

# DRAFT



## School Facility Dog Program Guidelines

**Assistance Dogs, a program of The Ability Center**



**The Ability Center**

<https://abilitycenter.org/>

# School Facility Dog Program Guidelines

The **School Facility Dog Program Guidelines** is a 2022 publication of **Assistance Dogs** - an Assistance Dogs International (ADI) accredited program of **The Ability Center** - through participatory research collaboration with the co-authors below.

## **Co-Authors/Participatory Research Team Group Facilitators**

**Shelley Wanner Agee**, Retired School Counselor, Bryan City Schools

**Jenny Barlos**, former Client Services Manager, Assistance Dogs, a program of The Ability Center

**Stacie Baumbarger**, Program Director, Assistance Dogs, a program of The Ability Center

**Jackie Boyd**, Retired School Counselor, Bryan City Schools

**Kim Holmes**, Canine Training Specialist, Assistance Dogs, a program of The Ability Center

**Suzanne Reinhart**, Retired School Counselor, Tiffin City Schools

## **Co-Authors/Participatory Research Team Members**

**Dr. Kadee Anstadt**, Superintendent, Washington Local School District

**Kate Bailin**, School Counselor, Whitehouse Primary School

**Deb Breidenbach**, School Counselor, Bucyrus Elementary, Bucyrus City Schools

**Chris Buehrer**, School Counselor, Monclova Primary School

**Jillian Cowell**, School Counselor, Waterville Primary School

**Angela Crum**, Occupational Therapist, Elmwood Elementary School

**Shelly DeVantier**, Reading Specialist/Faculty, Whiteford Agricultural School

**Trisha Flint**, School Counselor, Noble Elementary, Tiffin City School District

**Jennifer Floyd-Kemritz**, Faculty, Whiteford Agricultural School

**Erin Gillig**, Interim Director of Student Services, Tiffin City School District

**Gretchen Herzberger**, Intervention Specialist/Title 1, North Ridgeville Early Childhood Learning Community

**Laura Hufford**, School Counselor, South Vienna Elementary School

**Allie Livingston**, School Counselor, Fostoria City School District

**Rachael Mann**, School Counselor, Bryan Elementary School

**Angie McGinnis**, School Counselor, Mohawk Elementary, Mohawk Local School District

**Melissa Mellott**, School Counselor, Tiffin Middle School, Tiffin City School District

**Jill Miller**, District Social Worker, Tiffin City School District

**Jenny Minni**, School Counselor, Fallen Timbers Middle School

**Janice Panuto**, Trojan Academy Director/Principal and Compliance, Findlay City Schools

**Brittany Robbins**, School Counselor, Timberstone Junior High School

**Brooke Snead**, Teacher, Stranahan Elementary School

**Nancy Slotterbeck**, School Counselor, Lakota Local School District

**Theresa Vietmeier**, Principal, Wauseon Elementary School

**Katy Yoder**, School Counselor, Hartville & Lake Elementary Schools

**Bethany Zambori-Sanford**, School Counselor, Fostoria City Schools

### **Co-Author/Participatory Research Consultant**

**Dr. Janet Hoy-Gerlach**, Founder/CEO, OneHealth People-Animal Wellness Services (OHPAWS) & Professor of Social Work at The University of Toledo

We recommend citing as follows:

Assistance Dogs et al. (2022). *School Facility Dog Program Guidelines*.

# Dedication

## Kennedy: A Super School Facility Dog



Kennedy was diagnosed with cancer the day after our School Facility Dog Program Guidelines project began. Kennedy's many friends and supporters stepped up, raising the needed funds for his needed surgery within a few days. Tragically there were complications after his surgery, and Kennedy died the following month. His unconditional love and support of students, staff and the Tiffin community will live on through the memories of many. Kennedy will be remembered as a loving friend who was very headstrong and loved to make his friends laugh! He always knew just what to do to be helpful in every situation. From giving kisses, a hug or nudge, putting his head in a student's lap to planting his feet and refusing to go upstairs, Kennedy had an unlimited toolbox of activities to use to support his friends. He joined many students grieving the loss of a family member or classmate, offering a loving hug, gentle kiss, and sometimes comic relief with a carefully timed expression of gas from either end. He was quite the comedian, at times, knowing when the situation was getting heavy for the students. He knew how to make kids laugh! Kennedy filled our lives with smiles and love. As all these facility dogs do, Kennedy has touched so many lives and will always be remembered as a best friend and confidant. As hard as it is to say goodbye, these amazing animals have had such a profound impact on those who loved them that their memory will live on indefinitely.

# TABLE OF CONTENTS

**Acknowledgement p. 8**

**Introduction p. 9**

**Executive Summary p.12**

## **Part One – Pre-Dog Placement Guidelines p. 14**

- Site and Stakeholder Considerations p. 15
  - School needs assessment and goals for school facility dog program p. 15
  - Common concerns p. 16
  - Administrative approval p. 17
  - Community engagement/buy-in p. 19
  - Site logistics p. 19
- Policy Considerations p. 21
  - School district/board level p. 21
    - Dog ownership and welfare decision-making policy p. 21
    - Liability insurance p. 21
    - Veterinary insurance p. 21
    - General school facility dog program policy p. 22
  - School-level
    - General operations p. 22
    - Staff policies p. 25
    - Student policies p. 26
    - Parent/caregiver policies p. 26
    - Other animals – visiting therapy dogs, service animals, etc. p. 27
- Handler Considerations p. 28
  - Identification, training, and evaluation of primary handlers p. 28

- Identification, training, and evaluation of secondary handlers p. 30
- Dog Considerations
  - Selecting a school facility dog p. 31
  - Training a school facility dog p. 31
  - Canine Student Teacher p. 32

## **Part Two – Post-Dog Placement Guidelines p. 33**

- School facility dog daily care p. 34
  - Daily care plan at school p. 34
  - Home care plan p. 34
  - Veterinary care p. 35
  - Nutrition p. 36
- School facility dog work schedule management p. 37
  - Alignment of school goals/needs with proposed dog's work activities p. 37
  - Creation of school dog work schedule with breaks for dog p. 37
  - Management of schedule p. 38
  - Addressing schedule conflicts p. 38
  - Out of school events p. 39
- School facility dog wellness p. 40
  - Recognizing and responding to dog stress signs p. 40
  - Breaks p. 40
  - Ongoing training p. 41
  - Retirement p. 41
  - Death p.41
- School facility dog program administrative support role p. 43
  - Ongoing administrative oversight and support p. 43
  - Annual program evaluation p. 44
  - Annual school needs assessment update p. 44
  - School facility dog program changes – handler-related p. 44
  - School facility dog program changes – dog-related p. 45

**Conclusion p. 46**

**Tributes to School Facility Dogs p.47**

**Appendices**

- Appendix A – Sample Script for Meeting with Principal p. 54
- Appendix B – Sample Class Letter/Contract p. 56
- Appendix C – General Safety and Handling Rules p. 57
- Appendix D – Student Concern Form p. 59
- Appendix E – Guidelines for Other Animals p. 60
- Appendix F – Health and Preventative Veterinary Care Guidelines p. 61
- Appendix G – Stress Signs in School Facility Dogs p. 62

# Acknowledgement

The School Facility Dog Program Guidelines would not exist  
without the support of

**The Scaife Family Foundation.**

Through their generosity, schools will be better able to  
effectively implement school facility dog programs and reap the  
social, emotional, physical, and academic benefits associated  
with having a school facility dog on site!





## **Introduction**

Existing research<sup>1,2,3</sup> links dogs within schools to a range of benefits for students, including but not limited to the following:

- motivating students to complete academic tasks
- fostering positive attitudes toward school and learning
- supporting higher academic achievement
- reducing stress, anxiety, and depression
- encouraging children to be more physically active and engage in coordination-building actions
- catalyzing positive interactions between children, peers, and adults
- providing a unique form of social support to students *and* to school staff.

To help facilitate these benefits, there are multiple ways to incorporate a dog into a school environment. The terms *school facility dog* and *school therapy dog* are often used interchangeably to denote canine roles within school settings. While both school therapy dogs and school facility dogs can help to facilitate the above benefits within school communities, there are key differences between these two types of dogs' roles. Assistance Dogs, a program of the Ability Center, has historically used the term "school therapy dog" when referring to school facility dogs who have been trained and placed through their program. To better recognize the intensive and specialized training of dogs placed to work in schools through Assistance Dogs, the term "school facility dog" will henceforth be used.

### **School Facility Dog vs. School Therapy Dog:**

**School facility dogs** are a special category of *working dogs*, comparable to a K9 police dog who accompanies a particular police officer to work each day<sup>1</sup>. Facility dogs undergo hundreds of hours of professional training, ideally through an accredited facility dog training program<sup>4</sup>, and then are placed at a specific facility or facilities where they work alongside a volunteer or a

professional who serves as a primary handler<sup>4</sup>. Like K9 police dogs who belong to police departments, school facility dogs belong to the school or school district where they are placed. Just as the police officers who handle K9 police dogs must undergo special training and preparation and make an ongoing commitment to caring for their K9 partner daily, the school staff who are primary and secondary handlers for a school facility dog must likewise be trained and committed to caring for their canine co-worker throughout their workdays. During their workdays, school facility dogs work alongside trained primary and secondary handlers – typically professional school counselors or teachers – to provide mental health, academic, and social support to students and staff within their school(s).

