

The Mental Health Module (MHM): *A Resource For School Facility Dogs*

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

Brittney Murphy, Education Coordinator of Assistance Dogs, a program of The Ability Center

Stacie Baumbarger

Stacie Baumbarger is the Director of Assistance Dogs, an Assistance Dogs International (ADI) accredited program of The Ability Center of Greater Toledo. As an experienced and gifted dog trainer, Stacie is nationally known for successfully competing at the highest levels of performance dog competitions from coast to coast over the last 30 years. Her passion for dogs and dog training and her leadership and program management skills led her to the non-profit world and assistance dog training. As the Director of Assistance Dogs, Stacie oversees multiple programs such as: an assistance dog breeding, training and placement program that places service dogs with individuals who have primarily mobility disabilities; an agility program that pairs autistic individuals with therapy dogs trained in agility to foster self-esteem, confidence, and other positive benefits; and a school facility dog training and placement program. Stacie's leadership has been instrumental in the collaborative development and dissemination of best practice guidelines for school facility dog programs and a mental health module with tiered (using the Positive Behavior and Support/PBIS tiers used nationally in schools) activities for school facility dogs to support mental health in schools. These resources were developed through multi-year participatory action research projects made possible through the generous funding of the Scaife Foundation.



Brittney Murphy



Brittney Murphy is the Education Coordinator of Assistance Dogs. Brittney holds a Bachelor of Science in Education and a Masters in Special Education with a specialization in autism spectrum disorders. Prior to working with Assistance Dogs, Brittney was a primary School Facility Dog handler who worked as an intervention specialist in an elementary school setting. Drawing from her experiences as an educator and primary school facility dog handler, Brittney is able to use her knowledge to help build sustainable School Facility Dog programs that maximize benefits for school communities.

Janet Hoy-Gerlach, PhD, LCSW



Dr. Janet Hoy-Gerlach is a clinical social worker, author, researcher, and human-animal interaction researcher. She is currently the Director of Veterinary Social Work at Open Door Veterinary Collective, a national non-profit that works to improve access to veterinary care and related supports. She lead-authored of the peer-reviewed book *Human-Animal Interaction: A Social Work Guide* (2017) published by the National Association of Social Work, is an adjunct faculty member at Case Western Reserve University, and has a social work consulting practice called OneHealth People-Animal Wellness Services (OHPAWS). Through OHPAWS, Dr. Hoy-Gerlach helps to advance practices, programs and policies that support human-animal relationships for mutual well-being. Her research on mental health benefits of animal companionship has been featured in media outlets such as *Discover Magazine*, *Business Insider*, *Medscape*, and *Psychology Today*. She serves as an expert witness on human-animal bond mental health benefits for the U.S. Department of Justice Civil Rights Division.



Thank you to the
Scaife
Foundation!!!!

Presentation Overview



Background and Significance



Introduction to Assistance Dogs and School Facility Dogs Guidelines



The Mental Health Module for School Facility Dogs

School Facility Dogs

- Working dogs
- Legally belong to the school or district
- Undergo hundreds of hours (up to 2 years) of specialized training prior to placement
- Attend school everyday
- Utilized by a staff of skilled, trained handlers
- Required to maintain annual recertifications, including the dog and all handlers
- Ongoing training throughout the dog's working career

School Therapy Dogs

- Pet dogs
- Legally belong to private individuals
- No training required; may be evaluated and registered with a national therapy dog nonprofit
- Attend school with handler/owner as needed, typically for short visits
- Work with their owner/handler
- Unregulated training and evaluations (if registered with national organization, follows those regulations)





WHY THE SHIFT?

Many use the terms school facility dog and school therapy dog interchangeably to denote canine roles within school settings. While school therapy dogs and school facility dogs can provide benefits within school communities, there are critical differences between these two types of dog roles.

School facility dog is the term used by Assistance Dogs International (ADI) to identify dogs placed to work in schools who have undergone intensive, specialized and ongoing training.

School facility dogs may be involved in provision of therapy at their facility, but are distinctly different from therapy dogs

The Ability Center

The Ability Center

- Located on 17 acres in Sylvania, Ohio
- Founded in 1920
- Center for Independent Living
- Service over 2,000 consumers every year



Independence
Equity
Inclusion
Education
Community

Programs of the Ability Center

- Adult Living Services
- Advocacy
- **Assistance Dogs**
- Assistive Technology/Medical Equipment
- Home Accessibility and Modifications
- Information and Referral
- Youth and Transition Services



ABOUT ASSISTANCE DOGS

- Our Assistance Dogs program began in 1984
- School Dog program started in 2004
- We use evidence based best practices in our School Facility Dog programming
- We received a grant funding for following:
 - In 2022 we published The School Facility Dog Program Guidelines - through participatory research collaboration
 - In 2023 we will be completing our second research project, a mental health module, which is a collaboratively created resource based on the PBIS framework.



