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1. PURPOSE

To explain to our school community the rules and procedures we have in place in relation to dogs attending our school grounds. This includes the procedures in place for our wellbeing dog program to support student engagement and mental health.

2. POLICY

Assistance Dogs

Rowville Secondary College understands its obligations under the Disability Discrimination Act 1992 (Cth) and the Equal Opportunity Act 2010 (Vic) and will make reasonable adjustments for members of our school community with a disability who require an 'assistance animal' to help alleviate the effects of their disability. Assistance animals are permitted to attend our school with their handler. Our school Principal can lawfully ask a person to produce evidence that an animal:

- is trained specifically to assist a person to alleviate the effects of a disability (e.g., seeing eye dogs, hearing and physical assistance dogs and)
- meets standards of hygiene and behaviour appropriate for a school environment.

We understand that in some circumstances, students may require an assistance animal to attend school to help them to participate in their educational program. Rowville Secondary College will consider a request by a student with a disability to allow an assistance animal to attend school with them on a case-by-case basis. If you would like to discuss this further, please contact one of the Assistant Principals at the College.

Wellbeing Dogs

Rowville Secondary College supports the use of wellbeing dogs for the benefit of our students subject to the conditions of this policy. The role of the wellbeing dog is to support the social and emotional needs of our students, and to promote engagement and connectedness within the school community, while under the guidance and supervision of their handler and other school staff.

Rowville Secondary College has wellbeing dogs who supports our students' mental health and engagement. Our wellbeing dogs are suitably trained and integrated into the school community through Dogs Connect, delivered as part of the Department's Mental Health initiative.

Recognised benefits from working or visiting with a wellbeing dog include:

- reduced stress and anxiety, including decreased learner anxiety behaviours
- improved physical and emotional wellbeing
- improved self-esteem, empathy and interpersonal skills
- improved relationship building and ability to pick up on social cues
- improved attendance (for disengaged students or students at risk of disengaging).

Examples of activities students may engage in with the wellbeing dog include:

- petting and/or hugging the dog
- speaking and reading to the dog

