

**West Elementary**  
**Therapy Dog Program Release Form**  
**3<sup>rd</sup> Grade & New Students**

West Elementary implemented a "Therapy Dog" program in March of 2015. This opportunity has been made possible by the efforts of West Elementary Counselor, Robin Butler, and her dog, Miss Kitty.

Research has shown that therapy dogs in schools can increase reading skills (students reading to the dog), as well as contribute to social and emotional development. A Therapy Dog's presence in the School Counselor's office has also been shown to reduce anxiety, help students work through anger management, reduce bullying tendencies, and address other personal/social issues. The specific goals of the Therapy Dog program include the following: Increase empathy and compassion in children; help students connect in the school setting and reduce anxiety; and improve reading skills and comprehension, while increasing confidence and literary interest.

Mrs. Butler and Miss Kitty are registered through Therapy Dogs International. To belong to Therapy Dogs International (TDI®), all dogs must be tested and evaluated by a Certified TDI Evaluator. A dog must be a minimum of one (1) year of age and have a sound temperament. Each dog must pass a TDI temperament evaluation for suitability to become a Therapy Dog. The test also includes the evaluation of the dog's behavior around people with the use of some type of service equipment (wheelchairs, crutches, etc.).

TDI has specific guidelines to meet cleanliness and grooming requirements. Miss Kitty is a "aussiedoodle" breed, which is one of the hypoallergenic breeds of dogs. She is brushed daily, bathed as needed, and groomed every six weeks, which will minimize allergic contact. TDI also requires regular veterinarian checks for registered Therapy Dogs along with regular evaluations to maintain certification. Handlers are trained to notice potential harm to either a child or their dog.

*Please complete the form below acknowledging your preference as to whether you wish your child to have contact with the West Elementary Therapy Dog, Miss Kitty.*

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Student's Name: \_\_\_\_\_

My child may have incidental or student initiated contact with the school Therapy Dog. If my child is receiving counseling services either individually or in a group, I understand that the Therapy Dog will be in the room and part of the counseling process. I also understand that the Therapy Dog will support reading fluency through the "Minutes with Miss Kitty" program. *If your child will be participating in the Minutes with Miss Kitty program, you will be notified.*

I understand that this permission form will remain "active" during the years my child attends school at West Elementary. If I should change my mind regarding my child's interaction with the Therapy Dog, I understand that I must provide this in writing to the school principal.

- Yes, my child may have incidental or student initiated contact with the West Elementary Therapy Dog, Miss Kitty, during the years my child is enrolled at West Elementary School.
- No, my child may NOT have contact with the West Elementary Therapy Dog, Miss Kitty.

Explanation \_\_\_\_\_

Parent Signature & Date \_\_\_\_\_