OUR DEDICATED STAFF



OUR CANINE PROGRAMS



Skilled Companion Dogs



Service Dogs



School Facility Dogs



Agility Program

MISSION: Together, we will work to make our community the most disability friendly in the nation by increasing independence for people with disabilities, discovering true passions, and changing the community's perception of disability.

DOGS IN SCHOOLS

Research links dogs within schools to a range of benefits for students, including:

- 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 school staff





- **Assistance Dogs** places school facility dogs within schools or school districts to help facilitate student improvements in the following areas: academics, social/emotional learning, and mental health.
- School facility dogs can also positively impact attendance, motivation, and positive behavior support and intervention.

OUR DOGS

- We selectively choose dogs with the best temperaments, work ethic and affection level for our program through continual behavior and skill evaluations
- Typically, Labrador and Golden Retrievers
- Extensive genetic, health and behavioral testing is done on all potential breeders
- We are part of an international Assistance Dog breeding cooperative.
- Puppies are raised from birth to meet specific milestones for Assistance Dog work





TRAINING

- Approximately a 2-year process
- Led by Assistance Dogs International accredited training staff
- Weekly foster classes begin at 8-10 weeks of age
- Puppies move to a prison-based training program from 5-9 months of age
- Puppies return to fosters when coming out of the prison program
- A formal One Year evaluation takes place over 2 days in our training facility.
- Based on the results of the evaluation, dogs will be placed on the most appropriate training track for their second year of training.

Canine Student Teachers

Dogs selected for the school program become members of our Canine Student Teacher program

- School Facility Dog candidates are fostered by counselors at one of our partner schools
- Dogs spend a minimum of ½ school year receiving “on the job” training
- Continue to attend weekly classes with school-based curriculum, both in their schools and at our training facility.
- Expose the dogs to different school settings during the training process.
- Dogs are evaluated with different age groups of students to determine the best final placement





School Facility Dog Program Guidelines

Assistance Dogs

A PROGRAM OF THE ABILITY CENTER



The Ability Center

www.abilitycenter.org

*Thank you to the following Schools/Districts
were part of the participatory action research
team for this project:*

Anthony Wayne Local Schools

Bryan Elementary School

Bucyrus City Schools

Elmwood Elementary School

Findlay City Schools

Fostoria City Schools

Hartville & Lake Elementary Schools

Lakota Local School District

Local School District

North Ridgeville Early Childhood Learning Community

South Vienna Elementary School

Sylvania Schools

Tiffin City School District

Washington Local School District

Wauseon Elementary School

Whiteford Agricultural School



Two Kinds of Research

Traditional

Action

What others are doing
Seek explanation and truth
Objective
Strive for knowledge
Removed from research site

Data collection
Inquiry
Problem solving

What one is personally doing
Seek continuous change
Reflective
Strive for development and planned change
Personally involved

Participatory Action Research (PAR)

Differs from traditional research in which there is a divide between “subjects” and “researchers”

In PAR, *all* participants are considered stakeholders in a shared issue of concern

All participants have *expertise* and *knowledge*

Participants *combine their knowledge to co-create* and conduct a research project together

