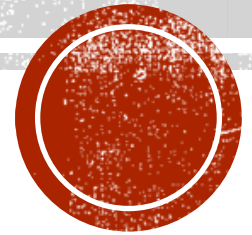


# PAWSATIVELY BAKER

Animal Assisted Interventions (AAI) in the Mount Baker School District





@pawsativelybaker



**Mount Baker Junior High**

Educational Excellence and Community Pride



We've been featured on [King 5 News](#) and [King 5 Evening](#)

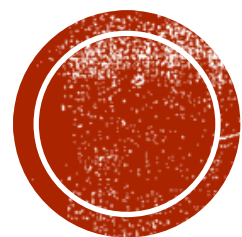
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# TOPICS

- Background: the need and how we started
- Our progress throughout the journey
- Current process
- Anecdotes and Evidence
- Q&A





**WHY DO WE NEED AAI?**



# WHAT IS THE NEED? WHAT DOES AAI OFFER?

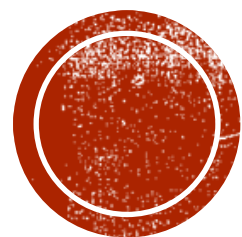
## The Need:

- Adolescent **mental health challenges** are reaching a near **crisis** level
- According to the CDC's [Youth Risk Behavior Surveillance Data Summary and Trends Report](#), more than 42% of students feel persistently sad or hopeless, nearly 30% experience poor mental health, 22% seriously considered suicide, and 10% made an attempt
- There is a lot of [research](#) showing the [positive effects of animal contact](#) and animal assisted interventions in general and [more coming](#) within the context of educational settings

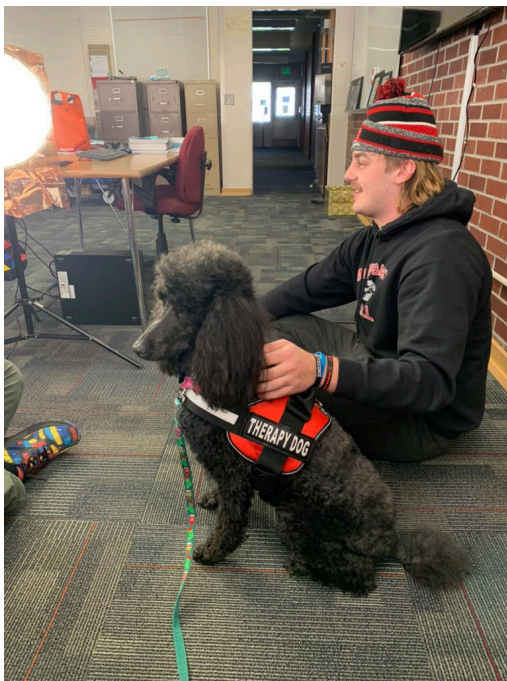
## Benefits of AAI that we have observed:

- Improved emotional regulation
- Improved academic engagement
- Improved behavioral outcomes for students who receive direct support
- Improved de-escalation times
- Improved mood on campus
- Better handler and student interactions (frequency and quality)
- Often can help identify kids with challenges like anxiety who might fly under the radar (the dogs seem to draw them out like magnets)
- Makes office visits and principal interactions less stressful and more enjoyable





