

**SEL SUPPORT DOG HANDBOOK**

The District’s SEL (Social Emotional Learning) Support dog program is intended to promote student growth and success in the District’s schools. A SEL Support dog is a dog that has been individually trained, evaluated, and registered to provide animal-assisted support. Research has shown that interacting with animals can help students by decreasing anxiety and stress and providing cognitive, physiological, social and emotional support. However, a SEL Support dog is not a service animal.

**Purpose**:

**Improve the culture and general mood of the school.**

 SEL support dogs provide many healing effects including:

* Increase in socialization resulting in a sense of happiness and well-being.
* Increase in mental stimulation
* Reduced stress and anxiety.
* Decreased feelings of depression, loneliness, and feelings of isolation.
* Decrease aggressive behaviors.

**Make a connection with at-risk students, and give them an additional reason to come to school.**

* The emotional well being of students is a large factor in their success. The presence of a SEL support dog can give students a sense of happiness that allows them to perform better academically. Animals have been incorporated into schools in order to allow children to discuss issues of grief and anxiety. There are many children who struggle to open up to an adult about issues they are facing but interaction with animals may relieve their anxiety and improve their mood, lending to more open dialogue. The SEL support dog will give our student support specialist opportunities to talk with children that otherwise might not open up about their situation. Children may find comfort in talking to the dog, and in turn, be willing to share with an adult.
* Many children who experience emotional troubles often lack trust, and using the intervention of a SEL support dog may help the child to develop trust. Interacting with animals helps to decrease anxiety, decrease manipulative/abusive behaviors, reduce depression, increase self-esteem, increase self-worth, increase expressions of feelings and the ability to trust.

**Improve literacy skills.**

* Reading to dogs can eliminate the fear of judgement for many children. Many studies have shown that students are able to improve their reading ability because of the increased motivation and interest they have in reading with a dog.

**Build a sense of community.**

* SEL support dogs will be present at a variety of school and community events, increasing positive interactions with community members, staff, and students. These are opportunities to build meaningful positive relationships with the greater community.

**Methods of Implementation**

* SEL support dogs will have a Host (caretaker at home) and Handler (caretaker at work).
* The SEL support dogs will be in the presence of one of the two (Host or Handler) at all times.
* There will be a kennel for the SEL support dog in a designated secure location. The SEL support dog is not to be disturbed when in the kennel.
* The SEL support dog will have a daily working schedule established by the Superintendent or his/her designee. This will include being at school when students arrive and staying until students have been dismissed to busses/parents.
* Teachers can sign up with the Handler to have the SEL support dog come to their classroom.
* The Student Support Specialist will have the SEL support dog in their office frequently to assist with student support.
* Teachers may provide incentives for kids to spend time with the SEL support dog to improve academic performance. Such incentives must be pre-planned and approved by the building principal and Handler.

**Policy 3109: Non-Service Animals (Key highlights as written in the Board of Education Policy)**

* An animal that supports a District program or curriculum or that is otherwise used for instructional purposes is allowed on District property with the Superintendent’s or designee prior written permission. District owned SEL support dogs are considered a District program and therefore permitted.
* A “therapy animal,” also known as an “emotional support animal,” “comfort animal,” or “companion animal,” is an animal that has not been individually trained to perform a specific job or task for a person with a disability, but its mere presence provides emotional support or comfort to the owner or others. Therapy animals are not “service animals” under the ADA or Board Policy.
* A therapy animal must be well-behaved and have a temperament that is suitable for interaction with students and other persons in a public school.
* Standards and Procedures:
	+ Preapproval by the Superintendent or designee.
	+ Training and certification must remain current and on file.
	+ The SEL support dog must be clean, well-groomed, in good health, house broken, and immunized against common diseases.
	+ SEL support dog must be licensed by Eaton County.
	+ Dog must be under the Handler’s or Host’s control at all times.
	+ The dog must wear appropriate identification identifying it as a SEL support dog.
	+ The dog’s behavior must not disrupt the educational process or learning environment.
	+ The dog must not pose a health or safety risk to any student, employee or other person.
	+ The Handler and Host are responsible for the supervision and care of the dog, including feeding, exercising, and clean up while the dog is in a District building, on District property or while representing the District at any event. The Host is responsible for all care outside of working hours/assignments.
	+ The Handler/Host will only allow the SEL support dog to be in those areas that have been pre-authorized by the Superintendent or designee.
* If any student or employee assigned to a classroom in which a SEL support dog is permitted suffers from related allergies or aversions (related fear, trauma, etc.), the Handler must remove the animal to a different location designed by the Superintendent or designee. The Handler will make every effort to know which student/employee has identified allergies or aversions.