Maximizing the benefits and welfare of a working school facility dog who is at the school forty plus hours per week necessitates the development and implementation of a comprehensive school facility dog program<sup>3</sup>; well-planned logistics are critical to the success of such an endeavor<sup>2,3</sup>. There are currently no comprehensive guidelines to inform such planning efforts.

***School therapy*** dogs, in contrast, are *pets* who belong to an individual (usually their handler) and who have typically been evaluated and registered by one of several national non-profit therapy dog credentialing organizations. For example, to be registered as a therapy dog-handler team with Pet Partners, a national non-profit that evaluates and registers therapy animal teams, both the handler and animal – the “team” – must pass an in-person evaluation. Evaluations focus on dog basic obedience and temperament indicators related to safely and comfortably interacting with a wide variety of people, across a wide range of settings with many distractions. To prepare, the handler and their animal typically enroll in dog training classes or do individual training work. School therapy dogs may belong to and accompany a volunteer community handler for scheduled visits to a school or may belong to and accompany a school staff member who brings the dog to school to visit and/or assist with class/student activities.

**Purpose of Guidelines:**

The purpose of the *School Facility Dog Program Guidelines* is to offer a research-informed resource for developing, implementing, and operating school facility dog programs that support school community well-being and facility dog welfare.

**Methods:**

A team of stakeholders with school facility dog expertise collaboratively developed the *School Facility Dog Program Guidelines* via a rigorous twelve-month research process. Team members included: three Assistance Dogs (AD) staff members (AD is a program of The Ability Center and an accredited school facility dog training organization through Assistance Dogs International (ADI)); three expert school facility dog handlers; twenty-six school facility dog staff handlers (teachers, professional school counselors, school social workers, other professionals, principals, and a superintendent) across northwest Ohio; and a research consultant.

Through generous funding from the Scaife Foundation, the team used an applied research methodology known as participatory action research. Via iterations of communication within and between five small groups of facility dog handlers over a twelve-month period, participants identified key domains of a school facility dog program; developed questions related to each domain; conducted focus groups on the questions, analyzed question responses, and used findings to create guidelines. University of Toledo Professor Dr. Janet Hoy-Gerlach provided research consultation and support throughout the participatory action research process. All research procedures were approved by Solutions IRB prior to the project commencing.

<sup>1</sup>Jalango, M., Permenter, F., & Conrad, K. (2022). Facility Dogs in Educational Programs for Young Children: Definition, Issues, and Implementation. *Early Childhood Education Journal*. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10643-022-01334-1>

<sup>2</sup>Grove, C., Henderson, L., Lee, F., & Wardlaw, P. (2021). Therapy Dogs in Educational Settings: Guidelines and Recommendations for Implementation. *Frontiers in Veterinary Science*. 8:655104 doi: 10.3389/fvets.2021.655104

<sup>3</sup>VonLintel, J., & Bruneau, L. (2021). Pathways for Implementing a School Therapy Dog Program: Steps for Success and Best Practice Considerations. *Journal of School Counseling*, 19(14), 1–32.

<sup>4</sup>Assistance Dogs International (2021). Summary of Standards.

Retrieved from <https://assistancedogsinternational.org/standards/summary-of-standards/>

<sup>5</sup>Pet Partners (2022) Terminology. Retrieved from <https://petpartners.org/learn/terminology/>

## **Executive Summary**

### **Overview**

Youth across the United States and internationally currently face a myriad of academic, social, and emotional challenges in school settings. Research on human-animal interaction (HAI) indicates a range of biopsychosocial benefits for people, including children and teens in school settings. School facility dogs working full-time in schools alongside their human partners have gained increased attention as a strategy for conveying HAI benefits to students and staff, but the logistics involved are often challenging; there were no established guidelines or best practices for school facility dog programs.

To begin to address this gap and build capacity for and access to school facility dogs, Assistance Dogs (an Assistance Dogs International (ADI) accredited program of The Ability Center) convened a workgroup of experts – including school facility dog trainers, school counselors, principals, a superintendent, teachers, and others – to collaboratively develop guidelines. The stakeholder group used participatory action research over a twelve-month period, to produce guidelines for developing, implementing, and maintaining a school facility dog program.

### **Key Findings**

While numerous important findings emerged through the stakeholders' participatory research, several core strategies were endorsed as particularly critical in maximizing the benefits associated with school facility dog programs:

- The work and activities of school facility dogs should *align with the school's goals and needs*, rather than operating in isolation as a particular classroom or staff initiative. The positive impacts of a school facility dog can be much more largely transformative for a school community if intentionally integrated with that school's strategic plan and needs.
- A school facility dog program should be recognized and treated as a *program*, with a *designated administrator* who collaborates with the dog's handler(s) on an ongoing basis to ensure facility dog activity alignment with school goals, as well as appropriate

and timely access to resources (including financial) and troubleshooting and support as needed with operations issues.

- The school facility dog should be a school *ambassador to the larger community*, and can help to create connections with families, residents and businesses through social media posts, presence at events, and other relationship-building endeavors.
- *Handler training and ongoing learning opportunities for handlers are crucial* to the integrity of a school facility dog program; the handlers develop and build the expertise that maximizes HAI benefits for the school and greater community, while ensuring canine well-being.
- *Proactively maintaining the dog's welfare is paramount*; to be a well-adjusted and happy working dog, ongoing training and welfare monitoring is necessary, and the handlers should serve as their canine colleague's advocate in such areas. Policies and procedures that ensure that the health, training, and daily care needs of the school facility dog are met should be put in place, monitored closely, and updated as needed.

## **Next Steps**

In addition to academic and social support, School Facility Dogs and their handlers can be a source of significant mental health support for students as well as staff. There are numerous and emerging strategies, practices and activities being utilized by School Facility Dogs and their handlers in responding to mental health needs, ranging from basic mental wellness promotion to assistance with de-escalating distressed students (while keeping in mind canine and human safety). Such interventions need to be made explicit, evaluated, refined, and shared across the school facility dog community, so that school facility dogs and handlers can be better equipped to provide mental health support in a time that is being referred to as a “mental health pandemic”, particularly for youth. We have just begun to realize the positive potential of school facility dogs and handlers in the lives of youth, school staff, and the communities that schools are a part of.

## **Part One – Pre-Dog Placement Guidelines**

## **Site and Stakeholder Considerations**

### **Overview**

---

Numerous site- and stakeholder-related considerations need to be addressed *prior* to placing a school facility dog. Within this section, guidance on school needs assessment, administrative approval, community engagement/buy-in, and general logistics are provided.

### **Assessing school needs and goals related to school facility dog program benefits**

---

- A school facility dog program provides numerous benefits to students and school staff. Specifically, a school facility dog can help facilitate student improvements in the following areas: academics; social/emotional learning; and mental health<sup>1</sup>. School facility dogs can also positively impact attendance, motivation, and Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS). PBIS is an evidenced-based three-tiered framework of student interventions ( <https://www.pbis.org/>) required through the Ohio Department of Education standards and Ohio law.
- A written school-wide needs assessment process that identifies specific school needs and how a school facility dog can specifically help to address these needs will align the school facility dog program with the ongoing needs/goals of the schools.
- A recent school strategic plan or other recent pre-existing school assessment document can be used to crosswalk/connect *specific* school needs with *specific* benefits of a school facility dog.
- A simple Google Forms survey or other document can also be used to identify priority areas and administered via email (using existing/established school procedures for administering such feedback tools).
- A written school needs assessment that links specific school needs/goals with specific benefits of school facility dog programs will be an invaluable tool in obtaining administrative approval (see next section).

## Addressing common concerns about school facility dogs

---

- There are typical concerns about school facility dogs - allergies, asthma; fears; and cultural issues related to dogs - that tend to be among the *first* questions raised by administrators, school staff, parents, and other community stakeholders. Be prepared to proactively address these concerns at *every* level of stakeholder communication relating to school facility dogs. Specifically, be prepared to explain how concerns can be mitigated.
- Outreach can be done proactively to parents/guardians to address concerns. For instance, one school facility dog handler (prior to the school facility dog placement) reviewed the emergency medical forms of each of the three buildings she worked in, to locate students who were reported to be allergic to dogs. She called each of the students' parents/caregivers to discuss how a school facility dog could affect their respective child, and what steps could be taken to safeguard child well-being.
- Specific mitigating strategies have been developed and successfully implemented in school facility dog programs.
  - Mitigating strategies for allergies and contact/proximity-related issues: not bringing the dog into the classroom of a child with dog-related allergies; not bringing the dog into common areas (music room, art room, library, and so forth); ensuring halls are swept daily to prevent dander collection; holding lessons that include the school facility dog outdoors, so that the child with dog allergies could participate; and ensuring that children are educated about allergies of all sorts to build empathy and support for children who are allergic to dogs.
  - Mitigating strategies for fears: providing education to the student on training and handling of dogs; allowing the student to observe the facility dog interactions with other students from a distance; doing a social story (social



stories are written from the student’s perspective to provide guidance for specific situations, see <https://vkc.vumc.org/assets/files/tipsheets/socialstoriestips.pdf> for more information); talking with the student and their family about proximity-related school facility dog rules (e.g., the dog will not approach from behind the student, and the student may move to the back of the room to increase distance between themselves and the dog).

