Harry the Therapy Dog

Mohawk Local School District | Sycamore, OH | Wyandot, Seneca and Crawford Counties

**Initiative Type(s):**
Mental health services; Services for homeless youth; Services for child welfare-involved youth; Community liaisons; Family engagement and support services; Professional development regarding the provision of trauma informed care; Student services provided prior to or after the regularly scheduled school day or any time school is not in session.

**Community Partner(s):**
Educational service center; Nonprofit organization with experience serving children

**Description of Initiative:**
Mohawk Local School District houses a full-time school therapy dog to provide therapeutic, behavioral and developmental supports to students from preK-12th grade. Mohawk Local School District partnered with North Central Ohio Educational Service Center and The Ability Center of Greater Ohio in Sylvania, Ohio to train staff and handlers. The therapy dog, Harry, is used in socio-emotional education lessons, to greet children at the beginning of the school day, as a part of the Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS) program, during conflict resolution processes and to uplift the overall school climate.

**Initiative Benefits:**
Mohawk Local School District, located in Wyandot County and serving students in Wyandot, Seneca and Crawford counties, is a rural, school district. To ensure their school buildings are places that children, parents and teachers looked forward to entering, district staff explored ways to increase overall student wellness while improving behavioral outcomes and improving school climate. By bringing on a full-time school therapy dog and integrating him into ongoing programming, Mohawk Local has advanced these goals. Among the services that Harry provides are the following: emotional regulation, for students who are experiencing overwhelming emotions and need help sorting through their feelings; PBIS rewards, to incentivize positive behavior; reading companionship, in which he rests his head on a nervous child's lap while they work on literacy goals; and conflict diffusion, when students or parents are in high-stress situations and need the emotional support that only a dog can provide. Staff and administrators at Mohawk Local credit Harry with recent positive changes in school climate and student behavior.

**Essential Staff and Partners:**
Essential partners include district administrators, staff and teachers, particularly the 3 staff members who became trained therapy dog handlers to support this program. Additionally, this program's success was enabled by the School Therapy Dog Training Program at The Ability Center of Greater Toledo in Sylvania, Ohio.

**Action Steps to Get Started:**
A staff member participated in a foster training program with The Ability Center of Greater Toledo in Sylvania, Ohio. Then, when deciding how to use Student Wellness and Success Funding to advance school wellness, team members unanimously agreed to use the funding to bring a full-time therapy dog on staff. Initial action steps included staff training, handler training and purchasing of equipment.

**For More Information:**
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NOTE: Student Wellness and Success Funds were used for this initiative.