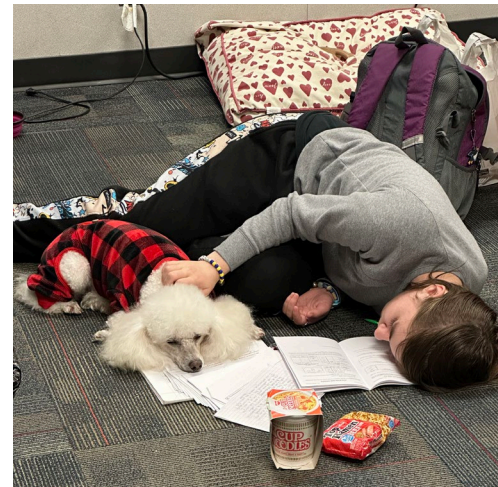
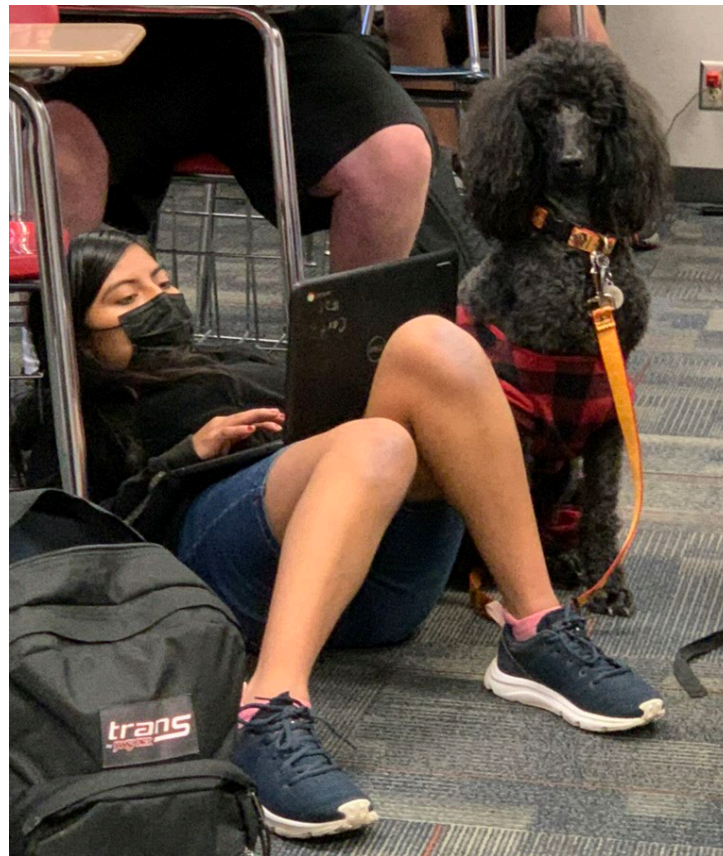
# HOW WE STARTED



# IN 2019 WE STARTED WITH SISSY THE POODLE

- Sissy, the Matriarch, is a therapy dog with a “complex” rating from Pet Partners
- Sissy’s interactions began as occasional work engagement and lunch visitations
- They now have grown to incorporate behavioral interventions
- Sissy can even do yoga!





# THE COVID OPPORTUNITY

- The COVID pandemic offered us *time* and a *reason* to build an actual AAI program
- Maverick earned a complex rating and joined the team
- Chappie was gifted to our program and began training for the Pet Partners evaluation
- We got the backing of our superintendent and school board to develop and implement a program



# THE DEVELOPMENT OF OUR PROGRAM

- We engaged teachers, classified staff, counselors, and volunteers to start developing our program
- We gathered input from families and students
- We identified program goals, drafted policies (that continue to evolve), assembled a committee, and created a preparation program for evaluations
- We figured out the dreaded insurance question
- Then we trained, prepped, and trained some more





# OUR PRE-EVAL TRAINING PROGRAM

- Earning a complex rating is challenging; We realized that we needed an in-house prep program
- We also needed outside help to get all dogs to the basic level of readiness first; we partnered with a [dog training school](#) and received discounts for our staff members
- Niki, who is a Pet Partners evaluator developed an 8 week prep program for evals
- We gathered donated materials like wheelchairs and walkers to prep for Pet Partners evaluations