**Student/Staff Notification**

On an annual basis, a letter from the school principal (see Attachment A) must be sent to all school families and staff notifying them that the District has assigned a SEL support dog to their building. A copy of the communication must be forwarded to the Superintendent. A copy of the letter will be provided to any new families or staff upon enrollment/hire.

Families/staff will have ten (10) business days to notify the school of any concerns. If concerns are received that could not be addressed by the school, it is the responsibility of the principal to notify the Superintendent. Handler will be provided with a list of all students/staff that have identified allergies and/or aversions to the SEL support dog. The SEL support dog can not be present in the school until the ten (10) day notice period has lapsed.

**Exclusion or Removal**

The SEL support dog may be excluded from school property and buildings if the Superintendent determines that:

* A Handler does not have control of the dog.
* The dog is not housebroken.
* The dog presents a direct and immediate threat to others in the school.
* The dog’s presence otherwise interferes with the educational process.
* The dog’s presence negatively interferes with the Handler’s job responsibilities.

The SEL support dog may be removed from the care of the Host or Handler if the Superintendent determines that:

* A Handler or Host does not have control of the dog.
* The Handler or Host does not comply with general care and training requirements.
* The dog is in danger while in the Handler’s or Host’s care.
* The Host or Handler is unable to complete job responsibilities.
* The Host or Handler is no longer employed by the District.
* Any other reason deemed appropriate by the Superintendent and in the best interest of the District owned SEL support dog.

**Miscellaneous Provisions and Expectations**

* Host and Handler are responsible for initial and ongoing training with the SEL support dog as required by Canines for Change and/or the District.
* The Host and Handler are required to follow the expectations as described in their respective applications.
* Handler must follow the daily SEL support dog work schedule as established by the Superintendent or their designee that includes required breaks for the SEL support dog.
* The Host and Handler must work collaboratively with the principal and Superintendent in the best interest of the SEL support dog and the District.
* While on duty, the SEL support dog must be on a leash of 4 to 6 feet in length and in control of the Handler at all times.
* Handler will introduce the SEL support dog and conduct a training with all building staff annually.
* Handler will introduce the SEL support dog and review expectations with students in each classroom.
* SEL support dog is only allowed in designated areas as determined by the Superintendent or designee.
* Handler is responsible for providing the SEL support dog with needed breaks, providing the dog with opportunities to relieve itself in pre-approved areas and cleaning up after the dog immediately.
* The Handler and Host are voluntary, unpaid positions that require work outside of your normal job assignment.
* Host and Handler agree to allow Canines for Change and Charlotte Public Schools to use images of you and the dog in its promotional materials or for any other purpose deemed necessary.
* If the Host or Handler become aware of any illness, injury or other health concern they must contact the District veterinarian and the Superintendent or designee immediately.
* If the Host or Handler become aware of any behavior concerns they must contact the Superintendent or designee immediately.
* The Host and Handler must maintain current training/certification in bloodborne pathogens, first aid and CPR and have proper clean-up kits available in case of bites, scratches or other incidents resulting from interactions between people and the SEL support dog.
* The Host will provide the Superintendent or designee with a file containing the following documents and information on an annual basis:
	+ Registration of the District SEL support dog with Eaton County.
	+ Proof of training/certification and any continuing training needs.
	+ Proof of immunizations up to date
	+ Certification from the District veterinarian that the dog is in good health and is fit to engage with students in a school environment.
* If the Host or Handler become aware of any injury or incident involving another student or staff member involving the SEL support dog, they must notify their principal and the Superintendent or designee immediately.
	+ Building principal will notify a child’s parent/guardian immediately upon notice that any incident has occurred between the SEL support dog and a student including: bites, scratches, allergic reactions, etc. An incident report will be completed by the principal and sent to the Associate Superintendent of Business and Operations.
	+ Building principal will notify Human Resources Supervisor immediately upon notice that any incident has occurred between the SEL support dog and a staff member including: bites, scratches, allergic reactions, etc. An employee injury/incident report will be completed by the principal and sent to the Human Resources Supervisor.
	+ Building principal will complete a Visitor Incident/Injury Report immediately upon notice that any incident has occurred between the SEL support dog and a visitor/community member including: bites, scratches, allergic reactions, etc. Report must be sent to Associate Superintendent for Business/Operations.