- Mitigation strategies can also be used with school staff.
- Animal allergens cannot be *eliminated* in schools. Typical school environments have allergens from animals due to transfer from the clothing of students and staff who have pets. There is “strong evidence that clothing is the primary transfer mechanism of pet allergens”, and that “cat and dog allergens are ubiquitously found in every type of human indoor environment, regardless of the presence of pets, likely due to passive transfer via clothing”<sup>6</sup>.

### **Obtaining formal school administrative approval**

---

- Administrative approvals at *both* the individual school and district/board levels are generally needed in starting a school facility dog program.
- A recommended first step is to approach the school principal with documented school needs and research-supported specific benefits of a school facility dog program that address these school needs; tailor your approach based on your school’s communication culture (email versus in-person informal communications).
- Proactively addressing common concerns related to school facility dogs is also recommended. Liability is a commonly raised concern by administrators. Liability for the school facility dog can be covered by the school district insurance, as the dog will legally belong to the school or school district. Use concrete examples to illustrate these concerns when discussing.

<sup>6</sup>Zahradnik, E., & Raulf, M. (2014). Animal allergens and their presence in the environment. *Frontiers in immunology*, 5, 76. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fimmu.2014.00076>

- Meeting with a principal, face-to-face, if possible, is a recommended initial strategy to proactively address anticipated questions and concerns.
- See Appendix A for a sample script used by a professional school counselor/primary handler for a meeting with principal about obtaining a school facility dog.
- Once the principal's approval is obtained, a school-wide staff communication – again tailored to your school's culture (meeting, email, other format) – soliciting feedback, interest and input from school staff should be generated and evaluated. Any additional "champions" (school staff who are highly interested in and willing to devote substantial time to the school facility dog program) identified through this process should be brought into the "start-up team" (group of staff working toward initiating a school facility dog program).
- Proactive addressing of common concerns related to school facility dogs is again recommended when communicating with school staff. See the section that specifically addresses common concerns; a presentation to staff with concrete examples of these issues and how to address them should be planned.
- Board/district level approval should be solicited with guidance from your principal. Again, proactive addressing of common concerns related to school facility dogs is recommended when the board is approached. Anticipate liability questions and have the answers ready.
- Addressing your school board may entail a simple meeting or a formal presentation to the board, depending on your school district. Again, documentation of specific school needs/goals and *how* a school facility dog program will assist in addressing these will be an invaluable tool. Be prepared to answer common Board questions related to insurance and funding. Also be prepared with ideas and suggestions for how a school facility dog will benefit the district and whole community.
- Community engagement/buy-in may be pursued concurrently with Board/district approval (see next section); community support is likely to positively influence the Board toward approving a school facility dog program.

## Community/stakeholder engagement and buy-in

---

- Communications with the community (including parents/caregivers) should likewise focus on assessed school needs/goals and the potential of a school facility dog program to help address these. Include information about the academic, social, psychological, and physical benefits associated with school facility dogs.
- Community input and engagement can be solicited a variety of ways for a school facility dog program, including but not limited to the following ways: virtual and in-person town halls; email communications; PTA presentations; social media requests for survey (Google Form or other simple survey instrument) feedback; and so forth.
- Think of the school “community” broadly; local businesses, hospitals and healthcare systems, summer camps, YMCA/YWCAs, public libraries, local civic organizations (Kiwanis, Rotary, Sons of American Legion, and so forth) and other entities may be interested in supporting a school facility dog program. Make a list of community allies/partners and reach out to them to ascertain interest and ways they may potentially be able to support the program (financial, supply donations, other). Offer to present to them, and/or to schedule visits with the school facility dog that support their respective organization’s goals.

## Site logistics

---

- Detailed planning for the care of the school facility dog is addressed in the School Facility Dog Daily Care section of this document; however, it is important to have a basic logistical plan to propose for the school facility dog’s space in each building.
- Designated resting place - The school facility dog will need a designated resting space with a bed, toys, food, and water dishes, and so forth for “down time” and breaks. This may be a professional school counselor’s office or another quiet place where the dog (and handler) can be as needed. Entry to the dog’s resting area should be locked or monitored if the handler needs to leave the area momentarily, so that students do **not** interact with the dog unattended.

- Space for walking/toileting – Some outdoor place where the dog can safely walk and toilet must be determined, with consideration for weather and ease of access to the school building.

## **Policy Considerations**

### **Overview**

---

Prior to starting a school facility dog program, an infrastructure of policy support is needed to optimize benefits of the program and provide guidance when emergent issues are encountered. Within this section, guidance is offered for policy development at the School Board/district and individual school level (which include policies for handlers, staff, students, and parents/caregivers).

### **School Board/district level policies**

---

- *School facility dog ownership and welfare responsibility policy* – Determination of school facility dog ownership (individual school vs. district) needs to be specified in a written Board-approved policy, and related/shared responsibilities need to be delineated within the policy:
  - Decision-making for the school facility dog’s welfare – a designated decision-maker for the dog’s health and welfare decision-making needs to be appointed to act as the owner “proxy”; we recommend that this be the primary handler, designated in writing, and evaluated/updated as needed.
  - Financial responsibility – the responsible parties for veterinary care, food, supplies, insurance, and other needs for the school facility dog need to be specified in policy; cost-sharing/fund-raising expectations from other entities can be included here (e.g., the individual school may be expected to raise a portion). Health insurance for a school facility dog and a veterinary provider who is willing to specify costs for veterinary services in writing can be used to budget for expenses.
  - Ongoing finance management – funds that are allocated or raised for the school facility dog expenses should be stored in an account that can be

*readily* accessed by the school facility dog owner “proxy” (ideally the primary handler); the school treasurer should be consulted for help with developing a written step-by-step protocol for accessing the funds; a process for expense review/approval should also be specified; an expense reimbursement process may also be included.

- Liability insurance for school facility dog – the person that manages other insurance coverages for the school district should be engaged to assist in procuring this coverage.
- Veterinary health insurance for the school facility dog – if the “owner” entity elects to obtain veterinary health insurance for the school facility dog, this should be noted in the *school facility dog ownership and responsibility policy* and the cost included in the financial section.
- General school facility dog program policy – the board/district should have a general school facility dog program policy which references their established school facility dog ownership and welfare policy (including dog care, decision-making policy and financial responsibility as specified on page 21) and minimally delineates: handler expectations and reporting of handling violations; general school facility dog safety/handling rules; and administrative programmatic responsibility and support.

### **School-level policies – general operations**

---

The school facility dog program should have a general operations policy, which includes the general program goals, handler expectations and reporting of violations, general school facility dog safety/handling rules, facility dog schedule management, and administrative programmatic responsibility and support.

- Examples of general program goals include but are not limited to the following: improve academic performance; increase engagement in learning; build social/emotional competence; decrease anxiety/stress.

- Handler expectations include but are not limited to the following: general scheduling/oversight of school facility dog activities; adherence to dog handling and safety practices; ensuring dog care; monitoring of dog welfare/stress and ensuring breaks as needed; educating regarding school facility dog procedures; and seeking administrative support as needed to resolve violations of school facility dog rules and training practices.
- General school facility dog safety and handling rules – see Appendix B for sample - please note, a critical rule is *that a student should never be left alone with a school facility dog, for the safety of the dog, student, and program*. A school staff person who has been trained in school facility dog handling should always be *present* and *in control* of the dog and the situation.

### *A Cautionary Tale*

*After extensive planning and work, a well-trained and – and soon well-loved – school facility dog was placed at a school. All went well, until the school facility dog was left alone briefly with a student, unattended by a trained handler or school staff person. That student claimed to have been bitten by the school facility dog during this time. Investigation revealed a slight scratch on the student's arm. Although the mark on the student's arm was barely visible, and the dog had passed multiple temperament evaluations with flying colors prior to placement and had never evidenced any sign of aggression with people or animals, due to liability concerns the dog was permanently removed from the school.*

- The facility dog schedule is a critical component of operations as it is the tool through which the facility dog's activities are coordinated daily. The general operations policy should identify the primary handler as the person responsible for creation and maintenance of the dog's schedule. In the event of schedule conflicts or emergent situations in which the school facility dog is requested, the operations policy should note prioritization of school facility dog activities that best align with school goals and

needs. The primary handler should determine the school facility dog's daily activities, in consultation with school administration if necessary. The primary handler (or designee) must have discretion to amend the dog's schedule at any time if there are concerns about the dog's welfare or health.

