

December, 2016

Dear Parent/Guardian,

Keene High School will be introducing a Therapy Dog Program and would like to share with you the objectives of the program and guidelines and procedures for students and staff. The KHS Therapy Dog Program would introduce Certified Therapy Dogs and their handlers into KHS for visitations. The objective of the program is to create an opportunity for students to interact with the therapy dog for a short visitation. Therapy dog teams have been used in many settings to help people feel better by reducing stress with a non-judgemental "visit", lowering blood pressure, meeting and making a new friend, and using other social and emotional supports to help people have a "good day". Currently, KHS will bring in Certified Therapy Dog teams from the Monadnock Region who qualify and meet the requirements of the School Board Policy "IMG Animals in School".

Identified Areas of Need for our Students:

- Anxiety
- Stress
- Relationship problems
- Confidence
- Academic stress (before tests, midterms, final exams, new schedule changes at the semester break, graduation, etc.)
- Family stress (divorce, arguments with parent/guardian)
- Identity issues for students who are finding "themselves"
- Crisis intervention
- Court appearance
- Health Issues or hospitalization (returning after a hospitalization)
- Victim of harassment or other emotional events

Academic Benefits of a Therapy Dog in the school:

- Improves attendance and decreases tardiness
- Students turn in homework more often and increase performance in other subjects
- Reinforces learning
- Motivates speech, learning, and exercise
- Stimulates the senses
- Facilitates counseling
- Does not judge, criticize, or laugh, and they are less intimidating than peers

Social Benefits of a Therapy Dog in the school:

- Students build self esteem, confidence, social skills, and communication skills
- Trusting relationships are formed
- Fosters feelings of safety and acceptance
- Decreases loneliness, anxiety, anger, and depression
- Teaches unconditional love and acceptance
- Teaches "to give" instead of "receive"
- Encourages positive social behaviors
- Lowers blood pressure and increases relaxation
- Inspires people to laugh, smile, and have fun!

Certified Therapy Dog Teams consist of a dog and a handler who have been certified as a Therapy Dog Team. Dogs in training for the certification program may also participate in visitations as long as the dog and handler completed the procedures and are part of a certified therapy dog program.

School Wide-Expectations For Therapy Dog Visitation 4 Steps > Approach, Ask, Pet, Goodbye

The program is 100% voluntary, and parents/guardians may opt out of the program by returning the bottom section of this letter to the student's House Office or sending an email to the House Office.

My Student may **not** participate in the KHS Therapy Dog Program.

Parent/Guardian Name: _____ Date _____ Student Name _____