

Dunlap Community Unit School District 323
Board of Education Meeting
May 21, 2025

INFORMATION ITEM

TO: Members of the Board of Education
Dr. Scott Dearman, Superintendent

FROM: Mrs. Cheryl Wooden, Assistant Principal, Hickory Grove Elementary School

SUBJECT: HGES Facility Dog PGI Application

BACKGROUND INFORMATION:

Hickory Grove Elementary School is preparing to welcome a Facility Dog for the 2025–26 school year through a partnership with Paws Giving Independence (PGI). The purpose of this initiative is to support students' academic, social, and emotional development. The dog will play a key role in facilitating smoother transitions, de-escalating challenging situations, and supporting students in specialized settings, such as our Autism Classroom and therapy sessions. In addition, students will have opportunities to help care for the dog, promoting empathy and responsibility. This initiative aligns with our broader commitment to fostering student well-being through innovative and compassionate approaches. Two other buildings (Banner Elementary School and Dunlap Grade School) have successfully implemented facility dogs.

The Assistant Principal will serve as the dog's primary handler and undergo PGI's certified training program. Additional staff, including school counselors, will be trained to support the dog's integration and care throughout the day. The dog will be housed primarily in the main office, and scheduled movement will occur through the building under adult supervision. A communication and education plan will be implemented to introduce the dog to students and staff, outline behavioral expectations, and ensure proper hygiene and accommodations for those with allergies or fears. The handler assumes full responsibility for the dog's daily care, health, and overall well-being, and the dog's use will be carefully structured to ensure a balance of work and rest.

All costs associated with the Facility Dog, including veterinary care, food, and supplies, will be the responsibility of the handler, though support will be sought through PTO partnerships and community donations. Staff will receive training on the dog's role during Teacher Institute, and students will participate in educational sessions on how to interact with the dog safely and respectfully. The dog's effectiveness will be evaluated through staff and student feedback, with special attention to its impact on emotional regulation, engagement, and therapy participation. Liability coverage will fall under the district's existing policy, and all efforts will be made to maintain transparent communication with families. A copy of the PGI application is included for the Board's review.

The Board will not need to take any action in this matter. Please email or call Cheryl Wooden with any questions.