



Examining the Impact of Therapy Dogs on School Climate: A Scoping Review

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Problem Statement

Due to increases in experienced school violence and a decline in student mental health, schools are focusing on the overall climate of a school (Flannery et al., 2004). School climate affects student well-being and academic success, yet maintaining a positive environment can be challenging. There is a gap in the literature regarding how school therapy dogs impact school climate and their potential as an intervention to foster a supportive educational experience.

Research Question

How do canine-assisted interventions (school therapy dogs) impact school climate?



Selected Keywords

animal-assisted interventions, animal-assisted services, animal-assisted therapy, animal-assisted activities, school climate, human-animal interaction, mental health, school-based, canine-assisted interventions, school therapy dogs, learning environment, education, educational environment, youth mental health, pet therapy, school age children

Databases

OTseeker, DynaMed, Google Scholar, ClinicalKey, AccessMedicine, PubMed (MEDLINE), UpToDate, ERIC (Proquest), Education Database (ProQuest), Education Research Complete (EBSCO), JSTOR, and Academic Search Complete (EBSCO)

Themes Derived

1. **Emotional/Behavioral Regulation**
2. **Social Inclusion & Peer Interaction**
3. **Academic Engagement & Motivation**
4. **Stakeholder Support if Structured Implementation**
5. **Paucity of Research**

Flow Chart

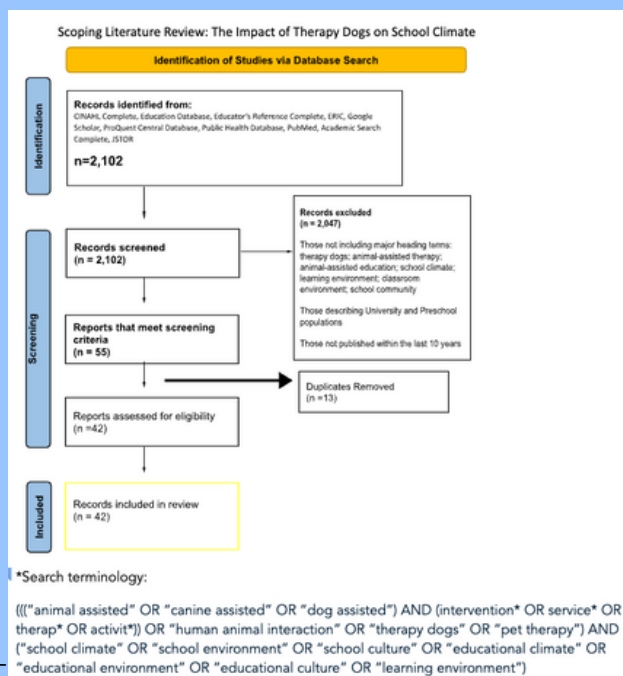


Figure 1. Flow Chart of Process



Findings

Findings from the 42 included sources show that therapy dog programs in K-12 schools most commonly report impacts at the individual and classroom levels, with fewer studies addressing whole-school climate shifts or system-wide outcomes. These insights are highly relevant to educators, school health professionals, program developers, and policymakers seeking low-cost interventions to foster supportive learning environments. This is especially applicable in the face of ongoing challenges such as student anxiety, disengagement, and behavioral concerns.

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