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HAS welcomes therapy dog in ongoing efforts to serve student social, emotional needs

*Oakley, the district's new four-legged staff member, to report
for duty at Holly High School in the fall*

HOLLY, Mich. — **Oakley**, a black Labrador retriever, will report for duty as Holly High School's **therapy dog** next school year, representing the district's latest investment in serving the social and emotional needs of all Bronchos. Oakley, who will also make appearances in other schools across the district, will provide the comfort of a furry friend for students experiencing anxiety, depression or just a rough day at school.

"We are so excited to welcome Oakley as the newest member of our Broncho family, and the students and staff have already fallen in love with her during pre-training," said **Scott Roper**, Holly Area Schools superintendent. "Oakley will help us enhance our continued efforts to support student mental health and well-being, and her presence will be invaluable to our students in our classrooms and hallways next school year and beyond."

The district purchased Oakley from a local trainer in March. The Holly High School Leadership Team conducted a student survey to name the dog, with the name "Oakley" receiving the most votes. As part of pre-training, Oakley spent time each workday at the district's Central Office learning basic commands and social skills. The purchase of the dog and training were made possible by one of the district's social-emotional programming grants.

Oakley completed her pre-training in May and has begun her official training with Wing and Shot LLC in Brandon Township to become a certified therapy dog. In September, Oakley's trainer will conduct an in-service with high school staff before the dog officially begins her work in the Fall of 2023. Holly Area Schools is following the guidance of districts with successful therapy dog programs to start with one dog at the high school level. The district hopes to introduce therapy dogs at Holly Middle School and at the elementary schools in the near future.

“Our team followed volumes of research showing the positive impact of therapy dogs in schools, including social-emotional and cognitive benefits for students, and Oakley helps us check all of these boxes and more,” said **Jennifer Lauria**, the district’s director of special services. “Therapy dogs have also proven to help students learn social skills, feel more connected and confident and avoid social isolation, and our program will help us provide these real-world skills that help prepare our students for success.”

Oakley will have multiple trained handlers, which will allow greater flexibility to serve students. She will also make visits across the district and attend school events throughout the school year. Oakley will receive all of her supplies and food through a sponsorship from Pet Supplies Plus of Fenton. Pawsitive Care Affordable Pet Clinic in Holly is sponsoring veterinary services for the dog.

“I would like to personally thank our students, families and business and community partners for welcoming Oakley with open arms as part of our continued efforts to serve the whole child as we prepare every Broncho for bright futures and the jobs of tomorrow,” Roper said. “Bringing Oakley on board has truly been a communitywide effort, and I encourage everyone to visit the high school in the fall to meet this amazing addition to our Broncho family.”

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Learn more about Holly Area Schools by visiting www.hask12.org, or visit us on [Facebook](#) and [Twitter](#).



Cutline: Holly High School Leadership Team members pose with Oakley in front of the high school.



Cutline: The Holly High School Leadership Team poses with Oakley at the high school.



Cutline: Oakley takes a rest during pre-training at the Holly Area Schools Central Office.



Cutline: Oakley poses during a pre-training session.