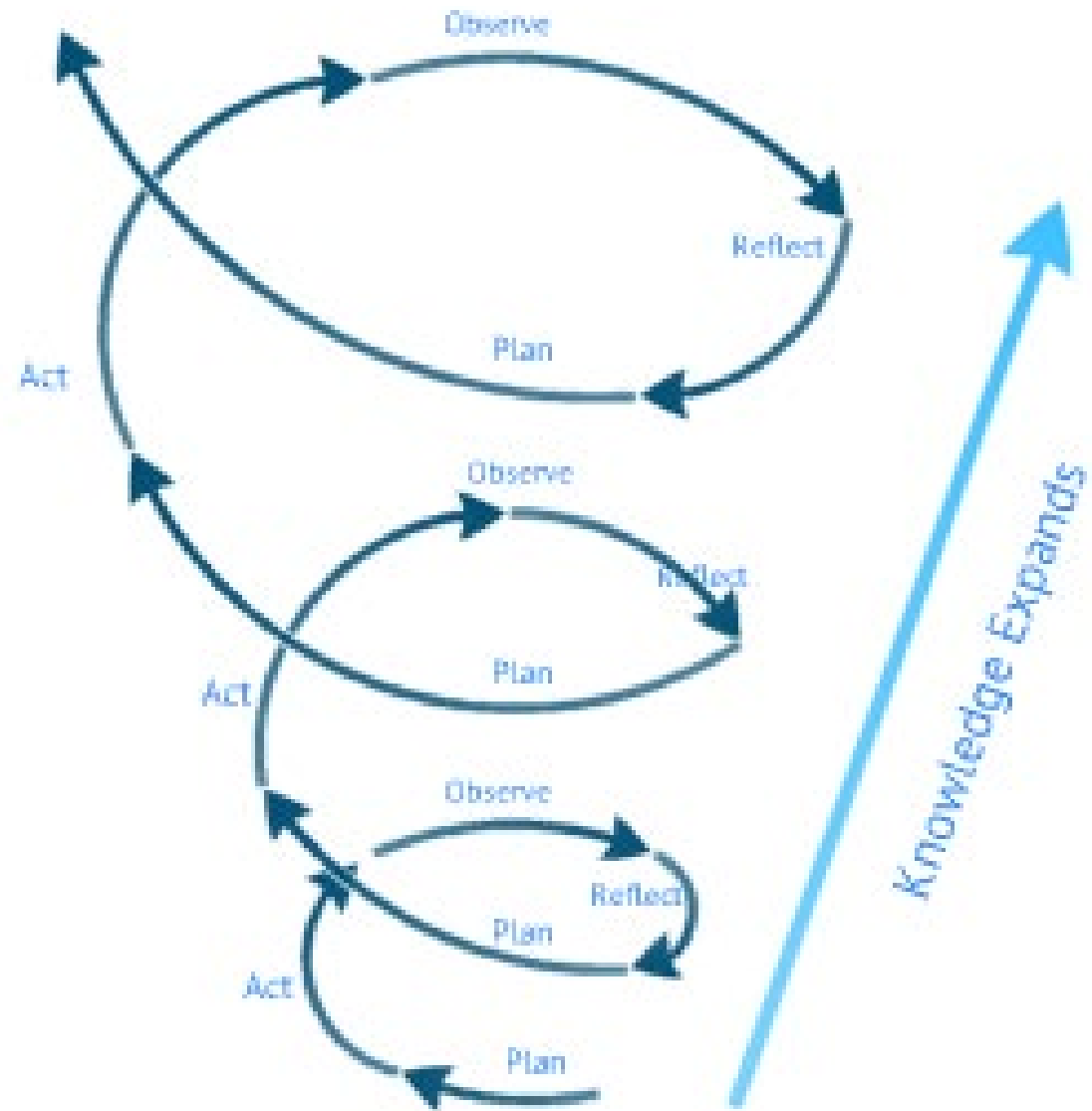
Series of group meetings over time using cycles of brainstorming and data collection, data analysis, and evaluation/revision of emerging findings

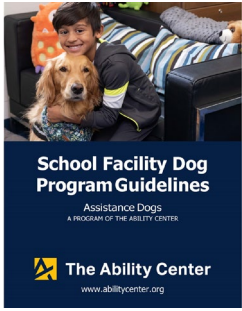


The Research Team

- **26 school facility dog handlers** Handler roles in schools included: school counselor, principal, social worker, teacher, occupational therapist, intervention specialist, and superintendent
- **2 facility dog training experts from Assistance Dogs** (an Assistance Dogs International (ADI) accredited program)
- **1 client services manager from Assistance Dogs**
- **3 expert school facility dog handlers/retired school counselors**
- **1 research consultant** with expertise in human-animal interaction research and participatory research methods

Action Research cycle





School Facility Dog Guidelines = A “Recipe” for School Facility Dog Programs

Pre-Dog

- Site and stakeholder prep
 - Needs assessment and goals
 - Administrative role
 - Community engagement and concerns
 - Logistics
- Policy development
- Handler considerations
- Dog considerations



Post-Dog

- Daily dog care
- Dog work schedule management
- Dog wellness
- School facility dog program administrative role



Part One: Pre-Dog Placement

- Site and Stakeholder Considerations
- Policy Considerations
- *Handler Considerations*
- *Dog Considerations*





Site and Stakeholder Considerations

- School needs assessment and goals for school facility dog program
- Common concerns
- Administrative approval
- Community engagement/buy-in
- Site Logistics



Policy Considerations

- School district/board level
 - Insurance
 - Parent/guardian notification
 - General school facility dog program policy
 - Dog care and decision-making (health, veterinary care, etc.)
 - Finances/expenses
 - Handler evaluation and violations
- School-level
 - Parent/guardian contact
 - Staff policies
 - Dog work schedule policies
 - Student policies
 - Other animals – visiting therapy dogs, service animals, etc.



HANDLER REQUIREMENTS

- Initial training is a 5-day, intensive hands-on workshop at our training facility.
- Up to 4 qualified handlers may attend this training
- Handlers complete a 30 day in school visit with Assistance Dogs staff
- Complete annual in-school recertifications
- All additional handlers must be trained by Assistance Dogs through additional opportunities offered throughout the year.
- The Ability Center provides lifetime training assistance for all School Facility Dogs to handlers and administrators.



Part Two: Post Dog Placement

School Facility Dog Daily Care

- Daily care plan at school
- Home care plan
- Veterinary care
- Grooming
- Nutrition – monitor food intake and weight
- General dog well-being considerations (play, walks, breaks, etc.)





