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May 11, 2023

Hi, I'm Oakley!

Dear Greater Lowell Tech Community,

Meet Greater Lowell Technical High School's newest staff member! Oakley is a 1.5-year-old chocolate lab and very excited to join the community at GLTHS as a facility dog beginning May 15, 2023.



Oakley is certified as a facility dog (sometimes referred to as therapy dogs) and has participated in extensive training to be able to provide support services to the general population in a school. Oakley will be handled by Mr. Phillips, School Psychologist at GLTHS.

As Oakley's role is unique, it is understandable that there may be some questions and concerns.

WHAT ARE THE BENEFITS OF HAVING A FACILITY DOG IN SCHOOL?

Numerous research studies have shown the benefits of facility dogs within the school setting and have at times been a part of our district staff before.

RESEARCH SHOWS BENEFITS INCLUDE IMPROVED:

- **Cognitive Function-** Working with a dog stimulates memory, problem-solving and game playing. Working with a dog improves concentration and allows for engagement in learning.
- **Social Skills/Socialization-** A dog provides a positive mutual topic for discussion, encourages responsibility, wellbeing, and focused interaction with others.
- **Emotional Function-** Working with a facility dog can improve mood, ability to regulate emotions, and improved self-esteem. Dogs can also teach compassion and respect for other living things as well as relieving anxiety.
- **Physical Response-** Interaction with a facility dog can reduce blood pressure, provide tactile stimulation, stimulate the senses, and increase motivation.
- **Executive Function Skills-** Working with a facility dog can support learning necessary skills for planning ahead, self-monitoring, organization, and managing tasks to achieve a goal.

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CONCERNS AND CONSIDERATIONS:

Allergies: It is understandable to be concerned about possible allergic reactions to a dog in the school setting. Oakley regularly participates in a thorough cleanliness and grooming regime. Oakley will also only be allowed in situations with students/staff who voluntarily wish to work with him in specified areas to reduce the possible spread of dander throughout the building.

Discomfort with Dogs: Upsetting experiences can lead to a fear of dogs (or other animals). Oakley will only be in contact with individuals that want to work with him. He has completed training that allows him to remain calm and be gentle around people of all ages. Oakley's training is ongoing and will continue to take place for as long as he is a school based facility dog. Additionally, research has shown that with proper guidance and handling, people can learn to overcome their fear of animals and grow in respect and appreciation for them.

HOW WILL OAKLEY BE CARED FOR?:

At School:

Oakley will come to school with Mr. Phillips a few times per week as he acclimates to GLTHS. Oakley will share an office with Mr. Phillips, with all necessary items for him to be comfortable at school. As Mr. Phillips often works individually with students, Oakley will also start interacting with students 1:1 before being introduced to a small group setting. Oakley will only work with students who voluntarily wish to work with him. Please be aware that parents/students Mr. Phillips works with on an individual basis will be contacted directly for questions and concerns and to determine comfort in working with Oakley.

Oakley will wear a collar, vest, and be leashed when he is on school grounds. He is trained to understand he is working when wearing his vest. He will be provided with opportunities for bathroom breaks and to rest throughout the day. Oakley will always be accompanied by Mr. Phillips when working with students/staff. Designated alternative handlers will be assigned in the case Mr. Phillips is not available for an extended period of time; however, he will not be working without Mr. Phillips present.

At Home:

Oakley resides at home with Mr. Phillips & family. When not working, Oakley is a family dog, and free to run and play as he pleases. All veterinary, insurance, and other expenses are exclusively the responsibility of Oakley's family. He is up to date on vaccination records, registered with the town he resides, microchipped, and socialized with children (including infants and toddlers) on an ongoing basis and is groomed regularly.

ADDITIONAL QUESTIONS & CONCERNS:

Generally, families of students working directly with Oakley will be notified. However, if you would like to request that your student does not work with Oakley for any reason, please contact Mr. Phillips at JPhillips@GLTech.org. Mr. Phillips is also available to provide additional information and accommodate requests for a visit from Oakley!



Please welcome Oakley to the GLTHS community! He is excited to fulfill his role as a positive influence for students and staff at Greater Lowell Technical High School. Thank you for your continued support.

Sincerely,

James Phillips
School Psychologist