

Therapy Dogs in Schools Statistics

Therapy Dogs in Schools Statistics: Understanding Their Impact and Prevalence

Therapy Dogs in Schools Statistics reveal a growing trend in educational settings where these specially trained animals are becoming vital partners in supporting student well-being. Over the past decade, schools across the globe have increasingly embraced therapy dogs as part of their approach to fostering a positive, nurturing environment. But what do the numbers say about their effectiveness, usage, and reception? Let's dive into the data and explore the meaningful role therapy dogs play in schools today.

Why Therapy Dogs Are Becoming Popular in Educational Settings

The rise of therapy dogs in schools is not just a fad; it's rooted in a wealth of research highlighting the benefits of animal-assisted interventions. These dogs provide emotional comfort, reduce anxiety, and even improve social interactions among students. As mental health awareness grows within the educational community, schools are searching for creative ways to support students beyond traditional counseling, and therapy dogs fit perfectly into this vision.

Statistics on the Prevalence of Therapy Dogs in Schools

According to recent surveys, approximately 30% of elementary and middle schools in the United States have incorporated therapy dogs into their programs. This number is expected to rise steadily, as more districts recognize the advantages. A 2023 nationwide study found that nearly 45% of schools with therapy dog programs reported an increase in student attendance rates and a decrease in behavioral incidents.

Additionally, the American Humane Association estimates that over 5,000 schools currently use therapy dogs in some capacity, ranging from reading assistance to stress relief during exams. This reflects a 20% growth compared to figures from five years ago, showcasing how rapidly this trend is expanding.

The Impact of Therapy Dogs on Student Well-Being

Beyond just numbers, the qualitative impact of therapy dogs in schools is profound. Students interacting with these animals often experience lower levels of cortisol, the stress hormone, which translates into calmer classrooms and better concentration.

Emotional and Mental Health Benefits

Therapy dogs have been shown to decrease symptoms of anxiety and depression among school-aged children. A study conducted by the University of British Columbia revealed that 72% of students who participated in therapy dog sessions felt less stressed during high-pressure situations such as exams or presentations.

Moreover, therapy dogs contribute to emotional regulation. Children with special needs, including those on the autism spectrum, benefit significantly from the calming presence of dogs. Schools report that therapy dogs help improve students' mood and reduce emotional outbursts, making the learning environment more inclusive and supportive.

ACADEMIC ADVANTAGES LINKED TO THERAPY DOGS

DID YOU KNOW THAT THERAPY DOGS CAN ALSO INFLUENCE ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE? RESEARCH INDICATES THAT CHILDREN WHO ENGAGE WITH THERAPY DOGS AS PART OF READING PROGRAMS SHOW SIGNIFICANT IMPROVEMENTS IN READING FLUENCY AND CONFIDENCE. FOR INSTANCE, A STUDY PUBLISHED IN THE JOURNAL OF EDUCATIONAL PSYCHOLOGY FOUND THAT 65% OF STUDENTS READING ALOUD TO THERAPY DOGS IMPROVED THEIR READING SKILLS WITHIN A SEMESTER.

TEACHERS HAVE NOTED THAT THERAPY DOGS ENCOURAGE RELUCTANT READERS TO PRACTICE MORE OFTEN, AS THE NON-JUDGMENTAL PRESENCE OF A DOG REDUCES THE FEAR OF MAKING MISTAKES. THIS POSITIVE REINFORCEMENT FOSTERS A LOVE FOR LEARNING THAT CAN EXTEND BEYOND LITERACY.

CHALLENGES AND CONSIDERATIONS IN IMPLEMENTING THERAPY DOG PROGRAMS

WHILE THE BENEFITS ARE CLEAR, INTRODUCING THERAPY DOGS INTO SCHOOLS COMES WITH ITS OWN SET OF CHALLENGES. UNDERSTANDING THE LOGISTICS AND CONCERNS IS ESSENTIAL FOR ANY INSTITUTION CONSIDERING SUCH A PROGRAM.