Work/Schedule Management

- Alignment of school goals/needs with proposed dog's work activities
- Creation of school dog work schedule with breaks for dog
- Management of schedule
 - Coordination and communication – designate who/how
 - Prioritize identified school goals related to school dog's work
 - Flexibility for emergent situations/school needs
 - Flexibility for changes (illness, crisis, vacation) and back-up
 - Out of school scheduled events

Wellness

- School facility dog wellness
 - Ongoing monitoring for stress signs
 - Breaks
 - Ongoing training
 - Retirement
 - Death



Administrative Support

School facility dog program administrative support role:

- Administrative coordination/support at school and/or district levels
 - School administrative point/contact person
- Annual program evaluation
 - Handler evaluation
 - Alignment of school goals with school dog's work
- Annual school needs assessment update
- Support with changes in school facility dog program – handler-related
- Support with changes in school facility dog program – dog-related

Education Weekly, April 2023

Kids' Declining Mental Health Is the 'Crisis of Our Time,' Surgeon General Says



By [Caitlynn Peetz](#) — April 25, 2023 ⌚ 6 min read





AAP-AACAP-CHA Declaration of a National Emergency in Child and Adolescent Mental Health

[Home](#) / [Advocacy](#) / [Child and Adolescent Healthy Mental and Emotional Development](#) / AAP-AACAP-CHA Declaration of a National Emergency in Child and Adolescent Mental Health



A declaration from the American Academy of Pediatrics, American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry and Children's Hospital Association:

As health professionals dedicated to the care of children and adolescents, we have witnessed soaring rates of mental health challenges among children, adolescents, and their families over the course of the COVID-19 pandemic, exacerbating the situation that existed prior to the pandemic. Children and families across our country have experienced enormous adversity and disruption. The inequities that result from structural racism have contributed to disproportionate impacts on children from communities of color.

This worsening crisis in child and adolescent mental health is inextricably tied to the stress brought on by COVID-19 and the ongoing struggle for racial justice and represents an acceleration of trends observed prior to 2020. Rates of childhood mental health concerns and suicide rose steadily between 2010 and 2020 and by 2018 suicide was the second leading cause of death for youth ages 10-24. The pandemic has intensified this crisis: across the country we have witnessed dramatic increases in Emergency Department visits for all mental health emergencies including suspected suicide attempts.

The pandemic has struck at the safety and stability of families. More than 140,000 children in the United States lost a



What do Chicago students say they most need? Counselors, school board seats, therapy dogs

