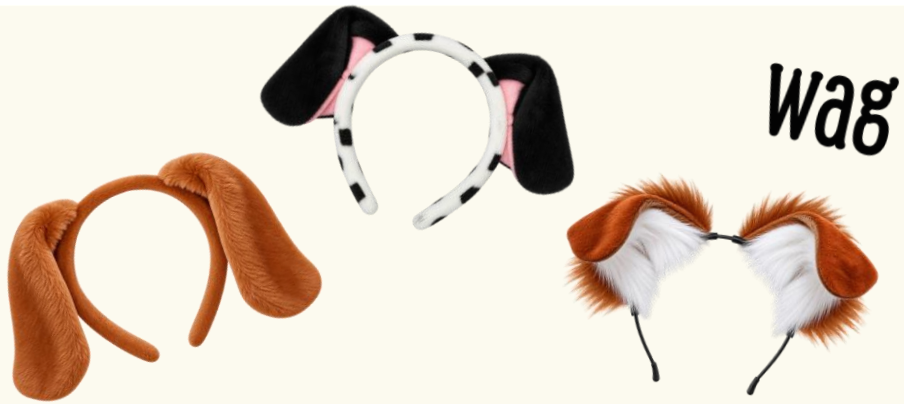
Therapy Dogs As Part of Our School Culture

Mckee's Dapper Dogs

[Phoebe's Song]

[Lucky's Song]

[Oliver's Song]



Wag Your Tail Wednesday

AKC Canine Good Citizenship Certification Req.

Accepting a friendly stranger
Evaluator approaches and pretends to shake hands with handler (hands 6- 12” apart). Evaluator does not touch dog.

Sitting politely for petting
Evaluator pets dog; dog must show no shyness or resentment.

Appearance and grooming
Evaluator inspects dog, combs or brushes lightly, examines ears and each front foot.

Out for a walk
Handler takes dog for a short walk including right turn, left turn, about turn and stop.

Walking through a crowd
Dog and handler walk close to several people; dog may show causal interest but not jump up.

Sit and down on cue/Staying in place
Handler shows that dog can do both sit and down, then chooses a position, leaves dog and goes to the end of a 20 ft. line, and returns immediately.

Coming when called
With dog still on 20 ft. line from Test 6, handler walks out 10 ft. and calls the dog.

Reaction to another dog
Two handlers and dogs approach, pretend to shake hands (hands 6-12” apart), exchange pleasantries, then move on.

Reaction to distractions
Distractions are presented; dog may not panic or show aggression.

Supervised separation
Handler goes out of sight for 3-min. Dog is held on a 6-ft. leash by an evaluator.

Therapy Dog United Certification Req.

Vaccinations Records:
Copies of vaccinations must be provided prior to testing

Therapy Dogs United

Reaction to a Stranger
Stranger Approach
- Dog shows little/no reaction to direct, rapid approach with sustained eye contact for 15 seconds
- Dog shows little/no reaction to approach from behind

Stranger Handling
- Dog accepts touch/hold and gentle stroking of entire body (lips, legs, tail)
- Dog accepts a stranger leaning over them
- Dog accepts prolonged hugging (30 seconds)
- Small dog accepts elevation
- Reaction to stranger at dogs level - lying/sitting on the floor

Out for a Walk
- Dog walks under control at all times
- Dog/Handler can walk a designated pattern with several stops, about turns and at different paces (slow, medium, and fast)

Therapy Dog United Certification Req.

Therapy Dogs United

Walking through a Crowd

- Medical Equipment
  - Dog can properly negotiate around/near medical equipment
- Crowded Petting
  - Dog can sustain control during crowded petting
  - Dog shows little/no fear with grand gestures

Sit/Stay on Command

- Dog can sustain sit/stay for 1 minute
- Dog can sustain down stay for 3 minutes

Reaction to distraction

- Dog is accepting of yelling, clapping and crying
- Dog is under control when a ball/toy like object crosses it's path
- Dog will ignore food/high value items when passing at a close distance (1 ft)

Dogs willingness to participate

- Dog is willing to participate

Handler

- Handler is appropriately dressed for therapy visit
- Handler has appropriate supplies for dog (4 ft leash, drool cloth, p/u bags etc.)
- Handler is friendly and enthusiastic and aware of dogs reactions
- Handler is in control at all times