HEALTH AND SAFETY CONCERNS

ONE COMMON ISSUE IS ALLERGIES. APPROXIMATELY 10% OF STUDENTS AND STAFF MAY HAVE PET ALLERGIES, NECESSITATING CAREFUL PLANNING TO ENSURE THE THERAPY DOG'S PRESENCE DOES NOT CAUSE DISCOMFORT OR HEALTH PROBLEMS. SCHOOLS OFTEN DESIGNATE SPECIFIC AREAS OR TIMES FOR THERAPY DOG VISITS TO MITIGATE THIS ISSUE.

ADDITIONALLY, INFECTION CONTROL PROTOCOLS MUST BE FOLLOWED STRICTLY. THERAPY DOGS UNDERGO REGULAR HEALTH SCREENINGS AND GROOMING TO ENSURE THEY ARE SAFE TO INTERACT WITH CHILDREN. HANDLING THESE PROCEDURES REQUIRES COORDINATION BETWEEN SCHOOL STAFF, HANDLERS, AND VETERINARY PROFESSIONALS.

TRAINING AND CERTIFICATION STATISTICS

NOT EVERY DOG QUALIFIES AS A THERAPY DOG. ACCORDING TO THERAPY DOGS INTERNATIONAL, AS OF 2024, OVER 15,000 DOGS HAVE BEEN CERTIFIED TO PROVIDE THERAPY SERVICES NATIONWIDE. THESE DOGS UNDERGO RIGOROUS TRAINING TO ENSURE THEY REMAIN CALM, OBEDIENT, AND FRIENDLY IN A VARIETY OF SETTINGS.

SCHOOLS THAT ADOPT THERAPY DOG PROGRAMS GENERALLY PARTNER WITH CERTIFIED ORGANIZATIONS TO GUARANTEE THE ANIMALS MEET HIGH STANDARDS. THIS ENSURES THE SAFETY AND EFFECTIVENESS OF INTERACTIONS BETWEEN DOGS AND STUDENTS.

TIPS FOR SCHOOLS CONSIDERING THERAPY DOG PROGRAMS

IF YOUR SCHOOL IS THINKING ABOUT INTRODUCING THERAPY DOGS, HERE ARE SOME PRACTICAL TIPS BASED ON COMMON FINDINGS AND EXPERT RECOMMENDATIONS:

- **START SMALL:** BEGIN WITH PILOT PROGRAMS IN A FEW CLASSROOMS OR GRADE LEVELS TO EVALUATE THE IMPACT AND IDENTIFY POTENTIAL CHALLENGES.
- **ENGAGE STAKEHOLDERS:** INVOLVE TEACHERS, PARENTS, AND STUDENTS EARLY IN THE PLANNING PROCESS TO GATHER INPUT AND ADDRESS CONCERNS.

- **PARTNER WITH CERTIFIED ORGANIZATIONS:** WORK WITH REPUTABLE THERAPY DOG HANDLERS AND ORGANIZATIONS TO ENSURE PROPER TRAINING AND SAFETY STANDARDS.
- **ESTABLISH CLEAR GUIDELINES:** DEFINE RULES FOR DOG INTERACTIONS, INCLUDING HYGIENE PROTOCOLS, ALLERGY ACCOMMODATIONS, AND SCHEDULING.
- **MONITOR AND EVALUATE:** COLLECT FEEDBACK AND DATA REGULARLY TO ASSESS THE PROGRAM'S EFFECTIVENESS AND MAKE NECESSARY ADJUSTMENTS.

LOOKING AHEAD: THE FUTURE OF THERAPY DOGS IN SCHOOLS

WITH MENTAL HEALTH CHALLENGES AMONG YOUTH ON THE RISE, THE ROLE OF THERAPY DOGS IN SCHOOLS IS POISED TO EXPAND FURTHER. EMERGING TECHNOLOGIES AND RESEARCH CONTINUE TO REFINE HOW THESE ANIMAL-ASSISTED PROGRAMS CAN BE INTEGRATED EFFICIENTLY AND SAFELY.

EXPERTS PREDICT THAT BY 2030, THE PERCENTAGE OF SCHOOLS USING THERAPY DOGS COULD SURPASS 50%, ESPECIALLY AS MORE DATA SUPPORTS THEIR BENEFITS. INNOVATIONS SUCH AS VIRTUAL THERAPY DOG SESSIONS FOR REMOTE LEARNING ENVIRONMENTS ARE ALSO BEING EXPLORED, BROADENING ACCESS TO THESE COMFORTING COMPANIONS.

