

Frequently Asked Questions – Reading Tails Program Moore County Schools

* Who coordinates the Reading Tails Program for Moore County Therapy Dogs (PRC)? Angela North Zumwalt (angelazumwalt@earthlink.net), 910-690-6384, and Linda Evans (spencersbestfriend@gmail.com), 910-603-0566, are the main contacts for the program.
* How do I begin to volunteer for Reading Tails? Moore County Schools requires a volunteer application be completed by all volunteers in the schools (not PRC Pet Responsibility Program volunteers – they are considered “speakers”). This application includes basic demographic information, as well as permission for a background check on your behalf by the schools. This gives you clearance to be alone with students if the area assigned for your Reading Tails is outside of a classroom setting. For more information, click here: <https://www.ncmcs.org/cms/One.aspx?portalId=19566378&pageId=21519704>. Work with the school office at the school where you want to volunteer. They will sponsor your application.
* How do I get an ID for myself and my dog? Once your volunteer application and background check are complete, contact the Moore County Schools Central Office (Hwy 15-501, across from Cooper Ford, in Carthage) at 910-947-2976 to arrange a day and time for your photo ID to be made.
* What should my dog and I do prior to beginning our volunteer sessions? It is a good idea to acclimate yourself and your dog to the school prior to beginning sessions with students. Take your dog to the school, let them sniff and walk around the outside of the school to get accustomed to all of the smells at a school (and there are plenty)! Linda Evans can assist you and your dog with getting a tour of the inside of the school, but this should be requested and arranged prior to starting. Each school has their own system for signing in at the front desk, and this can be discussed prior to starting to eliminate confusion. Some schools also ask that you sign out, and this can be discussed with that school before you start. Most of the front office staff are dog lovers, so be prepared for big greetings (and possible treats) every time you show up. Bring a soft pad for your dog to lay on since most of the school floors are not carpeted or soft. Toys to occupy your dog is also a good idea. Doggie bags to pick up and dispose of waste is a good idea as well.
* What should I expect from my Reading Tails volunteer experience? The school will explore which teacher(s) are interested in Reading Tails offering extra support for their students. You will need to discuss with the teacher how they would like to structure the program, including designating a space either in the classroom or a quiet area where the volunteer and dog can read with 2 students at a time, generally for 20 minutes for each 2 student group. The teacher will decide the best time for the volunteer and dog to come, based on the class schedule. The teacher will also let the Reading Tails team know if he/she will choose the books for the students, or if students will choose their own. Once the 20 minutes is finished, the Reading Tails volunteer and dog will escort the students back to the classroom, and 2 more students will be reading with the team in the designated area. It is up to the volunteer to let the teacher know how long their volunteer session will be for that day.

Other considerations:

* Reading Tails has been in elementary schools, and elementary students can be very loud when transitioning in the halls, and at the end of the day. If your dog has difficulty with loud noises, you might wish to consider asking the teacher if your team can come during a “core class”, such as English Language Arts, when the students are more settled and focused.
* Forming a relationship with the front office staff has been helpful at most schools in making the Reading Tails volunteer sessions as positive event and stress free.
* The elementary students you serve are often struggling with decoding and comprehension. Please assist them in sounding out a word if they are struggling and explain what a word means if they don’t understand. Good comprehension questions include asking “What do you think that means?” or “What do you think that person is thinking or feeling?”
* Positive praise for the student’s effort is always important and means so much to our students! The relationship you and your dog have with the student may be one of the few positive connections that student has in his/her life, and your time with that student is so important for improving self-esteem, learning about emotions, and building resiliency.
* Please remember - It is imperative to make Angela or Linda aware of any concerns at the time they occur so we can assist in problem solving situations.