



Pigeon Lake Regional School

Box 60, Falun, AB T0C 1H0
Phone : (780) 352-4916
Email : pl@wrps11.ca
www.plrs.ca

August 30, 2023

Dear Parents and Guardians,

Pigeon Lake Regional School 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 positively impact the well-being and mental health of our students and staff.

We are incredibly excited to introduce to you a new staff member that will be joining us this fall on Tuesday, September 12. As a Certified Therapy Dog, we will welcome Whiskey (aka Whisk) to our Pigeon Lake Regional team. Whiskey is a one ½-year-old cream-coloured non-shedding Labradoodle. He has been in training for the last few months, passing a reactivity, obedience class, and therapy dog certification. We are excited to have Whiskey become an integral part of our school community.

As a handler I have completed my “Informed Dog Therapy” course through the University of Saskatchewan. I have completed K9 First Aid. I am also taking courses through Lakeland College in “Animal Assisted Wellness”. Through these courses I hope to come up with a number of animal related activities to boost physical and mental wellbeing 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;
- Provides positive interactions surrounding a mutual topic for discussion;



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- 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, Whiskey has a non-shedding coat that will be subject to the most thorough cleanliness and grooming regime. He will only be allowed in situations with pupils who voluntarily wish to work with him. He 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. Whiskey 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). He will **not** be in places where students or staff eat, including the Cafe, home economics room, common area and staff room.

Will Whiskey be properly cared for?

Whiskey will be exceptionally well looked after. No matter where Whiskey works, he will always be accompanied by his handler and owner, Dr. Humby. Whiskey will be on a leash and wear a collar and his therapy dog vest on school grounds. Students will be supervised with Whiskey.

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

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). Whiskey will only be in contact with children that want to work with him. He has completed training that helps him to remain calm and gentle around children. This ongoing training will continue for as long as he is a school-based therapy dog. Experience and research



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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 Whiskey be used?

Whiskey will visit the school twice a week (Tuesdays and Thursdays). Additional days may be considered, depending on how well the initial schedule works. He will stay safely in the office until proper acclimation has been completed. He will then begin by being present for morning greetings. Physical contact with students will be based on approval. He 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 flex and visits at breaks and lunch. He will be present to support students socially/emotionally, with reading and 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_UexrivDGKjcYZvYEYs/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 Pigeon Lake Regional School during the 2023-2024 school year

Explanation (if needed)

Parent Signature & Date _____



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If we do not hear from parents by September 11, we will assume you are providing permission for your child to be around Whiskey.

We hope you will join us in welcoming Whiskey to the Pigeon Lake Regional School family and embrace all he has to offer the school.

Lastly, please be on the lookout for updates on Whiskey's journey on the Pigeon Lake Regional School's Facebook and Instagram pages.

Thank you for your continued support.

Melissa Humby
Principal
Pigeon Lake Regional School