- School administrative support is *crucial* to maintaining the integrity and optimal functioning of the school facility dog program. The operations policy should thus stipulate that a school administrator (with formal supervisory capacity in the school where the facility dog primarily works) be explicitly designated to provide timely ongoing support and oversight to the school facility dog program.

The designated school administrator role entails facilitating communication and coordination between the school facility dog program, the school, and the wider community, with the overarching purpose of aligning the school facility dog program activities with the needs and goals of the school.

The *designated school administrator* should also work with the primary handler to ensure that an annual school facility dog program evaluation (including handler evaluations) is completed, and that the school facility dog program activities continue to align with the school's needs and goals. Ongoing assistance with needed supports and resources should be provided to help accomplish this.

Examples of when the designated school administrator role is needed for emergent issues include but are not limited to the following:

- When the primary handler needs assistance resolving a staff conflict related to school facility dog work schedule
- When there are deliberate/ongoing rule violations/infractions of school facility dog rules by school personnel (including handlers) that are not resolved with information/education. It is important to note that the handlers, while they can provide information and education, generally are



not in a supervisory capacity over colleagues and need access to supervisory assistance to enforce program rules.

- When there needs to be designation of new handlers, handler performance issues, involuntary transitions, and related issues.

### School-level policies – staff

---

- A general school facility dog classroom letter and agreement (see Appendix B for sample) that references school facility dog safety and handling rules (see Appendix C for sample) should be provided to the classroom teacher for return with signature (indicating review and agreement) prior to the school facility dog coming to do work in that teacher's classroom. These could be done annually via electronic means at the beginning of each school year to simplify the process.

We recommend that the classroom agreement also include language indicating that while every effort will be made to honor the scheduled date/time for the school facility dog, in the event of an emergent crisis the school facility dog may be re-deployed at the discretion of the primary handler and designated school administrator. The school facility dog classroom activity may also be rescheduled in the event of handler unavailability or health issues of dog or handler. A back-up/contingency class activity plan is thus encouraged.

Language educating on alignment of school facility dog activities with addressing of school needs/goals (academics, social/emotional learning, mental health, other intervention for students in need) in a classroom agreement is also helpful. The school facility dog is not “just a friendly visitor” or a “class reward”. Rather, the school facility dog is a trained collaborator who can help in the teacher's accomplishment of educational goals and objectives through purposeful activities! **See *The Allie Project* for specific assistance developing academic plans that incorporate the school facility dog:** <http://allieproject.org/>

- Protocols for dog-related classroom concerns (allergies, asthma, fears, cultural concerns) should likewise be offered to classroom teachers or any other school personnel who schedules work involving the school facility dog; as previously mentioned in prior sections, *every effort should be made to proactively identify and resolve such concerns prior to school facility dog involvement.*
- The school facility dog may be removed from a classroom or school event *at any point at the discretion of the handler* if there are safety or handling concerns; the designated school administrator can be involved to resolve at a later point but relocating the school facility dog to a safe place will be prioritized.
- Any classroom incidents involving the school facility dog should be reported using existing school incident protocols; however, the primary handler and designated school administrator should also be notified asap.

#### **School-level policies – students**

---

- Student agreements for school facility dog activities should be distributed minimally annually for review and signature and include safety/handling rules.
- Students may serve in volunteer capacities with additional responsibilities related to care of the school facility dog. Tasks involving direct handling of the school facility dog should happen with primary or secondary handler approval and *under direct supervision of a primary or secondary handler only.*

#### **School-level policies – parents/caregivers**

---

- Parents/caregivers/guardians should be notified in writing (email, letter, etc.) at the beginning of each academic year regarding the School Facility Dog Program; simple language highlighting the benefits of a school facility dog program for students is helpful to include.

Information and instructions for communication of parent/guardian/caregiver concerns related to student participation in the school facility dog program – such as

dog allergies, asthma, fears, and cultural considerations – should be clearly outlined, along with general school responses to such concerns that ensure student well-being. A concern/allergy form for parent/caregiver to sign and return should be included (see Appendix D for sample).

Parents/caregivers/guardians can also be invited to be more involved with the school facility dog program through fund-raising, special events including the school facility dog, or other opportunities.

### **School-level policies – visiting therapy dogs, service dogs, and pets**

---

- To ensure that the work of the school facility dog and the purpose of other animals in a school building are not at odds, guidelines should be in place.
- See Appendix E for sample guidelines.

# **Handler Considerations for School Facility Dog Programs**

## **Overview**

---

At the heart of the school facility dog program is a happy, healthy, well-trained dog. This section offers guidance on selection and training of the school facility dog, drawing from the standards and protocols of Assistance Dogs, an Assistance Dogs International (ADI) accredited program of the Ability Center. (For differences between a school *facility* dog and a school *therapy* dog, please see the Introduction section on pages 2-3.)

## **Primary handler**

---

Primary handler – Serving as the school facility dog primary handler is a tremendous responsibility, as this is the lead staff role in a school facility dog program. A primary handler for a new school facility dog program is often a school staff member and leader of the informal “startup” group that championed the creation of the school facility dog program. The primary handler role requires an enormous amount of time and dedication, and ongoing learning.

If a new primary handler must be determined for an existing school facility dog (for non-handler performance related reasons such as retirement or relocation), the current primary handler should have a highly active role in determining the new primary handler

A person in this role must be both able and willing to do the following:

- Complete an extensive 5-day training workshop to learning handling and training protocols for the school facility dog.
- Serve as the *primary advocate* for the dog’s health and well-being and make decisions as or in close collaboration with the designated “owner proxy” for the school facility dog (the “owner proxy” should be specified in the School Board policy, see pages 17-18 for more information).

- House and care for the school facility dog after working hours
- Ensure that other animals residing in the handler's household have been approved by the school facility dog placement organization prior to the school facility dog meeting these animals.
- Ensure that the school facility dog has a designated space, toileting area, and access to nutritious food and water while working.
- Ensure that the school facility dog has a school care plan and home care plan and that both are appropriately implemented.
- Ensure that the school facility dog has preventative and acute veterinary care as needed.
- Serve as the primary school facility dog program liaison between the school/school district and the facility dog training/placement program.
- Hold primary responsibility for creation and oversight of the school facility dog's work schedule (including prioritization of dog's work activities and resolution of schedule conflicts, in alignment with school needs/goals).
- Provide general education as needed to the school community and the community at-large related to the school facility dog program.
- Attend ongoing professional development and dog training workshops to maintain skills.
- Work with the designated school administrator to ensure the integrity of the school facility dog program and alignment of the program with the school's needs.
- The designated school administrator should at least annually evaluate primary handlers, and as needed.

If multiple school staff seek the role of primary handler, the interested staff should be extensively educated on the significant work and responsibility of the primary handler role (it may be that some staff will opt for secondary handler roles once the extent of the responsibilities are outlined). If there is no resolution after education on the primary handler role and discussion between the staff, a staff person will be chosen by the

designated school official, in consultation with Assistance Dog program staff and school principal. Priority consideration should be given to the staff person who houses the dog. If there is a particular staff who has been the lead in development and implementation of a school facility dog program, this should also be prioritized. A professional school counselor role, because it entails working with students across classrooms, may lend itself to a school facility dog handler work.

## **Secondary handler**

---

Secondary handler – Serving as a secondary handler is likewise a *highly* important role in the school facility dog program. Secondary handlers should be determined through discussion between the primary handler and the designated administrator.

A secondary handler must be able and willing to do the following:

- Complete a 3-day training workshop to learn handling and training protocols for the school facility dog.
- Coordinate with the primary handler to provide coverage/back up as needed for the school facility dog work schedule.
- Serve as the handler as scheduled for school facility dog work activities.
- Assist with school and community education related to the school facility dog program.
- Assist and provide back-up/coverage for other activities noted under primary handler as needed (housing, veterinary care, implementation of care plans at school and home).
- Ensure that other animals residing in the handler's household have been approved by the school facility dog placement organization prior to the school facility dog meeting these animals.
- Be evaluated at least annually by designated school administrator (with input from the primary handler), and as needed.

# **Dog Considerations for School Facility Dog Programs**

## **Overview**

---

At the heart of the school facility dog program is a happy, healthy, well-trained dog. This section offers guidance on selection and training of the school facility dog, drawing from the standards and protocols of Assistance Dogs, an Assistance Dogs International (ADI) accredited program of the Ability Center. (For differences between a school *facility* dog and a school *therapy* dog, please see the Introduction section.)

## **Selecting a school facility dog**

---

- Ideally, an ADI-accredited or other well-credentialed facility dog training organization will be managing the selection of the school facility dog trainee.
- Good general health (see Appendix F for health guidelines), a friendly extroverted disposition, and a calm temperament are minimally needed for school facility dog work.
- Dogs who do not pass evaluation for service dog work due to minor issues (such as work ethic) may likewise be transitioned to school facility dog work.

