



## Therapy Dogs in Schools Administrative Procedure 1.B.195

1.0 School Administration  
1.B. Students

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### Board Governance Policy Cross Reference:

### Legal Reference:

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**Date Adopted:** February 2020

### Date Amended:

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Evergreen School Division recognizes animals may be in schools for various purposes:

- for a scheduled one - time visit (*See 1.B.35 Animals in Schools*)
- for an extended stay; as in a classroom pet (*See 1.B.35 Animals in Schools*)
- as a certified service animal (*See 1.B.55 Certified Service Animals*)
- as a therapy dog (*see below*).

### What are Therapy Dogs?

It's important to note therapy dogs are **not** service dogs.

Certified service dogs are *assistance dogs* that focus on the owner to the *exclusion* of all else. Service dogs are highly trained to provide specific, medically recommended support for individuals with disabilities. Service dogs are trained to perform tasks to ease their owner's disabilities, helping them to attain safety and independence. (*See 1.B.55 Certified Service Animals*)

Therapy dogs are *interactive dogs* trained to provide comfort to support the well-being of individual students and/or small groups of students, under the guidance and direction of a Handler. Therapy dogs can provide a level of comfort that enables students to work through challenges.

### Who is the Dog Handler?

The Handler is the adult who was part of the certification process for a particular dog. The adult dog Handler accepts full responsibility for the dog and must accompany the therapy dog at all times. See below re: responsibilities of the Handler.

### How are Therapy Dogs Used in Schools?

At the request of a clinician and with the approval of the Director of Programs and Student Services, a therapy dog visit may occur at a specified time(s) and location for a particular purpose(s). Use of therapy dogs will occur as per the expectations described below.

- a. Approval must be given/renewed each year, and/or whenever the Handler wishes to use a different therapy dog.

- b. The Principal of the school has the authority to end the arrangement pertaining to the use of therapy dogs at any time at their discretion.

Responsibilities of the Handler:

1. In addition to student safety, the Handler agrees that the therapy dog's behaviour and health will be his/her responsibility.
2. The Handler must provide a copy of certification from a recognized therapy dog organization such as St. John's Ambulance or Therapeutic Paws of Canada.
3. **The Handler must also provide the following:**
  - a. Criminal Record (vulnerable sector) Check and Child Abuse Registry Check; at no time will the Handler and dog be alone with students.
  - b. Signed copy of **1.A.170A Volunteer Agreement**
  - c. Current vaccination record for the therapy dog, including proof of vaccinations for rabies, distemper, parvovirus and adenovirus (hepatitis).
  - d. Proof of liability insurance (\$2 million general liability insurance through their respective therapy dog organization or through their own personal insurance). NOTE: The Handler acknowledges that Evergreen School Division does not carry liability and/or medical insurance for the Handler or dog and is not responsible if the dog is lost, stolen or injured.
  - e. Signed copy of **1.B.195 A Therapy Dogs in School Agreement**.
4. The Handler will assume full responsibility and liability for any damage to school property or injury to staff, students or others in the school caused by the therapy dog while on school property.
5. The Handler will work under the guidance and supervision of the Principal (or designate) who will ensure the Handler is aware of school "rules" and "routines" and how to respond to concerning behaviors.
6. The schedule of visits will be determined by the Principal (or designate) in consultation with the Handler.
7. The Handler will feed, exercise and clean up after the therapy dog while the therapy dog is on school property. The Handler is responsible for decisions around the safest and most environmentally sound place for the therapy dog to relieve itself, removal and disposal of animal waste; and how to respond if an elimination accident should occur.
8. At all times, the Handler will control and supervise the dog. The Handler will ensure the dog is on a leash, held by the Handler, at all times. The Handler will ensure the dog is clean, well

groomed, free of injury/illness and of the temperament appropriate for working with children.

9. The Handler will give their full attention to the dog and its interactions with students and staff.
10. The Handler will wear a visitor identification card and ensure the dog wears a vest identifying it as a “therapy animal”.
11. Under the direction of the Principal, the Handler will take responsibility for educating the school community about the role of the dog.
12. The Handler will immediately remove the dog from the school if any behaviors occur that may affect the safety of students.
13. The Handler will notify the Principal of any concerns, or injury to students, the dog or Handler. **NOTE:** Dependent on injury, Principal may contact ESD Superintendent, file a ***Serious Incident Report***, complete a ***Student Accident Report***, or ask employee to complete an injury report (See ***Section 8.0 of ESD Admin Manual: Safe Schools***).
14. If the Handler is an Evergreen School Division staff member, the following expectations also apply:
  - a. The Handler can only be working as a Handler during times that they are ***not*** performing their regular duties as employees of the Division.
  - b. This could include, with the Principal’s permission, before school, nutrition breaks, activity breaks (if not assigned supervision duties at that time), preparation time, or after school. ***The staff member cannot at any time assume the role of Handler when responsible for the care and supervision of students.***
  - c. All therapy dog visits must be pre – approved by school Principal.
  - d. Arrangements need to be made for the dog to leave the school or be kenneled when not on “active duty”.

#### Responsibilities of the Principal

The Principal of the school must ensure the following:

1. Careful consideration to the appropriateness of a therapy dog for work with particular students.
2. The Handler has provided **all** the necessary documentation. See ***1.B.195D Principal’s Checklist***.

3. A meeting is held with the Handler to discuss the expectations regarding the dog's grooming, hygiene, behaviour and access/limits to areas of the school/school property.
4. In conjunction with the Handler, the Principal must ensure that the care and needs of the therapy dog are met, including:
  - a. safest and most environmentally sound place for the therapy dog to relieve itself;
  - b. removal and disposal of animal waste; and
  - c. how Handler should respond to an elimination accident (in consultation with school custodian).
5. A trial visit is suggested where the Handler brings the dog to school to familiarize dog with school/students. Principal will treat this visit as a scheduled one – time visit and follow ***Procedure 1.B.35 Animals in Schools.***
6. A letter is sent home to the students in any classes where the therapy dog will be present to elicit information concerning allergies, phobias, and other considerations.
  - ***1.B.195 C Therapy Dog: Individual or Small Group Parent/Guardian Consent*** must be completed by parents/guardians of students the dog will be specifically visiting/working with. It is suggested that the school make phone contact prior to the form going home.
  - ***1.B.195 B Therapy Dog in Classroom Parent/Guardian Note*** must be completed by parents/guardians of students whose classroom the dog will be spending time in.
  - Parental consent must be obtained each school year.
7. Arrangements have been made for the Handler to educate the staff and students on the role of the therapy dog and to outline rules of conduct concerning the dog.
8. A timetable is established with the Handler.
9. A sign has been placed on each entry door of the school for the duration of the visit, informing visitors of the presence of a therapy dog (See ***1.B.195E Signage***).
10. The Principal will immediately inform ESD Superintendent if there is an accident or injury that involves the therapy dog or Handler.
11. The Principal must monitor the program by meeting with staff involved and the Handler on a regular basis.