



Wetaskiwin Outreach School

4705-47 Avenue, Wetaskiwin, AB T9A 0J6

Phone : (780) 352-3655

Email : cb@wrps11.ca

www.cbmcmurdo.ca

August 26, 2024

Dear Parents, Guardians and Staff

Wetaskiwin Outreach is excited to have a therapy dog within our school. We hope this will be an ongoing activity and another strategy that aligns with our division's goals to impact our students positively, as well as the staff's well-being and mental health.

We are incredibly excited to introduce to you new staff members who will be joining us this fall. As Certified Therapy Dogs, we will welcome Stella and Finley to our Wetaskiwin Outreach team. Stella is a one-year-old blue-colored French Bulldog and Finley is a two-year-old red-colored Labradoodle. Both have been in training for the last few months and have passed their therapy dog certifications. We are excited to have both Stella and Finley become an integral part of our school community.

Please note that the dogs will never be at school at the same time but on different days.

As a handler, I have completed my “Informed Dog Therapy” course at the University of Saskatchewan. I have completed K9 First Aid. Through these courses, I hope to come up with a number of animal-related activities to boost the physical and mental well-being of our students and staff as well as motivate students in their learning.

Below, we have set out the benefits of site-based school therapy dogs and tried to address some concerns you may have.

What are the benefits of having a school dog?

Numerous research studies have shown the benefits of therapy dogs in schools (Gray J, Hackling M. Wellbeing, 2009; Jalongo MR, 2005).

Evidence indicates that benefits include:

- It provides a calming effect on students and reduces stress;
- Improves concentration, self-esteem and self-confidence;
- Fosters a sense of responsibility and improves attendance;
- Motivates students to think and learn;
- Encourages respect and therefore improves relationships;
- It helps build confidence in reading and improves literacy skills;
- Stimulates memory, problem-solving and game-playing;
- Encourages expression, participation and shared attention;



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- Provides positive interactions surrounding a mutual topic for discussion;
- Promotes responsibility and well-being;
- Improves self-esteem, relieves anxiety and lifts mood;
- Teaches compassion and respect for other living things;
- It reduces blood pressure, assists with pain management, gives the motivation to move and stimulates the senses.

Some challenges to consider:

What if my child is allergic to dogs?

Understandably, some of you may be concerned about allergic reactions to a school dog. However, Finley the Labradoodle has a non-shedding coat and Stella sheds minimally. Both will be subject to the most thorough cleanliness and grooming regime. Both dogs will only be allowed in situations with pupils who voluntarily wish to work with them. The dogs will work with students one-on-one or in small group capacities in specified areas, so the possible spread of dander is limited throughout the building. Only one dog will be at school at a time and will be located primarily in the front of the building (main entrance to greet those who want to be welcomed, principal's office, counselling offices for one-to-one work and away from the classrooms unless specifically invited and no one has an allergy in the class). They will **not** be in places where students or staff eat.

Will the dogs be properly cared for?

Yes, they will be exceptionally well looked after. No matter where the dogs work, they will always be accompanied by their handler and owner, Dr. Humby. The dogs will be on a leash and wear a collar while on school grounds. Students will be supervised with the therapy dogs.

While on school property the dogs will have access to a dog crate in their home area (principal's office), where they can relax throughout the day. Stella and Finley will also visit the vet regularly for all his vaccinations, parasite prevention, and regular check-ups. An updated file of each dog's vaccinations and certifications will be kept at the school for reference. If either dog is unwell, they will stay home for the day and be reassessed the following day before returning. Each dog will have access to food and water and be given multiple opportunities to be brought outside for bathroom breaks during the day in a designated area.

What if my child is scared of dogs?

Some children may have had upsetting experiences and thus have a fear of dogs (or other animals). The dogs will only be in contact with children who want to work with them. Stella and Finley have completed training that helps them to remain calm and gentle around children. This



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ongoing training will continue for as long as they are school-based therapy dogs. Experience and research have shown that with proper guidance and handling, children can learn to overcome their fear of animals and grow in respect and appreciation for them.

How will Therapy dogs be used?

Stella and Finley will visit the school a few times each week. Additional days may be considered, depending on how well the initial schedule works. They will stay safely in the office until proper acclimation has been completed. They will be present for morning greetings. Physical contact with students will be based on approval. They will meet with students in small group settings and may even spend time listening to pupils read in a controlled environment or working with students during class times and visits at breaks and lunch. They will be present to support students socially/emotionally and for reasons determined by the School Support Team.

More information about the division Administrative Procedure 240 Therapy Dogs can be found at the following link:

https://docs.google.com/document/d/1TCQeqPhxFoNoZ6OaCXUkHtIE_UexrivDGKjcYZvYEEs/edit

If, for any reason, you would like to opt your student out of the therapy dog program, please complete the form below and return it to the office and or email melissa.humby@wrps11.ca.

Student's Name: _____

No, my child may NOT have contact with a Therapy Dog at Wetaskiwin Outreach during the 2024-2025 school year

Explanation (if needed)

Parent Signature & Date _____



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If we do not hear from parents by September 6, we will assume you are providing permission for your child to be around the therapy dogs.

We hope you will join us in welcoming both Stella and Finley to the Wetaskiwin Outreach family and embrace all they have to offer the school.

Lastly, please be on the lookout for updates on Stella and Finley's journey on the Wetaskiwin Outreach Instagram pages.

Thank you for your continued support.

Principal
Wetaskiwin Outreach