## **Training a school facility dog**

---

- Prior to placement in a school, the Assistance Dogs model suggests a 24-month training with professional dog trainers in accredited assistance dog program.
- In addition to the 24-month training content, the school dog trainee may also be trained to do specific commands for a specific school setting as needed.
- Exposure training to school environment and any unique aspects of that environment is particularly important; for a new school facility dog program, working with the school facility dog program “startup team” (the group of school and community proponents of the program) to access the needed areas can be helpful.

- The school facility dog trainee will then need to pass a final training evaluation and complete a 5-day intensive workshop with the primary handler prior to graduation and placement.
- The school facility dog and handlers are provided 18 months of post-placement support by Assistance Dog trainers to assist with emergent training/behavior needs, such as handler attachment/separation anxiety issues.
- Assistance Dogs also offers ongoing training opportunities to help keep school facility dogs mentally sharp, such as “Brush Up” classes, supplemental staff training, school visits, and summer camp visits.
- We recommend an annual check-in/evaluation of the facility dog and primary and secondary handlers. An annual check-in is an emerging best practice across facility dog placements in schools, hospitals, courts, etc., to help support fidelity to handling and training standards.

#### **Canine Student Teacher – a model training program for school facility dogs and handlers**

---

- The Canine Student Teacher program is a unique program of Assistance Dogs that enables school facility dog trainees and primary handlers to learn *together prior* to the dog’s formal placement in a school facility.
- The primary handler of the school facility dog trainee serves as the school facility dog trainee’s foster, and attends scheduled training classes and outings with Assistance Dog trainers over a 10-month period with other school facility dog trainees and handlers.
- For more information about the Canine Student Teacher program, contact Assistance Dogs, a program of The Ability Center.



## **Part Two – Post-Dog Placement Guidelines**

# **Planning the Care of the School Facility Dog**

## **Overview**

---

Once placed with a school, a plan to maintain the well-being of the school facility dog is paramount. To ensure the dog's well-being, a plan for the dog's care is needed both in the school facility and when the dog is at home with a handler. This section provides guidance on school facility dog care planning at school, in-home, and in other situations. Veterinary care and nutrition are also addressed.

## **Daily care plan at school**

---

- A written daily school care plan should be developed by the primary handler, reviewed by all handlers and the designated school administrator, and placed on file in the school office.
- The daily school care plan needs to include the following:
  - A designated location for the dog's bed, food and water bowls, food, treats, toys, grooming and other supplies,
  - A feeding protocol/schedule and who is responsible,
  - Extra water bowl locations and regular checks to ensure bowls are filled with fresh clean water
  - Scheduled toilet and exercise walks and designated locations (including contingencies for inclement weather),
  - Scheduled breaks/down time – with whom and where.

## **Home care**

---

- In addition to the components of the daily care plan at school, a home care plan should include an overnight sleeping location.
- Travel/back up home care plan in case primary handler is temporarily unable to care for school facility dog during non-working hours.

- Anyone in the residence of the primary school facility dog handler who will handle the school facility dog should be trained/approved by the facility dog placement program (this is to ensure the integrity of the dog's training is maintained).
- Resident animals at the handler household should be approved prior to the school facility dog meeting them.

## **Veterinary care**

---

- A veterinary provider and emergency veterinary provider should be determined through primary collaboration with the primary handler, "proxy owner" (if different from the primary handler), and with input from the designated school official.
- Veterinary providers should be engaged in discussion regarding reduced rates/costs. They may be able to offer some aspects of care as donations that may be tax deductible.
- The primary handler (or designated back up) is responsible for scheduling and transporting the school facility dog to all veterinary appointments.
- The cost of the veterinary care should be covered in accordance with policy determination and procedures (see pages 17-18) and using any veterinary healthcare insurance that is in place.
- See Appendix F for routine preventative veterinary care recommendations.
- The primary handler should make emergent healthcare decisions, or the "owner proxy" (if not the primary handler) in close collaboration with the primary handler.
- In the event of a veterinary emergency, if the "owner proxy" (if not the primary handler) cannot be reached, the primary handler shall have decision making authority (this should be noted in the policy pertaining to "owner proxy" role – see pages 17-18).

## Nutrition

---

- The school facility dog should be fed a nutritionally complete, balanced diet that is appropriate for the dog's size, weight, and activity level; this should be determined by the primary handler in consultation with the veterinary provider and/or school facility dog training organization.
- The dog's weight should be closely monitored (weighed monthly) to ensure the dog's weight remains within a healthy range.
- **Treats should be given only with approval of handler.**

## **Managing the work schedule of the school facility dog**

### **Overview**

---

The schedule of the school facility dog is the tool through which the dog's daily activities are coordinated and communicated across the school. This section addresses the following: alignment of school facility dog activities with school needs/goals; creation of the school facility dog work schedule; management of the school facility dog work schedule; addressing emergent in-school needs and schedule conflicts; and outside of schoolwork. The primary handler (or their designated back up for a specified time) is responsible for creation and management of the schedule, in accordance with established policy (see page 19). Only trained handlers (the primary handler and secondary handler) are scheduled with the school facility dog.

### **Alignment of school facility dog activities with assessed school needs/goals**

---

- Scheduled school facility dog activities should be directly related to an assessed school need or goal whenever possible. This will help to ensure that the school facility dog program is in alignment with accomplishment of school goals.
- If there are schedule conflicts, activities clearly linked to assessed school needs and goals shall be prioritized.

### **Creation of a work schedule for the school facility dog**

---

- The primary handler, in collaboration with the designated school administrator, should have responsibility for the creation of a scheduling process and schedule for the school facility dog's workday. This should be specified in general operations policy (p.19).
- Examples of a schedule location include but are not limited to the following:
  - An electronic calendar available in a shared drive
  - A hardcopy calendar or datebook available in a shared location on the school premise

## Management of the school facility dog work schedule

---

- Scheduling requests are subject to approval by the primary handler (or designee) and must be made in accordance with the school facility dog schedule policy.
- Each daily schedule shall include feeding, toileting, **and “down time” breaks for the school facility dog that can *only* be modified by primary handler (or designee).**
- Exercise and training should be incorporated into the school facility dog’s daily schedule. The dog should be exercised via a walk or play for thirty minutes per day (this can be broken into multiple smaller time periods). A ten-minute training review/practice of basic and commonly used commands should also be incorporated daily.

## Addressing emergent schedule changes and conflicts

---

- The school facility dog’s daily schedule is subject to change; contingency planning should be strongly encouraged in communications with class instructors.
- Changes in handler availability may necessitate flexibility within scheduled events in each day; advanced notification should be given to those requesting the school facility dog whenever possible.
- Reasons for schedule changes without notice include but are not limited to the following:
  - Emergent health issues – dog or handler-related; including dog stress signs (see Appendix G for information on stress signs);
  - Emergent crises for which the school facility dog is requested to provide support (approved by primary handler or designee);
  - Other unforeseen issues – e.g., weather emergencies, etc.

## Out of school scheduled events

---

- The primary handler, in collaboration with the designated school administrator, may approve a school facility dog scheduled event/activity during school hours; this may entail the school facility dog traveling to an approved community location or another school that has invited the dog.
  - A primary or secondary handler must transport and accompany the dog.
  - The general safety and handling rules should be provided to any schools that the school facility dog is attending as a guest and reviewed at the beginning of the scheduled event/activity.
- The primary handler (or secondary handler/designee) should approve non-school hour events and accompany the dog, keeping the well-being of the school facility dog at the forefront of such determinations and following all established safety and handling protocols.
- A traveling first aid kit for the school facility dog should be brought to all events that are held at locations outside of the school facility dog's school placement; access to food, water, a resting space, and breaks should also be ensured for the dog.

# **School Facility Dog Wellness**

## **Overview**

---

While home and school care plans are necessary for the well-being of a school facility dog, these are not the only things that need to be considered. As school staff well know, working in a school can be a stressful environment! This section provides guidance on school facility dog stress management and ongoing skills refreshers (similar to canine professional development!). Retirement and death of a school facility dog are also addressed in this section.

## **Recognizing and responding to dog stress signals**

---

- Primary handlers and secondary handlers should be well-versed in basic canine stress signs (see Appendix G) as well as the specific stress signals given by their specific school facility dog.
- When the school facility dog is giving stress signals, it is the responsibility of the handler working with the dog at that time to *recognize* and *respond* to those signals.
  - A response may entail modifying the dog's activity, a person's activity related to the dog, or the environment in which the dog is working.
  - A response may also entail removal of the dog from the environment at the discretion of the handler.
- If a school facility dog is removed by a secondary handler, the primary handler, as well as other people in supervisory roles, should be notified asap.
- Consultation from the facility dog training organization and/or the school facility dog's veterinary provider may be obtained as needed to assist with the dog's stress level.