By Cassie Walker Burke | May 14, 2021, 2:35pm CDT



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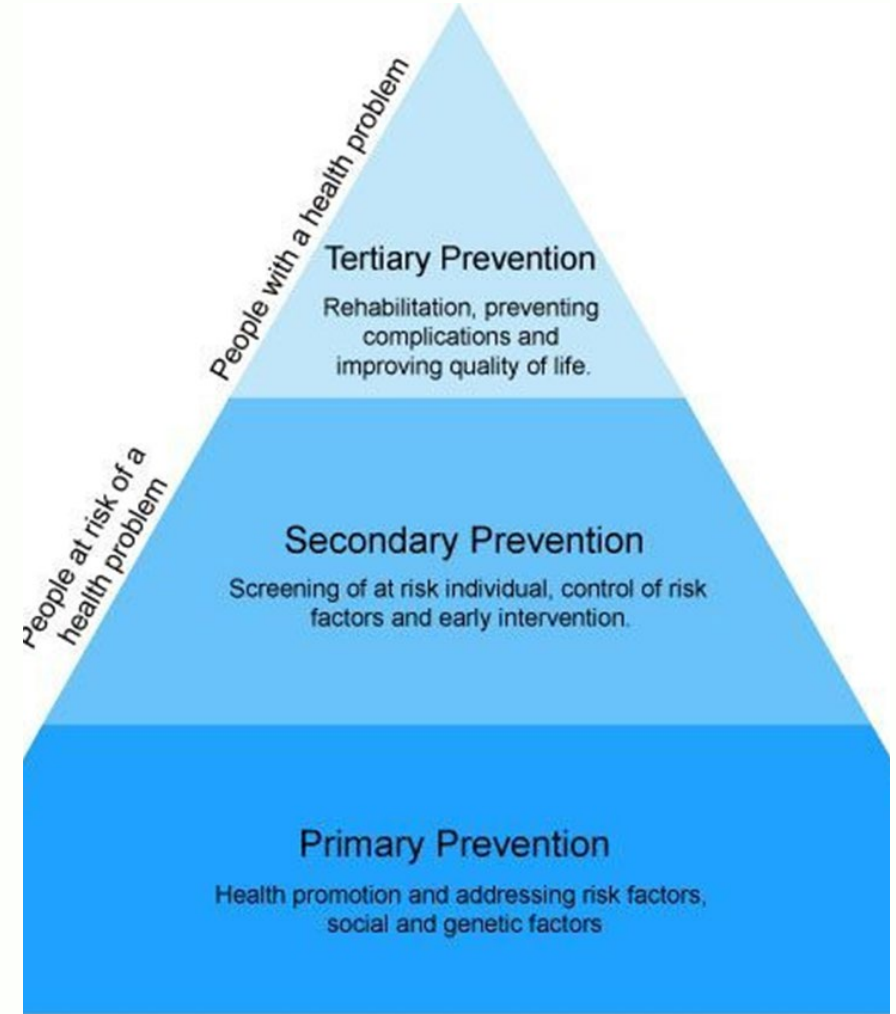
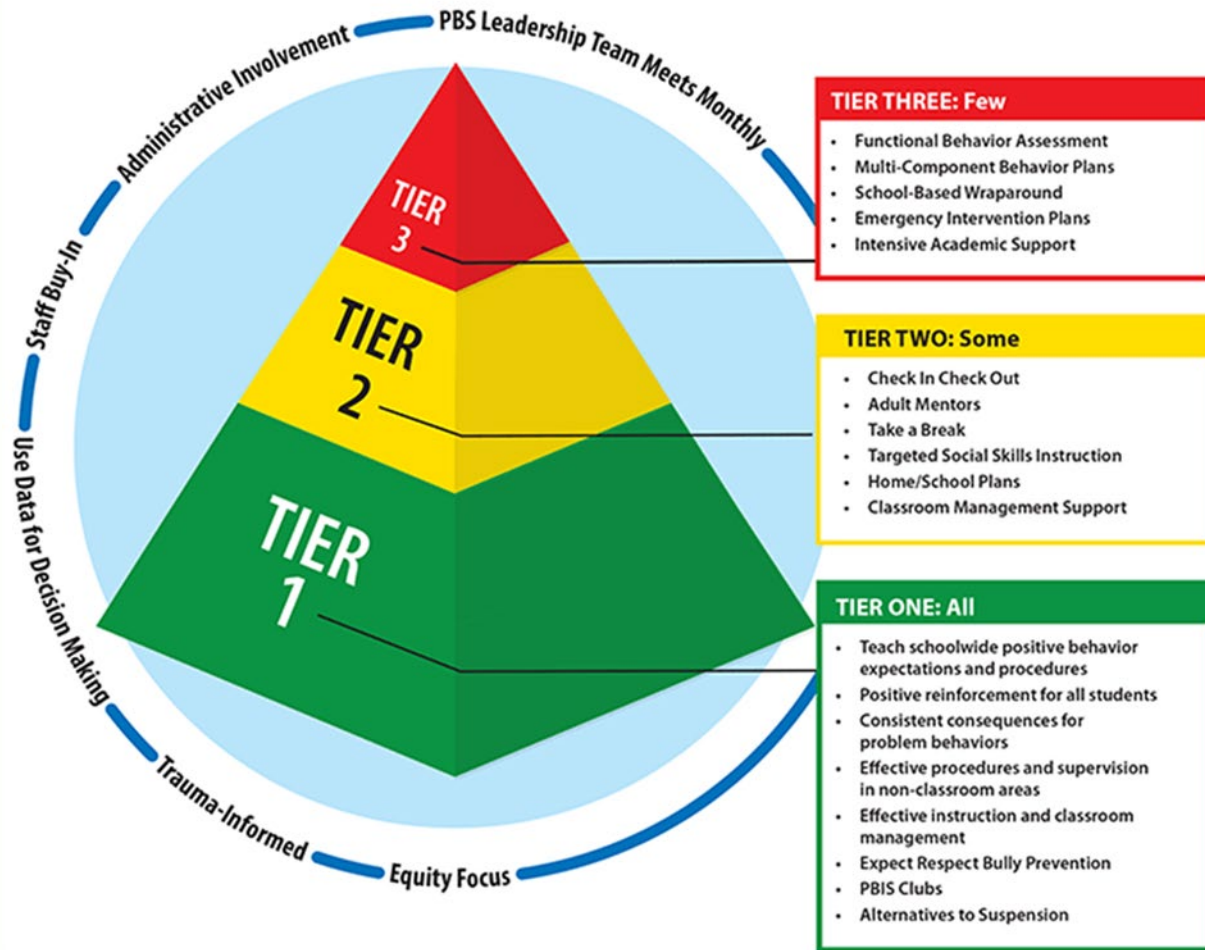
Participatory Action Research (PAR)

Team of school facility dog handlers (school counselors, social workers, teachers, and administrators) and assistance dog training staff reconvened

Series of group meetings over time using cycles of brainstorming and data collection, data analysis, and evaluation/revision of **specific school facility dog activities that target specific mental health-related outcomes and/or protective factors**



Three-Tiered Model of Positive Behavioral Interventions and Support



Mental Health Module

While our first research project, a recurrent theme that emerged in our discussions was the need to increase the capacity of SFD programs to provide effective and targeted mental health support in schools.