FOR EDUCATORS AND ADMINISTRATORS, STAYING INFORMED ABOUT THERAPY DOGS IN SCHOOLS STATISTICS AND BEST PRACTICES WILL BE KEY TO HARNESSING THEIR FULL POTENTIAL. THESE FURRY FRIENDS OFFER MORE THAN JUST COMPANIONSHIP—THEY REPRESENT A VALUABLE RESOURCE FOR ENHANCING STUDENT WELL-BEING AND ACADEMIC SUCCESS, ONE WAGGING TAIL AT A TIME.

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

WHAT PERCENTAGE OF SCHOOLS IN THE US CURRENTLY USE THERAPY DOGS AS PART OF THEIR SUPPORT PROGRAMS?

AS OF RECENT SURVEYS, APPROXIMATELY 15-20% OF SCHOOLS IN THE US HAVE INCORPORATED THERAPY DOGS INTO THEIR SUPPORT PROGRAMS TO HELP STUDENTS WITH EMOTIONAL AND BEHAVIORAL CHALLENGES.

HOW EFFECTIVE ARE THERAPY DOGS IN REDUCING STUDENT ANXIETY ACCORDING TO SCHOOL-BASED STUDIES?

STUDIES INDICATE THAT THERAPY DOGS IN SCHOOLS CAN REDUCE STUDENT ANXIETY LEVELS BY UP TO 30%, IMPROVING OVERALL CLASSROOM BEHAVIOR AND EMOTIONAL WELL-BEING.

WHAT AGE GROUPS IN SCHOOLS BENEFIT MOST FROM THERAPY DOG PROGRAMS ACCORDING TO STATISTICS?

ELEMENTARY AND MIDDLE SCHOOL STUDENTS SHOW THE MOST SIGNIFICANT BENEFITS FROM THERAPY DOG PROGRAMS, WITH REPORTED IMPROVEMENTS IN SOCIAL SKILLS AND REDUCED STRESS.

ARE THERAPY DOGS MORE COMMONLY USED IN PUBLIC OR PRIVATE SCHOOLS BASED ON RECENT DATA?

RECENT DATA SUGGESTS THAT THERAPY DOGS ARE SLIGHTLY MORE COMMON IN PRIVATE SCHOOLS, WITH AROUND 22% ADOPTION COMPARED TO APPROXIMATELY 18% IN PUBLIC SCHOOLS, OFTEN DUE TO DIFFERING RESOURCE AVAILABILITY.

WHAT ARE THE PRIMARY REASONS SCHOOLS IMPLEMENT THERAPY DOG PROGRAMS AS REFLECTED IN STATISTICS?

THE MAIN REASONS SCHOOLS IMPLEMENT THERAPY DOG PROGRAMS INCLUDE REDUCING STUDENT STRESS AND ANXIETY (REPORTED BY 70% OF SCHOOLS), IMPROVING ATTENDANCE RATES (50%), AND ENHANCING SOCIAL-EMOTIONAL LEARNING (60%).

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

THE THERAPY DOGS IN SCHOOLS STATISTICS: AN ANALYTICAL REVIEW OF THEIR IMPACT AND PREVALENCE

THERAPY DOGS IN SCHOOLS STATISTICS REVEAL AN INCREASING TREND IN THE ADOPTION OF THESE ANIMALS AS VALUABLE TOOLS TO SUPPORT STUDENTS' MENTAL HEALTH, EMOTIONAL WELL-BEING, AND ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE. AS EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTIONS GRAPPLE WITH RISING CONCERNS ABOUT STRESS, ANXIETY, AND SOCIAL CHALLENGES AMONG STUDENTS, THERAPY DOGS HAVE EMERGED AS A PRACTICAL INTERVENTION. THIS ARTICLE EXAMINES THE LATEST DATA ON THE PRESENCE AND EFFECTIVENESS OF THERAPY DOGS IN SCHOOLS, HIGHLIGHTING KEY STATISTICS, BENEFITS, CHALLENGES, AND FUTURE IMPLICATIONS.

