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**Dogs help students overcome stress during exam week**

By Chicago Tribune, adapted by Newsela staff

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Students shrieked, hugged and cried tears of joy recently as they snuggled with certified therapy dogs at Lane Tech College Prep in Chicago, Illinois. The activity on January 23 was designed as a break from the demands of preparing for exams.

This is the second year the dogs and volunteers have been brought into the school from Chicago-based Canine Therapy Corps to provide much-needed relief for stressed and anxious kids.

**Furry Friends During Finals**

"It's stressful around finals time," Assistant Principal Sarah Hanly said. She added that this week students are turning in final projects, reviewing and studying for next week's exams.

"It's a selective enrollment school, so a lot of them are in AP classes," she said. "We're trying to get them to chill out a little bit."

It seemed to do the trick as a group of students oohed and aahed as they met Waffles, an 85-pound golden retriever, and rushed to put their hands on his fluffy fur.

Junior Sophie Cohen sat cross-legged next to Waffles, petting him and chatting with her friends and Waffles' owner. She said she had just been talking to her friend about how stressed out she was over finals.

"Just the idea of having a dog in school is good because the school environment is just about stress," she said. "And then here is this dog. You get a break."

**Certified Therapy Dogs**

Monica Synecky is Waffles' owner and a volunteer with Canine Therapy Corps. She said she often takes her dog to visit high school students around finals time.

"This age group benefits really well" from just the presence of Waffles or other certified therapy dogs, she said.

Therapy dogs must be properly trained and pass a test before they become certified, said Ann Davidson, who helps run Canine Therapy Corps.

**One Bad Grade Isn't So Bad**

Taking breaks is one of several tools students can use to manage stress and anxiety during particularly trying times, said Jacqueline Rhew, a counselor with Amita Health who works with adolescents privately and does teacher training in schools. She also recommends simple things like eating healthy food, sleeping well, breathing exercises and physical activity.

Rhew said she also helps students put academic stress into perspective. When students don't properly manage stress, it can turn into troubling anxiety.

"I think a lot of adolescents today put a lot of stress on themselves. Finals have always been stressful, but now more than ever, it's the end of the world for kids" if they don't perform well, she said. "They think, 'I'm scared of being a failure, If I don't achieve perfection, then all is lost.'"

Rhew said it's important for parents and teachers to help students understand that while they should be preparing for finals, one bad grade is not "the end of the world."

**Breaks Have Benefits**

Seventh-grader Grace Baldwin started to cry Wednesday as she petted Ash, a keeshond, saying she tears up when she's happy and excited.

Watching Ash twirl around at Davidson's commands "is a good thing to get my mind off school," Grace said.

Juniors Jennifer Giraldo and Anastasia Ramirez hugged and laughed as they took turns with their classmates, giving Luna, a Portuguese water dog, commands to sit, lie down and roll over.

"I was stressing all third and fourth period, and then people were talking about the dogs," said Anastasia, who decided to wait in line with Jennifer to see the dogs herself.

"Now I feel better," she said.

**Questions:**

* **Using evidence from this article, what are some things you can do to relieve or manage academic stress?**
* **Using evidence from this text, explain how the staff at Lane Tech College Prep in Chicago were confident that therapy dogs help their students.**
* **How does the article introduce the idea that therapy dogs could reduce the stress of high school students?**
* **Write a short paragraph that explains the central idea of this article. Use at least two details from the article to support your response.**
* **How would you feel about therapy dogs at SHS during exam time? Explain your response.**