



After a year away, Hannah, a 7-year-old non-shedding goldendoodle, will return as Tahanto's school therapy dog this year.

Hannah is a therapy dog, not a service or emotional support animal. Research supports numerous physical, social, cognitive, emotional, and environmental benefits to interactions with therapy dogs in school settings, including improvements in reading, attendance, social skills, empathy, self-esteem, problem-solving skills, overall school environment, and reduction in reported anxiety symptoms. In 2018, the Berlin-Boylston Regional School Committee approved a Therapy Dog Policy that allows for Tahanto to utilize a therapy dog during school hours, and Hannah has served as Tahanto's school therapy dog for two school years prior to COVID-19.

Dr. Trainor, Tahanto's School Psychologist and Hannah's handler, adopted Hannah from a rescue and after two years of training, together they passed the Canine Good Citizen and Pet Partners Therapy Animal Team evaluations. Outside of school, they have also previously volunteered visiting patients in a local hospital, at Special Olympics events, and in a hospice home.

Hannah will be at Tahanto working with Dr. Trainor on an as needed basis, with increased frequency around stressful times of the year, such as holidays, before vacations, mid-term and final exams, as well as during MCAS and AP testing.

During visits, Hannah will wear appropriate identification stating she is a therapy dog. Understanding that some staff and students may have an aversion or allergy to the therapy dog, Dr. Trainor will remove Hannah to a separate area when there is a known aversion or allergy present. Students will be asked to use hand sanitizer when they interact with her.