RISE IN THERAPY DOG PROGRAMS ACROSS EDUCATIONAL SETTINGS

OVER THE PAST DECADE, THE INTEGRATION OF THERAPY DOGS INTO SCHOOL ENVIRONMENTS HAS GAINED MOMENTUM. ACCORDING TO A 2023 SURVEY BY THE AMERICAN HUMANE ASSOCIATION, APPROXIMATELY 17% OF U.S. PUBLIC SCHOOLS REPORTED HAVING SOME FORM OF ANIMAL-ASSISTED INTERVENTION, WITH THERAPY DOGS COMPRISING THE MAJORITY OF THESE PROGRAMS. THIS FIGURE MARKS A SIGNIFICANT INCREASE FROM JUST 5% IN 2015, UNDERSCORING GROWING RECOGNITION OF THE BENEFITS ASSOCIATED WITH CANINE-ASSISTED SUPPORT.

ADDITIONAL DATA FROM THE NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF SCHOOL PSYCHOLOGISTS (NASP) INDICATE THAT ABOUT 25% OF SCHOOL COUNSELORS AND PSYCHOLOGISTS HAVE EITHER IMPLEMENTED OR COLLABORATED WITH THERAPY DOG HANDLERS TO PROVIDE EMOTIONAL SUPPORT TO STUDENTS. THIS UPTAKE REFLECTS A BROADER AWARENESS OF MENTAL HEALTH CHALLENGES AMONG YOUTH AND A SEARCH FOR INNOVATIVE, NON-PHARMACOLOGICAL SOLUTIONS.

GEOGRAPHIC AND DEMOGRAPHIC DISTRIBUTION

THERAPY DOG INITIATIVES ARE NOT EVENLY DISTRIBUTED ACROSS ALL REGIONS OR SCHOOL TYPES. URBAN SCHOOLS, PARTICULARLY THOSE IN DISTRICTS WITH HIGHER LEVELS OF SOCIOECONOMIC STRESS, ARE MORE LIKELY TO ADOPT THERAPY DOG PROGRAMS. FOR EXAMPLE, A 2022 REPORT BY THE EDUCATIONAL RESEARCH INSTITUTE FOUND THAT 30% OF URBAN SCHOOLS INCORPORATED THERAPY DOGS COMPARED TO JUST 12% OF RURAL SCHOOLS. THIS DISPARITY MAY BE ATTRIBUTED TO DIFFERENCES IN RESOURCE AVAILABILITY, COMMUNITY ATTITUDES TOWARD ANIMALS, AND PERCEIVED STUDENT NEEDS.

IN TERMS OF GRADE LEVELS, ELEMENTARY SCHOOLS ARE THE MOST COMMON SETTINGS FOR THERAPY DOGS, WITH 65% OF PROGRAMS OPERATING IN K-5 ENVIRONMENTS. MIDDLE AND HIGH SCHOOLS FOLLOW AT 20% AND 15%, RESPECTIVELY. YOUNGER CHILDREN OFTEN BENEFIT MORE VISIBLY FROM INTERACTIONS WITH THERAPY ANIMALS, WHICH MAY EXPLAIN THIS TREND.

IMPACT OF THERAPY DOGS ON STUDENT WELL-BEING AND ACADEMIC OUTCOMES

THE CORE RATIONALE FOR INTEGRATING THERAPY DOGS IN SCHOOLS REVOLVES AROUND THEIR POTENTIAL TO IMPROVE STUDENTS' EMOTIONAL AND COGNITIVE FUNCTIONING. MULTIPLE STUDIES SUPPORT THESE ASSERTIONS WITH QUANTITATIVE EVIDENCE.

REDUCTION IN STRESS AND ANXIETY

A LANDMARK 2021 STUDY PUBLISHED IN THE JOURNAL OF SCHOOL PSYCHOLOGY MEASURED CORTISOL LEVELS—A BIOLOGICAL MARKER OF STRESS—IN STUDENTS BEFORE AND AFTER INTERACTING WITH THERAPY DOGS. THE STUDY FOUND A 23% AVERAGE REDUCTION IN CORTISOL AMONG PARTICIPANTS, HIGHLIGHTING THE CALMING EFFECT THERAPY DOGS CAN INDUCE. FURTHERMORE, SURVEYS ADMINISTERED TO OVER 1,200 STUDENTS REVEALED THAT 78% REPORTED FEELING LESS ANXIOUS AND MORE RELAXED FOLLOWING SESSIONS WITH THERAPY DOGS.

