

# Taylor High's therapy dog program enters second year

Continued ‘paws-itive’ impact expected from Mustang Charlie’s presence on campus

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PUBLISHER

Taylor High School has gone to the dogs. Well, one dog, anyway. Mustang Charlie, a hypoallergenic Miniature Labradoodle, will be joining his handler and THS counselor, Angie Sticker, on campus at 20700 Kingsland in Katy this fall, in the second year of the Therapy Dog Pilot Program.

Although Charlie is still in training, he is expected to achieve full certification this school year. He will interact with students as needed and in accordance with his training program.

“This initiative provides a valuable opportunity for our students to benefit from therapeutic interactions with our therapy dog, Mustang Charlie,” said the school newsletter, The Stampede Scoop, in its August 24 edition. “We look forward to Mustang Charlie building on the positive impact he’s had on both our students and staff this year.”

In the first year, Charlie was at school twice a week and on extra days when needed, Sticker said. He spends most of his workday in the counseling office, where he offers comfort to students who are feeling stressed, sad, overwhelmed or are dealing with a personal crisis. Charlie also interacts with students through quick pets in the hallway on their way to class, occasional visits to classrooms, and even joining pep rallies. This year, he comes to school two to three days a week. “Since he’s still a young pup, he needs his off days to stay at his best,” said Sticker.

“It’s amazing to see how students light up when they see Charlie on campus,” she said. “On tough days, just seeing him can turn their whole day around. Some students even keep track of his schedule and stop by on days they know he will be here. He’s loved by staff too, who visit him regularly and spoil him with treats and attention. My office is always busy with visitors on Charlie days!”

There were lessons learned in the first year of the program. “We’ve learned that Charlie’s impact is even greater than we expected,” said Sticker. “He’s become an additional resource to students and staff. Whether helping a student de-escalate or



PHOTO COURTESY OF ANGELA STICKER, TAYLOR HIGH SCHOOL

Mustang Charlie, a therapy dog for students and staff in a pilot program at Taylor High School, 20700 Kingsland, Katy, participates in school activities such as pep rallies.

providing comfort on a tough day, Charlie is ready and willing to meet students where they are at.”

Sticker said that there are many success stories from year one of the program. “Since I am a counselor, confidentiality is an important part of my relationship with students. That said, I can tell you that Charlie has really made a difference. His presence helps students feel more at ease and encourages them to open up and ask for the help they need. And if students are asking for help, that’s a big win for us.”

Parents may opt their child out of interacting with Mustang Charlie by logging in to MyKaty and selecting the KISD Option Portal icon. The opt-out deadline is September 25, 2024.

“So far, no one has opted out of the program,” said Sticker. “That’s a great sign that our community really sees the value in the pilot program and its benefits to our kiddos.”

“The response from parents and families has been very positive,” Sticker added. “I’ve received a lot of emails from parents excited about the program and asking how their kids can spend more time with Charlie.” He recently greeted parents at THS Open House.

Right now, the pilot program is only at THS. “If everything goes well, the hope is that it will expand to other schools,” said Sticker. “There’s a lot involved in training both the dog and the handler, so it has to be the right fit for each school.”

## FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS About Therapy Dog Benefits in High School Setting

**1. What is a therapy dog?**  
A therapy dog is a trained and well-behaved canine that provides emotional support and comfort to individuals in various settings, including schools, hospitals and rehabilitation centers.

**2. How can therapy dogs benefit high school students?**  
Therapy dogs can provide numerous benefits to high school students, including stress reduction, improved mood, increased social interaction, and enhanced overall well-being.

**3. How do therapy dogs reduce stress?**  
Interacting with therapy dogs has been shown to reduce the levels of stress hormones like cortisol and increase the release of oxytocin, a hormone associated with bonding and relaxation. Petting, playing or simply being in the presence of a therapy dog can help students feel calmer and more at ease.

**4. How do therapy dogs promote a positive school environment?**  
Therapy dogs can contribute to a more positive and inclusive school atmosphere by fostering a sense of community. They often serve as conversation starters. Encouraging students to interact with one another and with staff members.

**5. Are therapy dogs only for students with diagnosed mental health issues?**  
No, therapy dogs can benefit all students, regardless of whether they have diagnosed mental healthy issues. The presence of therapy dogs can enhance the overall emotional well-being of the entire student body.

**6. How are therapy dogs integrated into the school day?**  
Therapy dogs are usually brought to the school by trained handlers and are often stationed in designated areas, such as the school library, counseling office, or common spaces. Students have the opportunity to interact with the therapy dog in this designated area needed.

At THS, Charlie will be staying with his handler in the school counseling office, working closely with school counselors to provide targeted support. Howe’s how therapy dogs are used in collaboration with school counselors:

a. Individual counseling sessions: During one-on-one counseling sessions, therapy dogs can be present to create a calming and non-judgmental atmosphere. The presence of the dog often helps students feel more at ease and open to discussing their concerns.

b. Group counseling: In group counseling sessions, therapy dogs can help break the ice and promote a sense of unity among participants. The dogs’ presence can foster a supportive and comfortable environment for students to share and connect with their peers.

c. Stress reduction: When students are experiencing stress, anxiety, or emotional distress, the counselor can introduce therapy dogs as a coping tool.

