To: Stephan J. Vigliotti, Sr., Superintendent of Schools

From: Rotary Club of Wolcott
Colleen McCarty

Date: February 20, 2015

Re: Proposal for a Reading Dog Program

The objective is to implement a Reading Dog Program in North Rose Wolcott Elementary school to assist with literacy, academic success and to increase social and emotional benefit of K-4 students.

A Reading Dog program will enhance school climate and bring therapeutic value to students in contact with the dog. Animals have long been recognized as a positive addition to the healing process. In-school visits from trained animals have been demonstrated to reduce stress in students, increase happiness, calmness and emotional well-being of students and staff. Simply holding or petting an animal can help relieve stress and tension as well as reduce feelings of loneliness and depression.

The main objective of this program is to provide a relaxed non-judgmental atmosphere, which allows students to practice the skill of reading. Many children have difficulties reading and as a result have developed self-esteem issues. They are often self-conscious when reading aloud in front of other classmates. By sitting down next to and reading to the dog, all threats of being judged are put aside. The child relaxes, pats the attentive dog, and focuses on the reading. Reading improves because the child is practicing the skill of reading, which increases self-esteem. In addition, the student then associates reading with a positive experience and is more likely to read for pleasure.

The school district will bear no financial responsibility for the required training for accreditation or care and feeding of the animal. The Rotary Club of Wolcott will work with the animal's care giver (hence to be called owner) to coordinate financial arrangements for the care of the animal. The Rotary club will bear the expense of training and accreditation of the dog, including the cost of yearly accreditation (if applicable). Liability insurance for the dog will be covered under the owner's homeowner's insurance policy. It is proposed that the school district's liability insurance shall serve as secondary coverage when the dog is working at the school under the owner's supervision.

Specifics:

A Reading dog is a dog trained to provide affection and comfort to students in the North Rose Wolcott Elementary School. The most important characteristic of a Reading Dog is its temperament; it must be friendly, patient, confident, gentle and at ease in all situations. It must enjoy human contact and be content to be petted and handled. A Reading dog's primary job is to allow unfamiliar people to make physical contact with it and to enjoy the contact. Reading dogs are not considered trained service dogs as described by the Americans with Disabilities Act.

The following minimum standards shall be in effect for a Reading Dog to be approved to serve in the North Rose-Wolcott Central School District:

- A Reading Dog must be clean and well-groomed.
- It does not urinate or defecate in inappropriate locations. Its owner will take it outside at scheduled times and any solid waste will be contained and disposed of in a responsible manner.
- It does not annoy any member of the student body or school personnel by seeking attention.
- It does not vocalize unnecessarily.
- It shows no aggression towards people or other animals.
- It does not steal food or other items from students or school personnel.
- It does not in any way interfere with the educational process of any student.
- It does not pose a health or safety threat to any student, personnel or visitor.
- Reading Dogs are independently owned by school employees and must be in good health.

Reading Dogs in the school setting shall be recommended by the Superintendent of Schools and approved by the Board of Education. Prior to recommendation and approval, owners shall provide:

1. Proof of current vaccinations
2. Visible cleanliness of dog, with no sign of fleas/ticks
3. A visually healthy alert and not grossly over or under weight dog
4. Proof of fecal exam by veterinarian for internal and external parasites.
5. A copy of the owners current homeowners insurance policy
6. A copy of a certificate from Reading Dogs Incorporated or Reading Dogs International or a comparable authority.

The same requirements must be met on an annual basis, prior to the start of any school year.

Reading Dogs and owners shall be tested and accredited as "good citizen canines" or comparable authority as determined by the Superintendent. With a valid certificate and while "working" at the school under the owner's supervision, the District's liability insurance shall serve as secondary coverage.
The Building Principal shall notify parents on an annual basis regarding the presence of Reading Dogs in the school building.

Guidelines (proposed):

- Staff and students will be encouraged to wash hands after contact with dogs, dog products or animal environments.
- Staff members will supervise human-animal contact.
- A specific area will be designated for animal contact, e.g. school library and guidance office.
- The dog owner shall identify a quiet rest place for the dog.
- Dogs will not be allowed in areas where food is prepared or consumed by students.
- Dogs shall not roam or have contact with wild animals.
- All areas where animals are present shall be cleaned and disinfected daily; students will not perform this task.
- The owner shall identify a plan to evacuate the dog from the building in the event of an emergency or fire drill.