**Guidance for Staff**

* Staff should be open-minded to the SEL support dog and the benefits it can provide to their classrooms and the building in general.
* Should you have allergies to, aversions or general uncertainty about dogs, including the SEL support dog, it is important to communicate those concerns in advance to the building principal. It is critical that these concerns are not transferred to the students in your class and that you develop a plan for student support with your principal.
* All teachers will have a sign on their door that indicates to the Handler whether or not they currently want the dog in their room.
* Teachers may also sign up with the Handler to schedule a time to have the SEL support dog visit their classroom.
* At times, the Handler may call a classroom to see if it is a good time to have the SEL support dog come into the classroom.
* No more than three (3) students should be interacting with the SEL support dog at any one time. Enforce this policy with your students. It may be appropriate to dismiss students one at a time to pet and interact with the SEL support dog. Direction will be given to the teacher and students by the Handler.
* Teachers must provide time as requested for the Handler and SEL support dog to visit the classroom for introductions and teaching of expectations to students.

**Guidance for Students & Visitors**

* No more than three (3) students should be interacting with the SEL support dog at any one time.
* When approaching the dog, meet him/her with an open palm to allow her to sniff you.
* Never feed the dog.
* Never put your hand in the dog’s mouth.
* Never let the dog off of their leash or outside of the room/building.
* Never use rough behavior with the dog (hitting, kicking, pulling tail or ears, etc.).
* Never yell, scream, or use loud voices near the dog.
* Never run at/toward the dog.
* Never approach the dog while it is resting in its kennel. They need a nap just like us sometimes.
* Listen to the Handler and your teacher at all times and follow directions carefully.
* Failure to follow expectations will result in loss of privileges to pet/interact with the dog.

ATTACHMENT A: ANNUAL NOTICE TO FAMILIES



**Charlotte Public Schools SEL Support Dog Notice**

Charlotte Public Schools will be implementing a SEL Support Dog program during the 2023-2024 school year at your child’s school. Research has shown that support dogs in schools can help build strong social emotional skills in students. A support dog presence has also been shown to reduce anxiety, help students work through anger management concerns, reduce bullying tendencies, and address other personal and social issues that all of our developing students deal with. There are specific goals of the SEL support dog program and they include but are not limited to: increase empathy and compassion in students; help students connect with something in the school setting and reduce anxiety; and improve academic performance, while increasing confidence and self-esteem.

Our SEL support dog will be trained and certified through Canines for Change. Our dog has passed a temperament evaluation for suitability to become certified and to work in a variety of settings around people.

Our SEL support dog is owned by Charlotte Public Schools and is cared for by our employees. Each SEL support dog has a Host that takes care of them while they are not at work and a Handler that cares for them while at work. Both the Host and Handler have been properly trained through the Canines for Change program and meet very strict requirements for the ongoing care of the dog and the conditions under which our dog works.

You will find attached to this letter more specific information about the SEL support dog assigned to your child’s building including: name, age, breed, size, Host name and Handler name. It also includes a list of expectations for students when interacting with the SEL support dog. We encourage you to review these expectations with your child.

Please complete the form below acknowledging your preference as to whether you wish your child to have contact with a CPS support dog. If we do not receive a response from you within ten (10) business days we will automatically assume you do not have any concerns and approve interaction between your student and the SEL support dog. Please contact your building principal if you have questions regarding this program.

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Student’s Full Name: Grade:

I understand that my child may have incidental or student-initiated contact with the SEL support dog. I understand that the SEL support dog may be in my child’s classroom and may be part of the student support process. I understand that this permission form will remain in effect for the current school year. If I should change my mind regarding my child’s interaction and participation with the SEL support dog, I understand I must provide notice in writing to my child’s principal.

🞎 Yes, my child may have contact with the SEL support dog.

🞎 No, my child may NOT have contact with the SEL support dog.

 🞎 Due to Allergies 🞎 Due to Fear of Dogs 🞎 Other

Parent/Guardian Signature: Date:



**SEL Support Dog Program**

Include Photo of SEL Support Dog HERE

Building:

SEL Support Dog Name:

SEL Support Dog Breed:

SEL Support Dog Age and Weight:

SEL Support Dog Host Name:

SEL Support Dog Handler Name:

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