

TO: Dr. Jesse Bacon, Superintendent

FROM: Dr. Adrienne Usher, Deputy Superintendent

DATE: October 23, 2025

RE: Policy 09.214

The proposed Policy 09.214 establishes guidelines for using Registered Therapy Animals to support student mental health, emotional regulation, and academic engagement in Bullitt County Public Schools (BCPS). Due to an increase in the number of requests for therapy dogs/animals, a policy is necessary to ensure safety for students and staff. The policy mandates prior written approval, annual renewal, proof of certification/vaccinations, and liability insurance. Handlers are responsible for control, care, and clean-up, with provisions made for allergies and trauma concerns. This policy has been reviewed and approved by KSBA and Dinsmore & Shohl, LLP. as well as KSBA. Approval is requested for a first reading of the new policy 09.214.

OUR MISSION IS TO INSPIRE AND EQUIP OUR STUDENTS TO SUCCEED IN LIFE

BULLITT COUNTY PUBLIC SCHOOLS IS AN EQUAL EDUCATION AND EMPLOYMENT INSTITUTION

Therapy Animals

Purpose

Bullitt County Public Schools (BCPS) supports the use of Registered Therapy Animals by school personnel for the benefit of students, subject to the conditions of this policy. Registered Therapy Animals can reduce stress, improve emotional regulation, decrease anxiety, enhance social skills, improve self-esteem, normalize the learning environment, and support academic achievement. Registered Therapy Animals may be used in classroom, group, or individual interventions for mental health, social-emotional learning, or educational purposes.

Definitions

- A. Therapy Animal – An animal individually trained, evaluated, and registered to provide trauma support, therapy, and interactions within a school. Registered Therapy Animals are not “emotional support animals” or “service animals.” Registered Therapy Animals must be well-behaved, housebroken, and have a temperament appropriate for interaction with students and school personnel. Registered Therapy Animals are the personal property of the owner and are not owned by BCPS.
- B. Handler – A school employee, person approved to operate within the District under a MOU (Memorandum of Understanding) or volunteer trained and registered with the Registered Therapy Animal. Registered Therapy Animals must work as part of a team with a school counselor or a mental health professional for targeted mental health or social-emotional interventions.
- C. Animal Assisted Therapy (AAT) – A goal-directed intervention delivered by a mental health, health service, or educational professional designed to improve physical, social, emotional, or cognitive functioning of an individual.
- D. Service Animals - A service animal is an animal, usually a dog, that is individually trained to perform specific tasks or work to assist a person with a disability as defined under the ADA (Americans with Disabilities Act).

General Standards and Procedures

A. Request and Registration:

- 1. Any employee or volunteer wishing to bring a Registered Therapy Animal into a school must submit a written request to the building principal and superintendent/designee.
- 2. Requests must be renewed each school year or when a different animal is used.
- 3. No Registered Therapy Animals may enter a school without the Superintendent/designee's approval.
- 4. The employee's professional role must be directly related to and consistent with the provision of the therapy services. Assignment of responsibilities shall be limited to staff whose job duties are inherently connected to the delivery of such services

Therapy Animals

General Standards and Procedures (continued)

5. Registered Therapy Animals must be registered and certified by an approved organization. Registration must remain current, with recertification required by the registering organization.
6. Handlers must provide proof of current vaccination, immunization, local licensing and liability insurance that covers the Handler and the Registered Therapy Animal.

B. Training and Certification:

1. Registered Therapy animals and handlers must be individually trained, evaluated, and registered
2. Registered Therapy Animals used for mental health or educational interventions must be registered as part of a therapy team with a qualified mental health professional.
3. Training, insurance, and certifications must be approved by the district legal counsel.

C. Health and Vaccination:

1. Registered Therapy Animals must be clean, well-groomed, housebroken, in good health, and immunized against diseases common to animals.
2. Owners/handlers must provide proof of vaccinations and local licensure.

D. Control and Identification:

1. Registered Therapy Animals must wear proper identification and be under the control of the handler at all times via leash, harness, or other approved restraint unless performing tasks that require otherwise.
2. Handlers must maintain control of the animal during school hours, including emergencies and evacuation drills.

E. Authorized Areas:

1. Registered Therapy Animals may have access only to areas approved by school administrators.
2. Registered Therapy Animals must have access to water, food, potty breaks, and a crate or safe space when not actively participating in interventions.

F. Supervision and Care:

1. Owners/handlers are solely responsible for the animals' supervision, feeding, exercise, and clean-up.
2. BCPS is not responsible for providing care or supervision, except for Registered Therapy Animals that are part of a district-supported program with designated co-handlers.

Therapy Animals

General Standards and Procedures (continued)

G. Allergies and Hypoallergenic Considerations:

1. Administrators will notify staff, students, and parents/guardians before a Registered Therapy Animal enters a school.
2. Students or staff with allergies or aversions may have restricted access or alternative arrangements.
3. Registered therapy animals must be removed from the environment if students object to being around the animal due to allergy issues related to animals.
4. Handlers are encouraged to consider hypoallergenic breeds where feasible.

H. Animal Welfare and Trauma:

1. Handlers must ensure that animals are not exposed to conditions that cause stress, fear, or trauma.
2. Registered Therapy Animals shall have appropriate breaks, water, and a safe environment.
3. Registered Therapy Animals must be removed from the environment if students object to being around the animal due to past trauma with animals.

Administrative Discretion and Removal

A. Therapy Animals may be permanently removed from school property if administrators determine:

1. The handler cannot maintain control of the animal.
2. The animal is not housebroken.
3. The animal presents a direct or immediate threat; or
4. The animal presence makes individuals uncomfortable.
5. The animal's presence disrupts the educational process of students and/or impedes staff from performing job responsibilities consistently.

Handlers must remove the animal immediately upon instruction.

Liability and Insurance

- A. Owners/handlers are solely responsible for any damage or injury caused by the animal.
- B. Proof of liability insurance must be submitted and maintained while the animal is on school property.

Funding

Any fundraising for the care of a Registered Therapy Animal shall be managed through an approved extra-classroom account.

Therapy Animals

Therapy Animals in Training

This policy applies to Registered Therapy Animals in training accompanied by a bona fide trainer, subject to all registration, certification, and health requirements.