

**WOODFORD COUNTY BOARD OF EDUCATION
AGENDA ITEM**

ITEM #: X4 **DATE:** December 19, 2019

TOPIC/TITLE: Facility Dog at Southside

PRESENTER: Jeremy Reynolds / Jenny Spencer

ORIGIN:

- ☐ TOPIC PRESENTED FOR INFORMATION ONLY (No board action required.)
- ☒ ACTION REQUESTED AT THIS MEETING
- ☐ ITEM IS ON THE CONSENT AGENDA FOR APPROVAL
- ☐ ACTION REQUESTED AT FUTURE MEETING: (DATE)
- ☐ BOARD REVIEW REQUIRED BY

- ☐ STATE OR FEDERAL LAW OR REGULATION
- ☐ BOARD OF EDUCATION POLICY
- ☐ OTHER:

PREVIOUS REVIEW, DISCUSSION OR ACTION:

- ☒ NO PREVIOUS BOARD REVIEW, DISCUSSION OR ACTION
- ☐ PREVIOUS REVIEW OR ACTION

- ☐ DATE:
- ☐ ACTION:

BACKGROUND INFORMATION:

We would like to request that a facility dog be allowed to be at Southside Elementary. We have a staff member, Jenny Spencer, that has a facility dog. Ms. Spencer's dog, Sully, is a 5 year old yellow labador retriever. Sully was certified through the Good Dog! Autism Companion center in Fallsbrook, California. Some of the potential benefits of having a facility dog at Southside are: increased school attendance; gains in confidence; decreases in learner anxiety behaviours; positive changes toward learning and improved motivation; enhanced relationships with peers and teachers due to experiencing trust and unconditional love. Sully would be covered under Ms. Spencer's professional liability insurance.

We have reached out to our staff and parents to get a feeling of their thoughts about having a facility dog at Southside. We send a letter home with all students asking for feedback about the possibility of having a dog. The positive response from parents was overwhelming. Only 16 parents returned the letter asking to be contacted. Of those, only one had significant concerns. After a discussion with Ms. Spencer, that family thought it was a good idea as well. We also surveyed the staff. 94% of the staff said, "Yes, we want a facility dog at Southside." There were two staff members that responded "Maybe," and one "No."

SUMMARY OF MAJOR ELEMENTS:

Some of the advantages of having a facility dog are:

Academics- Reading to a dog is less intimidating than reading a human. Facility dogs provide an instant sense of calm because our dogs have "non-judgmental ears" - meaning, a therapy dog doesn't care if a student mispronounces a word or struggles to read.

Motivation- The student responds more positively, enthusiastically, and comfortably when a dog is involved. Together, the student and the dog work together to engage in activities which help achieve goals set by the

therapist. Since dogs offer unconditional, non-judgmental love, therapy sessions can be pleasurable as well as productive.

Social Interaction & Language- Facility dogs open dialogue and facilitate conversations that encourage and promote social and emotional development.

Comfort, Compassion and Care- Facility dogs can provide support and friendship to anyone who may have the unique challenge of making new friends, or lack self-esteem. Dogs can also be used as a motivator or reward system to teach responsibility.

Feelings of Safety & Well-Being- Facility dogs are a calm companion who helps relieve stress, anxiety and loneliness. Dogs bring a pleasant distraction and reduce negative feelings, thoughts and concerns.

If a child has gone through some type of traumatic event -- like the death of a parent, a divorce or separation, or even sexual or physical abuse -- having an animal present can make the therapist, and the therapy process, seem much less threatening. For example, the counselor can ask the child to tell the dog what happened.

"Many times children will tell things to an animal that they don't feel comfortable telling an adult..."

Other Kentucky Schools Using Therapy Dogs

Numerous programs across the Commonwealth are using animals in their programs. For example, the Morehead Youth Development Center uses Greyhound Rescues full-time in their program. Christian County Alternative School has a program where the students are training a Service Dog to be used by a person who is blind. Franklin County Schools has a school psychologist that takes a Basset Hound with her when she tests students, to reduce anxiety and provide more accurate testing results. Fayette County has Elementary Schools where the Guidance Counselor brings their dog in for social skills time. Scott County's summer reading program has dogs come in to "read" with the students four hours per day.

Animal care and maintenance

Sully lives with Ms. Spencer. He is fed and walked prior to coming to school. Sully will be taken outside to use the restroom (and cleaned-up after), if necessary. While not in use, Sully will be housed in a kennel in Ms. Spencer's office. If Sully is out in the building, he will always be accompanied by Ms. Spencer.

Timeline

We would like to begin bringing Sully to school in February of 2020. We will introduce him on a weekly basis to see how students respond to him. If things go well, Sully will eventually come to school on a daily basis.

IMPACT ON RESOURCES: There is no additional cost associated with the facility dog.

TIMETABLE FOR FURTHER REVIEW OR ACTION:

SUPERINTENDENT'S RECOMMENDATION: ☒ Recommended

☐ Not Recommended