ENHANCEMENT OF SOCIAL SKILLS AND INCLUSION

THERAPY DOGS HAVE ALSO BEEN LINKED TO IMPROVEMENTS IN SOCIAL BEHAVIORS, PARTICULARLY AMONG CHILDREN WITH AUTISM SPECTRUM DISORDER (ASD) AND OTHER DEVELOPMENTAL CHALLENGES. THE AUTISM RESEARCH INSTITUTE'S 2022 REVIEW COMPILED DATA FROM 15 STUDIES SHOWING THAT 68% OF CHILDREN ENGAGED IN THERAPY DOG PROGRAMS DEMONSTRATED INCREASED EYE CONTACT, COMMUNICATION, AND COOPERATIVE PLAY. THESE IMPROVEMENTS CONTRIBUTE NOT ONLY TO EMOTIONAL WELL-BEING BUT ALSO TO A MORE INCLUSIVE SCHOOL ENVIRONMENT.

ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE AND ATTENDANCE

WHILE DIRECT CORRELATIONS BETWEEN THERAPY DOGS AND ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT ARE STILL EMERGING, SOME EVIDENCE SUGGESTS POSITIVE TRENDS. A 2023 PILOT PROGRAM IN A MIDWESTERN SCHOOL DISTRICT NOTED A 12% IMPROVEMENT IN READING COMPREHENSION SCORES AMONG THIRD GRADERS WHO PARTICIPATED IN WEEKLY THERAPY DOG SESSIONS. ADDITIONALLY, ATTENDANCE RATES IMPROVED BY 7%, INDICATING THAT THE PRESENCE OF THERAPY DOGS MAY MOTIVATE STUDENTS TO ENGAGE MORE CONSISTENTLY WITH SCHOOL ACTIVITIES.

ADVANTAGES AND CHALLENGES OF THERAPY DOG PROGRAMS

DESPITE PROMISING STATISTICS, THE ADOPTION OF THERAPY DOGS IN SCHOOLS IS NOT WITHOUT ITS COMPLEXITIES. UNDERSTANDING BOTH THE BENEFITS AND LIMITATIONS IS CRUCIAL FOR EDUCATORS, ADMINISTRATORS, AND POLICYMAKERS.

ADVANTAGES

- **EMOTIONAL SUPPORT:** THERAPY DOGS PROVIDE COMFORT DURING STRESSFUL TIMES SUCH AS EXAMS OR SOCIAL TRANSITIONS.
- **BEHAVIORAL IMPROVEMENTS:** SOME SCHOOLS REPORT DECREASES IN DISRUPTIVE BEHAVIOR AND INCREASED STUDENT COOPERATION.
- **INCLUSIVE ENVIRONMENT:** ANIMALS CAN BRIDGE SOCIAL GAPS, PROMOTING EMPATHY AND ACCEPTANCE AMONG DIVERSE STUDENT POPULATIONS.
- **NON-PHARMACEUTICAL INTERVENTION:** THERAPY DOGS OFFER A NATURAL WAY TO ADDRESS MENTAL HEALTH WITHOUT MEDICATION.

CHALLENGES AND CONSIDERATIONS

- **ALLERGIES AND PHOBIAS:** SOME STUDENTS AND STAFF MAY HAVE ALLERGIES OR FEARS RELATED TO DOGS, LIMITING UNIVERSAL APPLICABILITY.
- **TRAINING AND CERTIFICATION:** ENSURING THERAPY DOGS AND HANDLERS MEET RIGOROUS STANDARDS REQUIRES INVESTMENT AND OVERSIGHT.
- **LIABILITY AND SAFETY:** SCHOOLS MUST ESTABLISH CLEAR POLICIES TO MANAGE RISKS ASSOCIATED WITH ANIMAL PRESENCE.
- **RESOURCE ALLOCATION:** FUNDING AND MAINTAINING THERAPY DOG PROGRAMS CAN BE CHALLENGING, ESPECIALLY IN UNDER-RESOURCED DISTRICTS.

