

Dear West Jeff Middle families,

We are very excited to introduce you to a new member of staff who we will be welcoming to West Jefferson Middle School. Archie is a fully-trained therapy dog and works with our new counselor, Dan Keane. He is set to become an integral part of our school community. We will also have a service dog in the building named Drew Lou who accompanies one of our students. Below we have set out the benefits of a trained therapy dog and tried to address concerns you may have.

Numerous research studies have shown the benefits of therapy dogs in schools. Therapy dogs have been commonplace in schools in the United States, United Kingdom, and Australia for many years. Evidence indicates that benefits include:

- Cognitive – companionship with a dog stimulates memory, problem-solving and game-playing
- Social – a dog provides a positive mutual topic for discussion, encourages responsibility, wellbeing and focused interaction with others
- Emotional – a school dog improves self-esteem, acceptance from others and lifts mood, often provoking laughter and fun. Dogs can also teach compassion and respect for other living things as well as relieving anxiety.
- Physical – interaction with a furry friend reduces blood pressure, provides tactile stimulation, assists with pain management, gives motivation to move, walk and stimulates the senses
- Environmental – a dog in a school increases the sense of a family environment, with all of the above benefits continuing long after the school day is over.

What is the difference between a service dog and a therapy dog?

A service dog is trained to perform specific tasks and to do work that supports their handler's disabilities. It is very important to note that these dogs are not for petting as it could prevent them from performing their job correctly. The service dog, Drew Lou, has a red vest which means "STOP, do NOT pet me."

A therapy dog also goes through extensive training, but their job is to provide psychological and social-emotional support to a variety of individuals. Therapy dogs have stable temperaments and friendly, easy-going personalities. They are usually handled by their owners, who in this case is Mr. Keane. Archie wears a blue vest which means, "Yes, you can pet me if you want."



**West Jefferson Middle School**

9449 S. Barnes Avenue

Conifer, CO 80433

303.982.3056

Some concerns you might have:

**My child is allergic to dogs.**

It is understandable that some of you may be concerned about possible allergic reactions to a school dog. While Archie will only interact with students who choose to approach him, please let us know if your child is allergic and we can keep Archie out of specific classrooms or at a distance from your child.

**Will Archie be properly cared for?**

Archie will be extremely well looked after. He will live with Mr. Keane and his family and will come to school most days but will remain primarily with Mr. Keane who has completed rigorous training (beginning with puppy classes) so Archie is extremely well-behaved.

**My child is scared of dogs.**

Some children may have had upsetting experiences and thus have a fear of dogs (or another animal). Archie will only be in contact with students who choose to interact with him. Archie's training has taught him to be calm and gentle around children; he has a very loving and gentle nature. Experience and research have shown that, with proper guidance and handling, children can learn to overcome their fear of animals and grow in respect and appreciation for them. However, we would never push a child to interact with Archie if they were not comfortable doing so.

We hope you will join us in welcoming Archie to the West Jefferson Middle School family and embrace all that he has to offer the school. If you have any concerns or questions regarding this then please email [Dan.Keane@jeffco.k12.co.us](mailto:Dan.Keane@jeffco.k12.co.us) or [Kim.Halingstad@jeffco.k12.co.us](mailto:Kim.Halingstad@jeffco.k12.co.us) with the subject "School Dog".

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Kim Halingstad".

Kim Halingstad

Principal

West Jefferson Middle School