Through collaborative, participatory research, vetted:

- primary (general student wellness),
- secondary (for at-risk students), and
- tertiary (for students with identified mental/behavioral health needs)

interventions to do in partnership with school facility dogs!

The School Facility Dog Mental Health Module provides a range of stand-alone SFD activities that support student outcomes related to overall mental health.

The module is over 175 pages!



SCHOOL FACILITY DOG Mental Health Module

The Ability Center's Assistance Dogs program is a fully accredited school facility dog training program through Assistance Dogs International.

 **The Ability Center**

419-885-5733 | abilitycenter.org    

Social and Emotional Benefits

- Improved social and communication skills
- Increased confidence
- Improved relationships with peers
- Improved relationships and interactions with school staff
- Increased empathy
- Increased motivation to demonstrate positive behaviors
 - Opportunities to earn rewards with the SFD
- Increased engagement in acquiring social and emotional skills
- Reduced stress and anxiety





School Facility Dog-Assisted Mental Health Snapshot (MHS)

Snapshot Title	PBIS Puptastic Rewards
Purpose	Positive reinforcement for hard work and good behavior
PBIS Tier	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Tier 1 – wellness-focused for general student population ✓ Tier 2 – targeted for specific at-risk student group ✓ Tier 3 – specific intervention for student(s) with identified mental health and/or behavioral concerns
Explanation	<p>The sky's the limit for use of the SFD in the PBIS program as a positive reinforcer. The activities may be used to reward students for reaching a behavior goal or an academic goal. For all students, the rewards can be purchased with their PBIS points as incentives, rewards, etc. Students can purchase the following rewards:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Get a picture taken with SFD. Sample Pictures With Students • Do puzzles with the SFD. • Eat lunch with the SFD. Lunch with Cooper (SFD) • Bring a friend to lunch with the SFD. • Make treats for the SFD. • Snuggle with the SFD. Snuggle Photo • Give commands and treats to the SFD. (training practice) • Take the SFD for a walk using two leashes. The primary handler will have one leash and the student will have the other leash. This allows the handler to <u>maintain control of the SFD at all times.</u> • Create/purchase a themed picture of the SFD - something fun like a baseball card, holiday picture, Halloween costume picture, Christmas picture, birthday picture. Get creative! Get great



School Facility Dog-Assisted Mental Health Snapshot (MHS)

Snapshot Title	Crisis Intervention: Death of Student/Staff Member
Purpose	Provide emotional support for grieving students/staff
PBIS Tier	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Tier 1 – wellness-focused for general student population ✓ Tier 2 – targeted for specific at-risk student group ✓ Tier 3 – specific intervention for student(s) with identified mental health and/or behavioral concerns
Explanation	<p>Tier 1 - The SFD and handler are part of our district Crisis Intervention Team. They are able to offer the entire school community the comfort of small group and individual support to students and staff. The SFD and handler visit a school in crisis, (death of a student faculty member or other tragedy), to be a comfort to students/staff who are grieving. The SFD and handler may work in many areas, reaching a large number of people.</p>
Explanation	<p>Tier 2 - SFD works with small groups of students in a crisis situation. The SFD can lie in the middle of the small group to interact with everyone.</p>
Explanation	<p>Tier 3 Extra support can be offered to individual students or staff members beyond the plan for the larger group.</p>

Academic Benefits

- Improved attitude and/or motivation towards learning
- Improved reading outcomes
 - Building positive associations between reading and dogs;
 - Increasing motivation to read through the dog audience; and
 - Decreasing stress/anxiety associated with reading
- Improved language skills
- Increased motivation and confidence during testing situations





School Facility Dog-Assisted Mental Health Snapshot (MHS)

Snapshot Title	Test Anxiety/State Testing Support
Purpose	Give students a tangible reminder from the SFD
PBIS Tier	<ul style="list-style-type: none">✓ Tier 1 – wellness-focused for general student population✓ Tier 2 – targeted for specific at-risk student group✓ Tier 3 – specific intervention for student(s) with identified mental health and/or behavioral concerns
Explanation	<p>Tier 1- Prepare a picture of the SFD to give each student before the test. This could be created in collector's card size, which is convenient to place on student desks the first day of the test, or even earlier, depending on what strategies the school counselor wants to share. Leading up to the testing, the SFD could disseminate different "tricks" to help students give their best effort. For example, the card could say "Do Your Best on the Test!"; "Read Everything!"; "Take a Deep Breath"; "Stay Focused"; "You've Got this!" or the card could list a few key strategies specific to your school district. The card offers students a constant reminder as they work through the testing process.</p> <p>A state testing theme could be developed and used in a school wide approach to disseminate information and preparation for taking tests. Ideas for the cards could include but are not limited to the following: announcements, posters in the hallways, class mini lessons, social media posts, emails from the SFD, recorded messages from the SFD (There are apps that will make a picture of your SFD look like it is talking!) and more!</p>