## **Proactive breaks for school facility dogs**

---

- Breaks/downtime and exercise walks should be built into the school facility dog's daily schedule; these are protective factors against stress.



- A designated quiet space with the dog’s belongings (bed, toys, food and water bowls, etc.) should be created as a “do not disturb” zone in which the dog can decompress with minimal stimulation.

### **Ongoing skills support/refresher training for school facility dogs (and handlers)**

---

- Opportunities for the school facility dog to refresh training through workshops and classes with handlers should be engaged in regularly.

### **Retirement**

---

- The retirement of a school facility dog is based on several factors, including the dog’s age, health, and changes in responsiveness/behaviors in the school environment.
- Veterinary and training consultation can be used to help make a retirement determination.
- The school and community-at-large should be notified, and opportunities should be offered to process the dog’s departure and contributions, such as a retirement party or other celebratory gathering.
- Students and staff who are strongly bonded to the school facility dog may experience feelings of grief and loss; this can be discussed and processed both in group settings and individually as needed.
- The primary handler should be offered the opportunity to adopt the retiree. Secondary handlers can be offered the opportunity to adopt the dog as recommended by the primary handler if the primary handler is unable to do so.

### **Death**

---

- Health-related decision-making for the dog should be made as determined in policy by the primary handler, or “owner proxy” (if not primary handler) in collaboration with the primary handler. The dog’s well-being and quality of life should be prioritized, and veterinary input used to help ascertain these factors.

- While death is a normal part of life, a dog's lifespan is considerably shorter than that of a human, and the loss of a beloved school facility dog can be devastating for a school and community.
  - The school and community should be notified of an unexpected school facility dog death in a planned and timely fashion, using existing school processes for similar difficult announcements.
  - Opportunities for processing of grief and sharing of experiences should be made available to students and staff in both individual and group settings.
  - Social media announcements that pay tribute to the school facility dog's contributions and offer opportunities for sharing and comments provide a virtual gathering space.
  - A celebration of life or similar event should be planned to enable those who loved the school facility dog to gather, celebrate, and support one another.

## **School Facility Dog Program Administrative Support Role**

### **Overview**

---

While daily activities of the school facility dog and handler are conducted at the *individual* level, it is critical to understand the aggregate work of the dog and handler(s) as a *school program*, with the appropriate *administrative* oversight and support.

### **Ongoing administrative oversight and support**

---

- Having a designated school *administrator* who is involved in the school facility dog operations, has a formal supervisory role in the school, and is accessible to the handlers as needed, is a crucial component of an optimized school facility dog program.
- A designated school administrator can make and enforce decisions when there are schedule conflicts (related to multiple staff requests for the school facility dog at a particular time) that cannot be resolved through staff dialogue.
- A designated school administrator can definitively address and resolve school staff safety/handling rule violations related to the school facility dog. Primary and secondary dog handlers, who are typically in teacher or school counselor roles, can provide information and direction about school facility dog safety and handling procedures, but have limited ability to enforce such if their peers/colleagues do not adhere to the procedures (despite having the information and instruction on how to do so).
- A designated school administrator has a “big picture” vantage point and can help to keep the school facility dog activities/program strategically aligned with the school’s goals and needs and emerging concerns.
- The designated school administrator should assist the primary handler with accessing financial and other resources as allocated through board policy/budget and ongoing fund-raising.

## **Annual Program Evaluation**

---

- A designated school administrator, in collaboration with the primary handler, secondary handler, and other key staff in the school facility dog program, should evaluate the school facility dog program annually to determine to what extent the school facility dog program activities align with school needs/goals/priorities.
- A designated school administrator should annually evaluate the primary and secondary handlers, based on the alignment described above and adherence to existing policies, procedures and rules related to school facility dog program operations.

## **Annual School Needs/Goals Assessment Update**

---

- The designated school administrator should annually (or as needed) communicate in writing the school's updated assessed needs/goals - as related to the school facility dog program – to the primary and secondary handlers.
- The designated school administrator and handlers should collaboratively review/determine changes/adjustments to the school facility dog program activities and priorities to address the school's updated needs/goals on a quarterly basis.

## **School facility dog program changes – handler-related**

---

- If there are performance issues (related to adherence to school facility dog safety and handling policies, schedule managing, activity work, or other issues related to dog handling) identified with the primary or secondary handler, the designated school administrator shall be the first point of contact to investigate such and is responsible for resolving such. Resolution should be in collaboration with the primary handler unless the primary handler is being investigated for performance issues.
- If the school facility dog's welfare is at immediate risk, the designated school administrator, with school board approval, may designate a secondary handler as an

emergency primary handler and facilitate the immediate transfer of the school facility dog to the designated emergency primary handler.

- If a primary or secondary handler is leaving the school, becomes ill, dies, or otherwise is unable to perform handling duties, the designated school administrator is ultimately responsible – in close collaboration and consultation with remaining handlers and key school staff who regularly have contact with the dog – for determining replacement handlers. Ideally, a secondary handler who has a strong understanding of and commitment to the school facility dog program would be willing to assume the primary handler role. It would also be prudent to see whether any staff members who joined the district after the school facility dog was placed have an interest in a handler role.

#### **School facility dog program changes – dog-related**

---

- The designated school administrator will work collaboratively with the primary handler (or designee) to communicate with the school and community about changes in the school facility dog's work status or health (including death).
- The designated school administrator will work collaboratively with the primary handler and secondary handlers to plan, coordinate, and implement supportive responses to the school and community related to the dog's retirement, death, illness, etc.
- The designated school administrator, primary handler and secondary handler should have a key role in planning and obtaining of a **successor** school facility dog through appropriate resources. **(Please note, the term "replacement" dog is not used, as a new dog is not able to *replace* the previous dog. Rather, a "successor" dog will carry on with the school facility dog role and create new and unique relationships and connections with students, staff, and the community.)**

## **Conclusion**

School facility dogs have tremendous potential to contribute to the well-being and learning within school communities. The *School Facility Dog Guidelines* offer a research-informed foundation for developing, implementing, and maintaining a school facility dog program that enhances school community well-being, advances the goals of the school, and safeguards the welfare of the facility dog. Through a rigorous participatory research process over a twelve-month period, we were able to capture and integrate the collective wisdom and experience of school facility dog handlers and trainers with decades of experience, as well as newer handlers who were able to help identify places where more support and information was needed. As with all knowledge, these guidelines are works in progress, and may be modified to fit the unique contextual and cultural components of specific school and community environments. The benefits of a school facility dog are many, and given the current challenges being faced by youth and communities, much needed and well worth pursuing.

***My advice to any superintendent, if given the chance, simply say ‘Yes’ and watch as your building becomes a more compassionate place for everyone: parents, teachers, students, and dogs alike.***

**– James P. Gunner, Ed.D., Bryan City Schools Superintendent (1998-2009)**

# Tributes to School Facility Dogs Who are No Longer with Us

*These wonderful four-legged angels will never know the magnitude of the love they shared or the impact they had on hundreds, more likely thousands, of lives during their lifetimes. Maybe that is the beauty of it all. May we strive to be like them.*

– Jackie Boyd, Retired School Counselor, Bryan City Schools







## Allie

Bryan Middle School, Bryan, Ohio - placed December 2004

"On January 5, 2005, Allie began her career as the first Bryan City Schools facility dog, and the first school "therapy" dog placed by Assistance Dogs of America, Inc., now part of The Ability Center in Sylvania, Ohio. Shelley Wanner Agee and Jackie Boyd had some ideas about how to effectively work with Allie, but there were no guidelines in this area. There was no "rule book." It was amazing to witness the mutual love that grew among students, staff, and Allie just by getting to know and interact with her. The school therapy dog program built itself. Words cannot describe the scope of the things Allie did to help everyone around her. While well-trained to follow commands, the value of Allie lay in her instinctual responses to hurting people to provide love, a caring heart, and a helping

paw to lift them up and help them move on better than they were moments before. That cannot be taught. Now, 17 years later, the School Therapy Dog Program is called the School Facility Dog Program and has developed into a far-reaching and much more developed entity. If only Allie knew what she started!"



## Magic

Tiffin City Schools, Tiffin, Ohio – placed April 2006

"Tiffin City Schools put a little "Magic" in their lives when Suzanne Reinhart introduced Magic, a school facility dog to the district. He was the second dog placed as a school facility dog by ADAI. Magic filled our schools with smiles and unconditional love! He helped students with all sorts of emotions and support. He was frequently found sitting beside a friend, laying his head in their lap, or curled up with a student listening to a great book. Magic helped a student work through the chaos of a tornado drill his first day on the job! They remained the best of friends. He hit the ground running and had a pawsome career as a school facility dog. In 2010, Magic joined Suzanne as the recipient of the Ohio School Counselor of the year. Magic brought a new approach to the school counseling program and made a difference in the lives of students every day. I am certain Magic was a special part of me being named School

Counselor of the year. At this time, the school facility dog program was innovative, new, exciting, and showed lots of promise. About 6 weeks ago, an adult approached me and shared memories of reading to Magic and having her picture taken with him when she completed a math goal. She also shared that



she still has the photos taken with Magic. That was a decade ago! He “pawsitively” brought his own special “magic” to everyone, which was obvious by the smiles, memories, and love shared with him!”