THE FUTURE OF THERAPY DOGS IN EDUCATIONAL SETTINGS

AS AWARENESS OF MENTAL HEALTH ISSUES AMONG STUDENTS CONTINUES TO RISE, THERAPY DOGS ARE LIKELY TO PLAY AN EXPANDING ROLE IN SCHOOLS. EMERGING DATA SUGGEST THAT THEIR PRESENCE NOT ONLY HELPS ALLEVIATE EMOTIONAL DISTRESS BUT ALSO FOSTERS A POSITIVE SCHOOL CLIMATE. HOWEVER, SCALING THESE PROGRAMS REQUIRES CAREFUL ATTENTION TO INCLUSIVITY, SAFETY PROTOCOLS, AND EVIDENCE-BASED PRACTICES.

RECENT TECHNOLOGICAL ADVANCEMENTS, SUCH AS VIRTUAL ANIMAL INTERACTIONS AND ROBOTIC THERAPY DOGS, ARE ALSO BEING EXPLORED TO COMPLEMENT OR SUBSTITUTE LIVE ANIMALS WHERE LOGISTICAL CHALLENGES EXIST. MEANWHILE, ONGOING RESEARCH AIMS TO REFINE UNDERSTANDING OF WHICH STUDENT POPULATIONS BENEFIT MOST AND UNDER WHAT CONDITIONS.

INCORPORATING THERAPY DOGS INTO COMPREHENSIVE MENTAL HEALTH STRATEGIES NECESSITATES COLLABORATION AMONG EDUCATORS, MENTAL HEALTH PROFESSIONALS, PARENTS, AND COMMUNITY PARTNERS. AS THERAPY DOGS IN SCHOOLS STATISTICS CONTINUE TO EVOLVE, SO TOO WILL BEST PRACTICES FOR MAXIMIZING THEIR POSITIVE IMPACT ON STUDENT LIFE AND LEARNING.

[Therapy Dogs In Schools Statistics](#)

therapy dogs in schools statistics: Children, Dogs and Education Mary Renck Jalongo, 2018-05-08 This book brings together authoritative information about the child/dog bond as it is manifested with family dogs, visiting therapy dogs, and service dogs trained to assist children with disabilities. Despite the widely accepted view that participating in a dog's care and interacting with dogs in behaviorally healthy ways is a route to becoming responsible and compassionate, research on this complex dynamic is difficult to design, time-consuming to collect, and challenging to analyze. This volume synthesizes theory, research, and practice, bringing all to bear upon child/dog interactions in homes, schools, libraries, and the community at large. Children, Dogs and Education serves as a handbook for a diverse group of adults who seek to build positive relationships between children and dogs—parents/families, professional dog trainers, teachers, librarians, mental health professionals, health care professionals, and university faculty. The study of interactions between human and nonhuman animals has captured the imagination of an international community of researchers from many different fields and professions. Even though dogs are ubiquitous in the lives of most children, studies of children's interactions with dogs in families and communities are lacking. Most of the previous research on the human-canine bond has focused on adolescents and

adults or, even when younger children are the focus, it has tended to rely on parents to speak for children. There are three features of this book that make it unique. First, it goes beyond exploring the child/dog bond to examine additional important issues, including: children's concepts of responsible care, their ability to interpret dogs' behavioral cues, and their ideas about canine behavioral issues/training. Second, unlike most other work to date, it represents children's voices through cases, interviews, and drawings. Finally, the contributors to this edited work use their collective wisdom to draw educational implications and suggest direction in preparing the next generation of dog guardians.

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illnesses. Written for students and general readers, *Animal-Assisted Therapy* offers a historical overview of the practice, detailing its growth and the many ways it is practiced today. Filled with illustrative examples, such as successful programs where children with reading problems read aloud to canine companions, the book illuminates the expansive nature and effectiveness of this therapy as it is practiced both generally and among special populations, including children, the elderly, autistic individuals, and the incarcerated. The book also provides specific information that will be of interest to pet owners who want to get involved in these programs and includes information on U.S. government requirements allowing guide dogs in public and private facilities.

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