

Purpose/Background

Rocky View Schools supports the use of comfort dogs in school for the academic, social and emotional benefit of its students. The presence of a comfort dog can decrease anxiety and provide a level of comfort that enables students to work through a variety of challenging issues. Their presence provides support to individuals other than their owner.

It is important to note that comfort dogs are not service dogs. Service dogs are trained to perform tasks to ease their handlers' disabilities, helping them to attain safety and independence.

Research into the effects of comfort dogs in schools demonstrates a range of potential benefits to students including:

- increase in school attendance,
- gains in confidence,
- decreases in learner anxiety behaviours resulting in improved learning outcomes, such as increases in reading and writing levels,
- positive changes in individual students' engagement with school,
- enhanced relationships with peers and staff members,
- increase in a student's ability to express feelings and ability to regulate emotions.

Procedures

1. The following minimum standards shall be in effect for all comfort dogs approved to serve in a school:
 - 1.1. A comfort dog must be clean, well-groomed, and not have an offensive odour,
 - 1.2. A comfort dog does not annoy any member of the student body or school personnel by seeking attention,
 - 1.3. A comfort dog does not urinate or defecate in inappropriate locations,
 - 1.4. A comfort dog does not vocalize unnecessarily,
 - 1.5. A comfort dog shows no aggression towards people or other animals,
 - 1.6. a comfort dog does not solicit or steal food or other items from student body or school personnel,
 - 1.7. a comfort dog does not pose a health or safety threat to any student, personnel or other persons.
2. Maximum two comfort dogs per school with only one dog present in the building at a time.
3. Comfort dogs are independently owned and must meet standards of health as prescribed by a veterinarian at owner's expense. Rocky View Schools bears no financial responsibility for the care or feeding of the animal.
4. Approval by the school principal (Area Director of Schools in the case that the school principal is the dog owner/handler) must be given/renewed each school year and/or whenever the dog owner wishes to use a different comfort dog. Dog handler shall provide to the school principal/Area Director the following documentation regarding the potential comfort dog:

- 4.1. Proof of certification from certifying agency such as, Community Therapy Dogs Society or St. John's Ambulance,
 - 4.2. Proof of current vaccination,
 - 4.3. Proof of health, such as a current health certificate from a veterinarian,
 - 4.4. Visible cleanliness of dog with no sign of ticks/fleas,
 - 4.5. A visually healthy, alert and not over or under weight dog,
 - 4.6. A copy of the dog owner/handler's minimum of \$2,000,000 general liability insurance or proof of equivalent insurance through the organization the handler and comfort dog are representing.
5. If approved and prior to the comfort dog starting at the school, the Principal of the school must ensure the following:
- 5.1. A letter has been provided to staff and sent to parents/guardians in any of the classes where the comfort dog will be present to elicit information concerning allergies, phobias or cultural considerations from the staff member, student and/or parents/guardians. Should a conflict arise, priority will be given to the health and safety of the school community and the comfort dog will be excluded from that specific area and/or entire school.
 - 5.2. The handler has provided in writing to the Principal a detailed schedule outlining the location, times and details of when and how the dog will be used in the school. Dogs should be restricted from food preparation areas and where possible, limited to spaces with hard-surface flooring.
 - 5.3. The Principal has met with the handler to discuss the expectations of the dog's grooming, hygiene, behaviour and role in the school. In conjunction with the handler, the Principal must ensure that the personal care and physical needs of the comfort dog are met including plans for the:
 - 5.3.1. safest and most environmentally sound place for the comfort dog to relieve itself;
 - 5.3.2. removal and disposal of animal waste; and
 - 5.3.3. provision of a suitable container for waste that the handler can access.
 - 5.4. Careful consideration has been given to which students will work with the comfort dog.
 - 5.5. Parental consent forms are required for situations such as when the comfort dog will be working in a class or has scheduled visits with an individual student.
 - 5.6. Arrangements have been made to inform the school community of the presence of the comfort dog including signage placed on each entry door of the school.
6. The principal of the school has the authority to end any arrangement pertaining to the use of comfort dogs at any time.