

# Canine comfort: Therapy dogs shown to be valuable team members in the classroom

**Education professor examines effect therapy dogs have on students with behavior challenges**

By Scott Bordow, ASU News  
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There's a 2018 book titled "Dog Knows Best" in which dogs train their humans on matters like belly rubs and household management.

It's obviously a lighthearted read.

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**In need of your own  
furry therapy session?**

**Check out these two  
upcoming events:**

[College of Global Futures Dog  
Therapy](#)

Thursday, April 30  
10:30 a.m.–12:30 p.m.  
Walton Center for Planetary  
Health, Tempe campus

[Fri-Yay: Rest and Relax](#)  
Friday, May 1

But according to [Kathleen Farrand](#), an associate professor in the Mary Lou Fulton College for Teaching and Learning Innovation at Arizona State University, the book title perfectly describes the effect therapy dogs can have in a classroom.

Farrand and doctoral student Jae Young Jung have co-published three articles on the effect therapy dogs have in schools — especially for students with behavior challenges — the latest being published in the journal Behavioral Sciences.

“One of the things our college does is (look) at team-based approaches in school, so, for me, this was looking at the therapy dog as another member of the team,” Farrand said.

“I’d been reading about research (surrounding therapy dogs) in literature, but there wasn’t a ton there. And I’m a huge animal lover, so this ... was near and dear to my heart.”

Here, Farrand explains how a therapy dog in one of her studies was not only able to adapt to students’ individual needs, but fostered engagement between the children.

*Note: Answers have been edited for length and/or clarity.*

**Question: What prompted you to do this study?**

**Answer:** One of the areas that I really look at with schools is looking at different strategies and interventions that support social and emotional well-being, and then hopefully lead to academic success. I had done a previous paper looking at the impact of therapy dogs, and we were noticing a lot of positive benefits, especially in terms of community building and positive learning environments.

So this paper was (about) wanting to take a closer look at a tier-three behavior support classroom, which is the highest level of support for students with behavior challenges. Really just looking at, what does the presence of a therapy dog do? Not replacing the existing supports that are already in place, but looking at how this can be seen as a way to enhance it.

**Q: How did you obtain your data?**

**A:** We had interviews with the classroom teacher, we had feedback from the students. That was nice because they were third and fourth graders, so they had a little bit more agency and feedback about how they perceived the dog. We also did classroom videos. We were able to take videos of instruction when the dog was present as well as when the dog wasn’t present.

**Q: How often was the therapy dog in the classroom?**

**A:** This was the 2023–24 school year, so the therapy dog, which was actually the classroom teacher’s dog, was there for the entire instructional year, averaging about three days a week.

**Q: What sort of impact did the dog have?**

**A:** One of the things the teacher really talked about was how it helped build peer relationships among the students in the classroom. That can be one of the more difficult things ... building those

Noon–4 p.m.

Arizona Center, downtown  
Phoenix

[Barrett: Rest & Relax Spring  
2026](#)

Monday, May 4

Noon–3 p.m.

Barrett Student Center and  
Palm Court, Tempe campus

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positive relationships with students. We found that the dog's presence often helped students build each other up in terms of being able to support each other when they're making positive strides, whether it's with behavior or academic success.

The dog also seemed to adapt to the different students' needs. For example, there was one student who would usually just take themselves out of a learning environment when they became dysregulated. They would go sit in a corner. The dog knew that, and it would go sit with the student, and the student would slowly put his hand on the dog and come out of the corner. Another example was a student kicking the desk. The dog would come over and put its head between the student's leg and the desk to calm that student down. It was just an instinctive thing that the dog knew what those students needed in the moment.

**Q: What's the long-term takeaway? Should every district, if possible, have a therapy dog?**

**A:** What we've really looked at is districts like Mesa Public Schools, which is committed to this as something they do the whole school year. Their educators bring dogs with them the entire year. It's a complete commitment from the district as well as the handlers that work for their district to really put social and emotional well-being at the forefront of what students and educators need. One of the biggest benefits is community building and creating that safe environment where students and staff feel welcome and want to engage. Then, the academic success and that relationship building can happen.

*This story originally appeared on [ASU News](#).*

**Main image**



Therapy dog Ozzie helps provide stress relief to ASU students during a past Barrett, The Honors College Rest & Relax event held during finals. An ASU education professor has been studying the benefit of therapy dogs in classrooms for children with behavior issues. Photo by Charlie Leight/ASU News