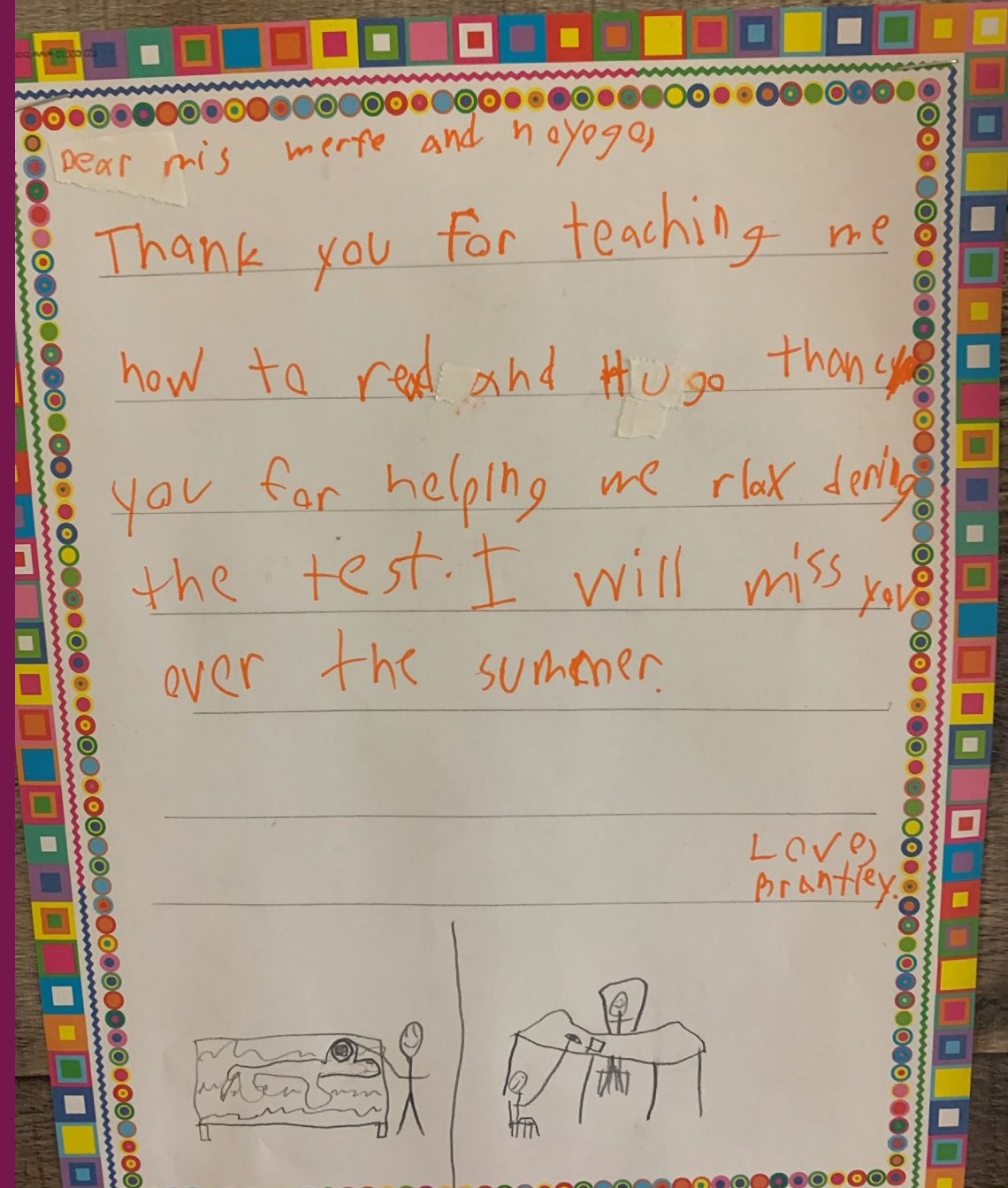


School Facility Dog-Assisted Mental Health Snapshot (MHS)

Snapshot Title	The Dog Ate Your Homework?
Purpose	Homework completion incentive
PBIS Tier	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><input type="checkbox"/> Tier 1 – wellness-focused for general student population✓ Tier 2 – targeted for specific at-risk student group✓ Tier 3 – specific intervention for student(s) with identified mental health and/or behavioral concerns
Explanation	Tier 2 or Tier 3 - Student(s) who have set a goal to complete homework more successfully or frequently can earn time with the SFD, have their picture taken with the SFD, or choose an activity from the PBIS rewards as their reward for achieving their goal.

School Environment/Climate Benefits


- Enhancement of positive classroom atmosphere
- Enhancement of positive school-wide atmosphere
- Strengthens school connections with:
 - Students
 - Families
 - Staff
- Creates a sense of comfort
- Strengthens Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports for all students





Jacket Way Friday

You were nominated by

 **Hugo**



for "bee-having"
like a JACKET!