## Dixie

Bigelow Hill Intermediate School, Findlay, Ohio - placed  
November 2006

Thank you, Dixie!!



## Jewels

Jefferson Primary School, Findlay, Ohio – placed  
October 2007

“What a tremendous blessing it was to have Jewels working with the K-5 students of Jefferson Primary and Chamberlin Hill Intermediate in Findlay, Ohio. She worked daily with the school counselors and assisted students in gym class, the principal, and nurses' offices, on bus duty and even helped the custodial staff! She truly was a "Leadership Lab" who taught the 7 habits with her very own leadership team!

Jewels worked in many classrooms to provide emotional support and to practice academic skills. Even after school hours, she stayed busy attending extracurricular activities and visiting students at hospitals and funeral home visitations. When Jewels was eight years old, she had one of her front legs amputated because of a cancer diagnosis. As a cancer survivor, she continued to work and teach our staff and students even more life lessons about perseverance, gratitude, and acceptance. Despite the cancer diagnosis, she lived an excellent quality of life to age 13 doing what she loved...being with her people!”



## Kramer

Wauseon Middle School, Wauseon, Ohio – placed October 2007

"Kramer was a mainstay of Wauseon Middle School for 10 years. The effect that he had over that span of time on the people that were fortunate to have encountered him is impossible to adequately articulate. While he spent most of time with the students of WMS, he also regularly visited local nursing homes, rang the bell for the Salvation Army at Christmas, and made many special appearances at local events. To attempt to describe the impact Kramer had, I would like to share a testimonial that I received shortly after his passing from a parent in the district. The parent contacted me to let me know that her son had graduated from high school and was attending college.

He had just learned that Kramer had passed away and had called her. He was very upset and was crying on the telephone. That is truly making an impact. He was a gift from God."



## Sara

Waterville Primary, Waterville, Ohio – placed October 2008

"Sara was hands down the best dog ever! She was so special to everyone at Waterville, and I loved her more than I have ever loved any other animal. She was super stubborn when I was learning to work with her, but we figured out how to work together effectively. I cannot imagine how I would have started my career as a school counselor without her. Like all our dogs, Sara was amazing at recognizing when anyone was feeling stressed, worried, or uncomfortable. She could always be counted on to go over to the person who needed her most and lay her head on his/her lap. She offered more support and comfort to students this way than any of our staff members ever could have. When Sara retired from Waterville School, every student signed her poster and

presented it to her at her retirement ceremony. This poster hangs in our school as a tribute to the love and support Sara brought here each day. We will always remember her friendly, calm, and sometimes strong-willed personality. We were all so lucky to have experienced this time with Sara. The positive and lasting impact she has had on so many of us truly cannot be measured. Thank you, Sara!"

## Hayden

Glenwood Middle School, Findlay, Ohio - placed October 2008

Thank you, Hayden!!



## Veda

South Vienna Elementary School,

South Vienna, Ohio – placed April 2010

“Veda served our school and community with love! She had an amazing way of loving everyone that met her. She seemed to instinctively know who needed space, who needed a lean in hug and who needed a paw on their knee. Playing fetch was something she would do endlessly with such joy! She brought unconditional love and joy to everyone who was blessed to know her and was a very important and very missed part of our family.”

## Dwight

Fayette Elementary/Delta Elementary Schools - placed  
August 2010

Thank you, Dwight!!



## Gracie

Bryan City Schools, Bryan, Ohio – placed April 2011

“Gracie was a beautiful, shiny, black dog with a heart of gold. She “graced” the halls of Bryan City Schools for only 3 years, but during that short time, she impacted students and staff for the rest of their lives. Thank you, Gracie, for your loving and energetic spirit that brought joy to more people than you will ever know.”



## Kennedy

Placed in Tiffin City Schools, Tiffin, Ohio – placed November 2018

“Kennedy joined Suzanne Reinhart in Tiffin City Schools after the passing of Magic in 2012. He brought a spirited new outlook to the job! Kennedy would bring smiles of joy with his antics, shenanigans, and loving nature. He was even more determined, or shall I say stubborn than Magic! However, Kennedy offered the students many teachable moments with his ornery personality and great sense of humor! Trisha Flint became Kennedy’s handler when Suzanne retired in 2019. Kennedy and Trisha continued to support students and staff through the pandemic as Kennedy

learned how to work virtually helping his students cope and learned to play tic tac toe with students online. He proved you can teach an old dog new tricks! Kennedy also visited neighboring schools when tragedy struck their districts. It was pawmazing to watch him comfort students whom he had never met! It was love at first sight! Kennedy’s impact reached thousands of students. He left paw prints on many hearts!”



## Violet

Kateri Catholic Academy/Cardinal Stritch H.S., Oregon, Ohio –  
placed November 2015



“Violet was the sweetest and kindest dog I have ever known. She was only 5 years old when we lost her. The students and staff at Cardinal Stritch Catholic High School and Academy all adored her. She was well-loved and maybe a little spoiled!

She would spend a lot of time visiting classrooms. If she wasn't in a classroom she would be out to recess with students, in my office with students or walking the halls checking things out. When I took Violet to a classroom, if there was a student who was sad, Violet went straight to them and sat by their desk. Even students who were afraid of dogs loved Violet. They would approach very slowly and reach out to pet her. Violet just sat there and did not move at all. Violet's short time here on earth touched many lives, she was loved and adored.”

### **Sample Script – Meeting with Principal**

Primary Handler:

Good afternoon!

I am here to share an innovative and creative program opportunity for the Tiffin City Schools!

I have a resource that will:

- \* Lower the anxiety level in classrooms for testing as well as daily learning.
- \* This resource can connect students to school in a way we have never previously offered.
- \* A resource that will promote improvement in human, physical, social, emotional and/or cognitive functioning.
- \* This resource can open verbal communication with children with autism, selective mutism, and non-communicative children.
- \* A resource that will teach, by example, kindness, compassion, and caring treatment of our school family.
- \* This resource offers a non-threatening, non-judgmental, unconditional support for each student and staff member.
- \* Finally, this resource will positively impact over (insert number) of students plus countless community members at a nominal cost to our district.

Principal:

What is this resource?

Primary Handler:

It is a school facility dog from Assistance Dogs, a program of The Ability Center located in Sylvania Ohio.

Assistance Dogs places assistance or service dogs as well as facility dogs. Assistance or service dogs are placed with people with mobility disabilities and are taught to do tasks to help them with aspects of their respective disabilities.

A facility dog is placed in a school, nursing home, or other facility. Our dog would be placed with our school, and I would be the caretaker of the dog. Our dog would live with me. X (staff name) has volunteered as a co-caretaker if I am unable to be at school.

The cost of a facility dog is \$2000 and includes the application and equipment fees. Assistance Dogs will then come to our school with a presentation on how to implement a facility dog in our schools.

The Kiwanis Club or another local service club may be interested in funding some of this project along with the K Kids. This is in the very early stages of discussion. I hope to secure veterinarian services at a very reasonable (if not free) cost.

There are two hurdles yet to cross, liability and allergies. I am waiting to hear from X (school administrator who handles insurance) to see if our current liability coverage would include a trained facility dog. If not, I will explore other options.

Allergies will be handled by a letter home to parents requesting information on how to support their child and exposure to the facility dog. I will do everything possible to limit exposure as well as reduce dander to prevent allergic reactions. X (name of) school has not had any problems with allergic reactions.

## Sample Class Letter/Contract

Dear Students and Teacher,

We are so excited to have (Insert Facility Dog's Name), our Facility Dog in school with us this year! It is very important that you know and understand the rules and expectations when (Insert Facility Dog's Name) is in your presence. Our goal is to have a great experience for everyone in our school, including (Insert Facility Dog's Name). Your teacher has shared with you our rules and expectations around the school when (Insert Facility Dog's Name) is here. Please always be sure to follow these expectations.

Signing your name below indicates you have reviewed and will follow all the rules to keep (Insert Facility Dog's Name) and everyone in our school safe.

Thank you for helping us to take good care of your school facility dog, (Insert Facility Dog's Name). (Insert Facility Dog's Name) is going to love being in our school!

Sincerely,

(Insert School Counselor & Insert Facility Dog's Name)

---

Signature

\*\*\*\*\* This could also be sent to older students in a google form to save time and paper. We are hopeful a signed contract will help students take more responsibility for their facility dog.

\*\*\*\*\* It could also be presented in the form of an Oath/Promise to uphold the rules.