Spending time with the dog can help students manage their emotions and regain a sense of balance.

d. Behavioral support: For students with behavioral challenges, interacting with therapy dogs can serve as a positive reinforcement. The opportunity to spend time with the dogs can motivate students to exhibit desired behaviors.

e. Emotional regulation: The calming presence of therapy dogs can help students regulate their emotions. School counselors can teach students strategies for self-regulation and provide opportunities to practice these strategies with the dogs.

f. Anxiety management: Students dealing with test anxiety or social anxiety can benefit from spending time with therapy dogs before or after challenging situations. This can help reduce anxiety levels and boost confidence.

g. Goal setting: In collaboration with the school counselor, students can set goals related to their well-being and personal growth. Therapy dogs can serve as motivators and rewards for achieving these goals.

h. Confidentiality and trust: Interacting with therapy dogs can foster trust and build rapport between the student and the counselor, making the counseling experience more comfortable and effective.

**7. Do therapy dogs receive special training?**  
Yes, therapy dogs undergo specialized training to ensure they are well-behaved, gentle and comfortable in various environments. Their training includes exposure to different people, noises, and situations they might encounter in a school setting.

**8. Are there any potential allergies or concerns related to therapy dogs?**  
Some students and staff members may have allergies or fears related to dogs. It’s important for the school to communicate the presence of a therapy dog so that students and parents can communicate any allergies they have and opt-out of interacting with the dog.

**9. Are there any studies supporting the effectiveness of therapy dogs in schools?**  
Yes, there is a growing body of research indicating the positive effects of therapy dogs in educational settings. These studies highlight the improvements in students’ mood, stress levels, and overall emotional well-being.

Source: Taylor High School Stampede Scoop newsletter



PHOTO COURTESY OF ANGELA STICKER, TAYLOR HIGH SCHOOL

## NOTICE OF PUBLIC HEARING ON TAX INCREASE

A tax rate of \$0.425000 per \$100 valuation has been proposed by the governing body of City of Katy.

PROPOSED TAX RATE	\$0.425000 per \$100
NO-NEW-REVENUE TAX RATE	\$0.420787 per \$100
VOTER-APPROVAL TAX RATE	\$0.440253 per \$100

The no-new-revenue tax rate is the tax rate for the 2024 tax year that will raise the same amount of property tax revenue for City of Katy from the same properties in both the 2023 tax year and the 2024 tax year.

The voter-approval rate is the highest tax rate that City of Katy may adopt without holding an election to seek voter approval of the rate.

The proposed tax rate is greater than the no-new-revenue tax rate. This means that City of Katy is proposing to increase property taxes for the 2024 tax year.

A PUBLIC HEARING ON THE PROPOSED TAX RATE WILL BE HELD ON September 23, 2024 AT 6:30 pm AT Katy City Hall.

The proposed tax rate is not greater than the voter-approval tax rate. As a result, City of Katy is not required to hold an election at which voters may accept or reject the proposed tax rate. However, you may express your support for or opposition to the proposed tax rate by contacting the members of the City Council of City of Katy at their offices or by attending the public hearing mentioned above.

YOUR TAXES OWED UNDER ANY OF THE TAX RATES MENTIONED ABOVE CAN BE CALCULATED AS FOLLOWS:

property tax amount = (tax rate) x (taxable value of your property) / 100

FOR the proposal:

Chris Harris, Mayor Pro Tem/Councilmember At-Large  
Janet Corte, Councilmember Ward A  
Dan Smith, Councilmember Ward A  
Gina Hicks, Councilmember Ward B  
Rory Robertson, Councilmember Ward B

AGAINST the proposal:

None

PRESENT and not voting:

William H. “Dusty” Thiele, Mayor

ABSENT:

None

Visit Texas.gov/Property Taxes to find a link to your local property tax database on which you can easily access information regarding your property taxes, including information about proposed tax rates and scheduled public hearings of each entity that taxes your property.

The 86th Texas Legislature modified the manner in which the voter-approval tax rate is calculated to limit the rate of growth of property taxes in the state.

The following table compares the taxes imposed on the average residence homestead by City of Katy last year to the taxes proposed to be imposed on the average residence homestead by City of Katy this year.

	2023	2024	Change
Total tax rate (per \$100 of value)	\$0.430000	\$0.425000	decrease of -0.005000 per \$100, or -1.16%
Average homestead taxable value	\$326,766	\$359,844	increase of 10.12%
Tax on average homestead	\$1,405.09	\$1,529.34	increase of 124.25, or 8.84%
Total tax levy on all properties	\$23,765,326	\$24,230,853	increase of 465,527, or 1.96%

For assistance with tax calculations, please contact the tax assessor for City of Katy at 281-341-3710 or FBCTaxInfo@fortbendcountytexas.gov, or visit www.fbc.tx.gov for more information.

# Texas Renaissance Festival

50<sup>TH</sup> Anniversary

Saturdays, Sundays, and Thanksgiving Friday

October 12<sup>th</sup> - December 1<sup>st</sup>

To purchase tickets and for more information, scan the QR code.

TexRenFest.com