Student Name _____

Grade _____ Teacher _____

School Facility Dog-Assisted Mental Health Activity (MHA)

Activity title	Golden Ticket (PBIS Reward)
Staff role in school	Intervention Specialist
PBIS Tier	✓ Tier 1 – wellness-focused for general student population
Modality	✓ Single student
Evidence Base:	
<input type="checkbox"/> Best Practice <i>(commonly used and believed to be of high quality)</i> <input type="checkbox"/> Action Research <i>(individual investigates own practice to improve content/delivery)</i> <input type="checkbox"/> Research-Informed <i>(a review of research provides foundation for content/delivery)</i> <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Evidence-Based <i>(highest level of evidence, results published in peer-reviewed journal)</i>	
Materials Needed:	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • PBIS Golden Tickets from (insert SFD name) 	
Describe the steps to do the activity (add step space as needed):	
Step 1	Create PBIS Golden Tickets from (insert SFD name)
Step 2	The SFD handler will keep the Golden Tickets in a pouch when with the SFD.
Step 3	Hand out Golden Tickets from (insert SFD name) for showing the expected behaviors (ex. Be Respectful, Be Responsible, Be Ready). Tell students that (insert SFD name) noticed them (insert positive expected behavior).
Step 4	Students will then fill out the ticket and put it into their classroom PBIS Golden Ticket bin.



School Facility Dog-Assisted Mental Health Snapshot (MHS)

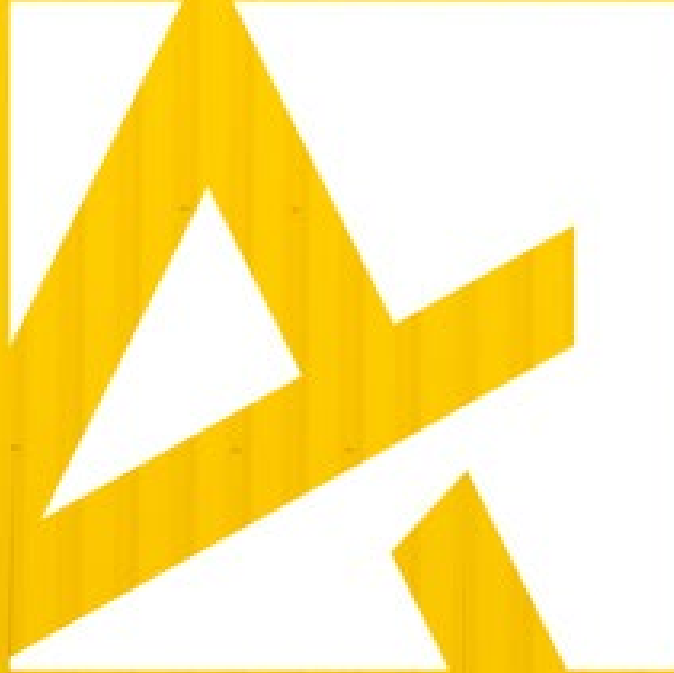
Snapshot Title	Creating a Safe and Supportive Environment
Purpose	Help students feel welcome when coming to school
PBIS Tier	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Tier 1 – wellness-focused for general student population ✓ Tier 2 – targeted for specific at-risk student group ✓ Tier 3 – specific intervention for student(s) with identified mental health and/or behavioral concerns
Explanation	Tier 1 - SFD and Handler stand at the front doors of the school first thing in the morning every day to greet students. This helps reduce student anxiety and helps them feel welcome. Students also know there is a supportive adult they can talk to, or sees them, when they enter the building each morning. If a student has a difficult morning, an SFD can be used as an intervention to help calm the student.
Explanation	Tier 2 - This can be used with students who temporarily have issues coming to school for a variety of reasons. They may have had to come without a sibling due to illness, parents may be out of town for work, it was just a rough morning or other reasons. Having the dog there will be a motivation to come in and make the day better than it started off.
Explanation	Tier 3 - This can be helpful for students with school aversion anxiety, etc., to ease their way into the building. The SFD can meet them to escort them into the building. If it is part of the student's plan, the student could walk the SFD to the School Counselor/Social Worker's office for a brief morning check in.



ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

- Summer School Facility Dog workshop
- School Facility Dog educational lesson plans
- School Facility Dog presentations to aid in administrative/Board approval
- Resources and support for allergy and fear concerns
- Assistance in creating school specific implementation guidelines and policies
- Access to a School Facility Dog Resource Folder via Google Drive containing examples and blank templates for:
 - Introduction resources
 - Social stories
 - Dog friendly/Dog free area resources
 - Flyers/Posters
 - Google Site
 - PBIS connection resources
 - Fundraising
 - Budgets
- Equipment/Supply bags provided at training

QUESTIONS?





Assistance Dogs Program

School Facility Dogs

Contact Information:

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