\*\*\*\*\* Each student could also sign one paper

**Choose the option that fits your school best!**



### **General Safety and Handling Guidelines for School Facility Dog**

1. Facility dog is ALWAYS on leash with a trained handler.
2. Facility dog is NEVER left unattended with students, not even for a second!
3. Students will approach the facility dog in a calm manner.
4. Facility dog will be removed immediately from any situation if it exhibits any signs of stress or anxiety.
5. Students will always pet the dog appropriately with gentle pets on the back and shoulders. Many dogs do not like our hands in their face. Would you like hands in your face?
6. Students will be aware of the dog's feet and tail, being sure not to step on the feet or pull the tail.
7. Treats are only given from the handler. Do not bring treats from home to share with the facility dog. It has dietary restrictions that the handler must control.
8. Students can earn the privilege of brushing hair, teeth, filling a water bowl, etc. when supervised by the handler.

#### **Hallway Procedures**

1. All school hallway rules are always followed.
2. Students who are in class lines will remain in line and not step out to pet the facility dog. If the dog is allowed to visit with students, the handler will command the dog to do so.
3. Students will remain quiet, no calling out of the dog's name. Students can say "hi" by wagging their tails at the facility dog. (This is done by making a "thumbs up" and wiggling the thumb.)
4. Students will not crowd the dog, being careful of paws, nose, and tail.
5. Students can give a quick pet on the shoulders/back as the dog passes by the line. This is quick, no time for hugs! The dog may be on his way to a lesson!
6. In a crowded hallway, like during class exchanges, students will be alert to the presence of the facility dog and take great caution to cause it no harm.

#### **Classroom Procedures**

1. All classroom rules will continue to be followed.
2. The classroom shall remain quiet when the facility dog enters the room. No one will announce the dog's arrival or call it by name. If students are working quietly, they keep working. If the teacher is talking, they keep listening. If anyone shouts out in any way, the facility dog and handler will leave the room.
3. For a walk through, students will keep working until the dog comes behind their desk. Then the student can stop working, turn and briefly pet the dog. After petting, the student will take a deep, long, slow breather to restart their brain for working. This is like restarting your computer. Again, there is no talking during a walkthrough. If a

student doesn't want to pet the dog, when it gets behind their desk, they can simply face forward and keep working. The dog will continue with the walkthrough.

4. The facility dog should not cause a disruption when entering the classroom for a walk through, lesson, reward, or any reason!
5. If the facility dog joins the students on the carpet, again, students need to continue to listen to the lesson. If the dog is directly beside a student, that student can pet or lay their hand on the dog, while continuing to pay attention to the lesson.
6. Students will always be careful not to step on the dog and pet appropriately.

### **Playground Procedures**

1. When the facility dog is on the playground, students DO NOT run to the dog. That can be very scary for the dog. Students must approach in a calm manner.
2. A trained handler must be always in control of the facility dog. If a student earns the ability to take the dog for a walk, there must be a second leash attached for the student to hold. This is imperative outside!
3. The dog will be removed from the playground if the facility dog shows any signs of stress, or the students are not following the rules.

### **Cafeteria Procedures**

1. All cafeteria rules will continue to be followed.
2. The facility dog does not eat anything off the floor or from a student. The handler controls what the dog eats.
3. Students will continue to eat and take care of their trays upon completion.

### **Arrival and Dismissal**

1. All school rules apply.
2. Students can give a quick pet on the way in or out of school. There is not time to stop and hug/talk to the dog. Everyone wants a chance to say hi or bye!
3. If you are entering or leaving the building in a line, please stay in line and pet as you pass by.

## Student Concern/Allergy Form

### TCS School Facility Dogs 🐾 🐾

**Tiffin City Schools are fortunate to have three school facility dogs working in the District!** School facility dogs provide benefits including reduced stress, improved physical and emotional well-being, lower blood pressure, decreased anxiety, improved self-esteem and normalization of the environment, and increases the likelihood of successful academic achievement for students.

**Kennedy** works at Krout and Noble with School Counselor, Ms. Trisha Eidt.

**Cooper** works at Tiffin Middle School with School Counselor, Mrs. Melissa Mellott.

**Ace** works district-wide in all buildings with Social Worker, Mrs. Jill Miller.

**If you have concerns about your student in relation to the school facility dogs in terms of fears or allergies, please contact the appropriate school facility dog handler by email.**

We will work with you to determine specifics and what we can do to help your student be successful.

- For Lincoln, Washington, and Columbian students, contact Jill Miller at [jill\\_miller@tiffincityschools.org](mailto:jill_miller@tiffincityschools.org)

- For Krout and Noble students, contact Trisha Eidt at [trisha\\_eidt@tiffincityschools.org](mailto:trisha_eidt@tiffincityschools.org)

- For TMS students, contact Melissa Mellott at [melissa\\_mellott@tiffincityschools.org](mailto:melissa_mellott@tiffincityschools.org).

**By signing this document, I acknowledge the use of school facility dogs in Tiffin City Schools and will contact the appropriate handler if I have concerns related to my student.**

X \_\_\_\_\_

## **Guidelines for School Facility Dogs and Other Animals**

1. As a matter of professional courtesy, if students bring pets for show and tell, teachers are asked to inform the school facility dog handlers of the date/time/place of the visit ahead of time.
2. If a staff member wishes to utilize a visiting registered therapy dog or a reader dog in the classroom, these steps are suggested:
  - a. Obtain administrator approval.
  - b. Provide a copy of the registration, in the case of a registered therapy dog, to keep on file with the administrator. (Pet Partners or Therapy Dogs International, for example).
  - c. Notify the handlers of the fulltime therapy dog of this situation schedule.
  - d. Limit visitations to one day per week in the specified classroom, or two days per week for a limited time during the day, in the case of a reader dog.
  - e. Keep the classroom door closed and post a sign that says Visiting Therapy (or Reading) Dog at Work on the classroom door where the visiting dog is working.
  - f. Refrain from having the dog in the library area, as that is where Allie's room is located.
  - g. Keep the visiting dog leashed and accompanied by the handler when walking in the hallways to and from the classroom.
  - h. Communicate any variance from the set schedule to the administrator as well as the handlers of the full-time school facility dog.
3. In the event of a student or staff member utilizing a full-time service dog at school, both dogs' handlers will discuss the separate expectations and roles for the two dogs, so neither dog interferes with the other one's work.
4. When trained law enforcement dogs will be in the building, it is important that the school facility dog handlers be notified ahead of time, so that the school facility dog does not interfere with the job of the Police K-9 Unit.

Created by: Shelley Wanner & Jackie Boyd, Bryan Middle School, Bryan, Ohio, March 1, 2007

\*\*2022 Updated email contact for:

Shelley Wanner Agee: [shelleywanner@gmail.com](mailto:shelleywanner@gmail.com)

Jackie Boyd: [jboyd1231@gmail.com](mailto:jboyd1231@gmail.com)

## **Health and Preventative Veterinary Care Guidelines for School Facility Dogs**

### **Pet insurance may be a good option!**

#### Health checks:

- Breeding dogs should have Heart, Eyes, Hips and Elbows evaluated and cleared before being used for breeding.
- Placed School Facility Dogs should have Hips & Elbows evaluated and cleared before placement.

#### Core Vaccines: Booster 3 years or longer

- Distemper
- Adenovirus
- Parvovirus
- Parainfluenza
- Rabies 1 year or 3 years

#### Non-Core Vaccines:

- Bordetella (booster yearly)
- Leptospira (booster yearly)
- Canine Influenza (booster yearly)

Consult with your veterinarian for recommended vaccines in your area.

#### Internal Parasites: We recommend a fecal check every 6 months.

- Heartworm
- Roundworm
- Hookworm
- Whipworm
- Tapeworm

#### External Parasites: Consult with your veterinarian for recommended products

- Fleas
- Ticks
- Mosquitos

## Stress Signs in School Facility Dogs

Mild signs of stress: If you see any combination of the following you may want to move away from the student/object or end the session altogether (depending on the situation)

- Panting
- Turning head away
- Tongue flicking
- Yawning
- Displacement sniffing
- Scratching or grooming themselves
- Stretching
- Rolling on back to expose belly
- Shaking off (as if they are wet)
- Ears pinned back
- Slow movement or stretching towards an object/person
- Refusing to move

Moderate to Severe signs of stress: If you witness any of the following it is time to move away and end the session.

- Salivating
- Refusal of treats
- Bloodshot eyes
- Restlessness or pacing
- Vomiting
- Diarrhea
- Fearfulness
- Touch Sensitivity (jumpy)
- Dandruff suddenly appears
- Hyperactivity

When you are called to an unknown *situation it may be best to leave the dog and go access the situation first*, then determine if it is safe for the dog to be utilized.

***Never*** force your dog into a situation or environment if they are unwilling.

When dealing with students who have significant behavior issues (screaming, thrashing, throwing things, etc.), you can condition (gradually familiarize the dog with such sounds and sights) the dog before they are ever exposed to a real-life scenario. Always ensure dog safety.

***Any concerns should always be discussed with your trainer/organization you received your dog from.***