

**Paws Giving Independence Application Letter**  
**Hickory Grove Elementary School**  
**Dunlap School District 323**

**Purpose and Goals**

At Hickory Grove Elementary School, we are excited to welcome a Facility Dog to support our students' academic, social, and emotional growth. The dog will assist with student transitions, help de-escalate challenging situations, and offer support in our Autism Classroom. Students will also have opportunities to take part in caring for the dog, teaching responsibility and empathy. Additionally, the Facility Dog will play a valuable role in related services, such as speech therapy, social work, and occupational/physical therapy sessions, helping students feel more comfortable, motivated, and engaged. We are committed to using the Facility Dog thoughtfully to enhance the well-being of our entire school community.

**Handling and Supervision**

I will be the primary handler and responsible for the daily care and management of the Facility Dog. As the Assistant Principal of Hickory Grove Elementary School, I am committed to ensuring the dog's well-being, consistent training, and appropriate use within our school environment. While I will serve as the designated primary handler, I plan to train additional staff members — including our school counselors — to support the dog's care and integration throughout the day. I am fully prepared to complete the training required by Paws Giving Independence to become a certified handler. In addition, I will lead efforts to educate students about how to interact with the dog respectfully and safely, reinforcing responsibility and compassion within our school community. The Facility Dog's daily routine will be carefully structured to ensure a healthy balance between work, rest, and exercise. I will create a daily schedule that aligns with the school day and provides the dog with consistent routines and appropriate breaks.

**Logistics and Integration**

The Facility Dog will be housed primarily in the main office, where it will have a designated space to rest. Under adult supervision and while on a leash, the dog will be permitted to move throughout the building, including classrooms, hallways, therapy rooms, and other student support areas, based on daily needs and the dog's schedule. We will introduce the Facility Dog to our school community through our social media platforms and school-wide communication. In addition, we will conduct welcome presentations in each classroom to educate students on how to interact with the dog safely and respectfully. These presentations will include guidelines on when and how to approach the dog, the importance of calm behavior, and the role of the dog in our school setting. Staff will also receive training to ensure consistency in expectations and supervision.

## **Health and Care**

As the handler and official owner of the Facility Dog, I will be fully responsible for all aspects of the dog's healthcare, including regular veterinary visits, vaccinations, and grooming. While I plan to collaborate with our PTO and local community partners to help support some of the ongoing costs, I understand and accept that these responsibilities ultimately fall to me. The dog's physical and emotional well-being will be monitored daily through structured routines that include regular rest breaks, exercise, and quiet time in a designated space. I will closely observe its behavior and stress levels and make adjustments as needed to prevent fatigue or burnout.

## **Safety and Behavior**

All students, staff, and visitors are encouraged to wash their hands after interacting with the Facility Dog. Individuals who have allergies to dogs or who feel uncomfortable around animals should inform school staff so that appropriate accommodations can be arranged. In cases where a student has a known allergy or fear of dogs, the school will make every reasonable effort to ensure the student is not placed in direct contact with the Facility Dog or in situations that may cause discomfort.

## **Discipline and Behavior Expectations**

Any unwanted or unsafe behavior toward the Facility Dog — including teasing, startling, or causing harm — is strictly prohibited. Individuals who do not follow these expectations may lose the privilege of interacting with the dog in the future.

## **Legal and Liability Considerations**

If the Facility Dog is present on school grounds as part of an approved school program the school district's liability insurance may extend coverage to incidents involving the dog, provided it is acting within its intended role and under appropriate supervision. As the handler, I will ensure that the dog is properly trained, leashed, and supervised at all times to minimize risk. The district's approval and oversight help ensure that legal responsibilities are clearly defined and that appropriate risk management measures are in place.

There are no specific local or state regulations that currently restrict the use of a Facility Dog in schools; however, we are committed to maintaining clear and consistent communication with our families. Each year, we will share information about the Facility Dog's presence, purpose, and role within our school community. This communication will include guidance for families who may have concerns related to allergies, fears, or other sensitivities, and we will work to provide accommodations as needed to ensure all students feel safe and supported.

Our district's existing liability insurance will extend to cover the Facility Dog while it is acting within its designated role in the school setting. At this time, no additional insurance is required. While formal paperwork for staff, students, or families is not mandatory, we will provide clear

communication regarding expectations, safety guidelines, and accommodations to ensure a positive and informed experience for all members of our school community.

### **Budget and Funding**

The costs associated with a Facility Dog include initial training fees, routine veterinary care (such as vaccinations and yearly checkups), food, grooming, and necessary equipment (leash, bed, crate, toys, etc.). There may also be ongoing expenses for refresher training or unexpected medical care. To help offset these expenses, I will partner with our PTO to allocate yearly funding for routine care, such as veterinary visits. Additionally, I plan to create and share a Wish List with our school community to gather donations of supplies and support. We are fortunate to have a generous and engaged community that I am confident will rally behind this initiative. While we will seek support through donations, PTO funds, and potential community partnerships, I understand that the financial responsibility ultimately rests with me. I am fully prepared to cover any costs necessary to ensure the well-being and success of the Facility Dog, both now and in the future.

### **Training and Education**

To ensure everyone in the school community understands the Facility Dog's purpose, I will provide training to all staff during our annual Teacher Institute. This training will cover the dog's role in supporting student well-being, promoting emotional regulation, assisting in transitions, and participating in related services. I will conduct age-appropriate educational presentations in each classroom at the beginning of the school year and as needed throughout the year. These sessions will teach students how to interact with the dog respectfully and safely, while reinforcing clear, consistent expectations. We will proactively address concerns by communicating clearly with families and staff about the Facility Dog's role, schedule, and protocols. If a student or staff member has a known allergy or fear, we will work collaboratively to provide reasonable accommodations. Open communication, education, and transparency will be key in ensuring a supportive and inclusive environment for everyone.

### **Review and Evaluation**

The effectiveness of the Facility Dog will be assessed through ongoing observation and feedback from staff, students, and families. Key indicators will include improvements in student engagement, emotional regulation, behavior during transitions, and the dog's impact within our specialized programs such as our Autism classroom and related services. In the event of an emergency, the Facility Dog will be managed in accordance with the school's established emergency procedures. The designated handler is trained to prioritize the dog's safety and well-being throughout any emergency situation.