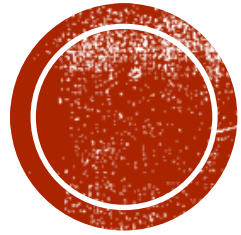




# PET PARTNERS EVALUATIONS

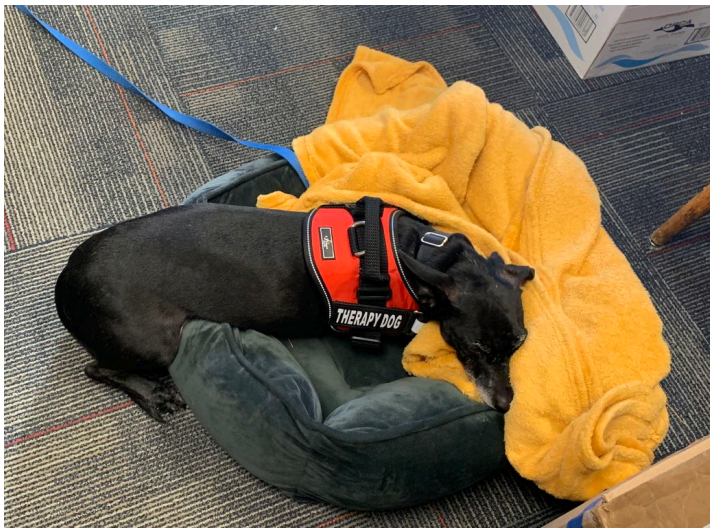
- Utilizing Pet Partners allows us an objective third party to determine whether teams are appropriate
- We established a relationship with an evaluator and have crafted a smooth process for evaluation day; most of us volunteer to help out
- Some teams have taken multiple attempts to achieve complex





# A DAY IN THE LIFE OF A DOG

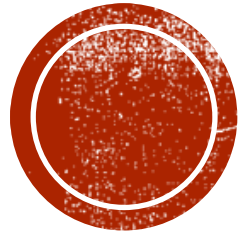




# WHAT DOES A DOG'S DAY LOOK LIKE?

- We emphasize the well-being of our dogs. Dogs have a lot of down time, but they are out during passing, breaks, and lunch interacting with kids, staff, and visitors
- Dogs play specific roles based on their personalities and location (office, classroom, de-escalation room, etc.)
- Staff across campus have bought dog treats to encourage visits
- We have crates, beds, food, and quiet areas





# BENEFITS OF AAI

Anecdotes and evidence from our experiences



# DOGS ARE GREAT MOTIVATORS

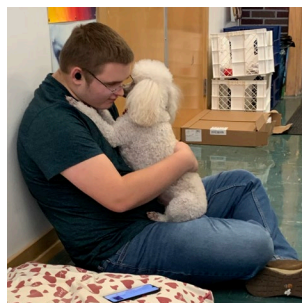
- Dogs have repeatedly been used to successfully de-escalate very volatile situations in which students are extremely dysregulated
- Dogs have repeatedly been used to successfully re-engage students academically for whom other forms of intervention have not worked
- Dogs have repeatedly been used to successfully encourage students to modify behavior in longer term, delayed gratification scenarios



- School crisis
- Situations involving reporting of abuse, neglect, etc.
- De-escalation of undesirable behaviors
- Enhancing work (Reading with Rover) production and follow through
- Enticement to attend after school programs and work help.
- Reducing test anxiety
- Introduction to new classroom or stressful work
- Rewards based programs (Trader cards, stickers, dog time, etc.)
- Softening the blow when going to the principal's office
- Helping to bridge the gap between student to teacher, student to administrator, etc.
- Settling kids down who are elevated and are sent to the office
- Assisting with students who are experiencing injuries and health issues until they can be addressed
- Staff who are stressed or need some quiet AAI time
- Providing a friendly and soft introduction to parents/outside entering campus through the office

## **SITUATIONS WHERE DOGS ARE ESPECIALLY BENEFICIAL**

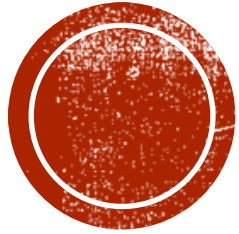




# SOME OF OUR FAVORITE STORIES . . .

- Our Life Skills program
- Chris' mask-melt down
- Connor's extreme aversion to touch
- Sophia's and Mason's crippling anxiety
- Sawyer's successful de-escalation





- We are constantly refining our policies and practices as we learn each day
- We are supporting other schools to help them launch AAI programs
- We are planning to develop a crisis response dog team
- We *\*may\** be planning to train a vape-sniffing llama

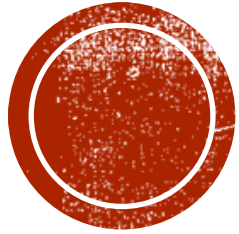


# OUR NEXT STEPS...



In loving  
memory of Liz  
2009-2022





**Q&A.** . . .