

## PRESS RELEASE



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### **Coronado Middle School Therapy Dogs Support Student And Staff Wellness**

Arguably the two most popular Tritons at Coronado Middle School are Miso and Mushu. The beloved four-legged middle schoolers are on campus Tuesday through Friday, each one coming two days, and the effect of their presence is tangible.

“I have seen such a difference with students this year with the dogs present. The students are so engaged and want to create connections,” said the dogs’ handler, CMS clinical counselor Rebecca Rabe, LMFT, who is also certified in Animal Assisted Human Health Certification Therapy.

CMS Principal Brooke Falar agrees. “Since their arrival, Mushu, Miso, and Rebecca have brought countless smiles, joy, and comfort to everyone at CMS. They have truly completed our Triton family! Mushu and Miso were here for picture day last week and just like all the staff and students, their pictures will be included in the yearbook; right where they belong!”

When they aren’t ‘working’ at school, Miso (a male whose full name is Miso Soup) and Mushu (a female whose full name is Mushu Chicken), are the Rabe family pets.

As part of her certification process Rabe published a paper documenting the therapeutic benefits of Animal Assisted Therapy (AAT) with students experiencing emotional/behavioral disorders in an educational setting.

Rabe uses research-based practices at CMS to facilitate the interactions with students and she shared that the dogs are used in different manners; from helping students de-stress throughout the day by petting during passing periods and breaks, to emotional support during one-on-one counseling when students are often overwhelmed.

Multiple studies have shown that dogs in schools promote positive mood and provide significant anti-stress effects on the body. “Petting a dog has been scientifically proven to lower cortisol levels in humans. This is the hormone that is released during stressful situations,” said Rabe. “I also use the dogs to help students develop coping strategies.”

The dogs also participate in Therapy Dog Group to help students develop social emotional learning skills. All of the student group work is voluntary and Rabe has found that students are very eager to help 'train' the dogs. The purpose of group work is to practice cooperative learning (one student holds the dog while the other gives the dog a command), communication skills (making eye contact and developing voice skills), confidence building (learning new skills and successfully teaching the dogs), and relationship building (with peers and with the dogs).

"I got both dogs from the same breeder and they both came home at eight weeks. I specifically used a breeder so that I could look at parent's personalities to help guide which dog to choose," shared Rabe. She also noted that they each have different qualities, "Mushu is more empathetic and prefers one to one contact with students and likes to sit with them on the couch and snuggle during sessions. Miso is the dog that really likes interacting with students. He is very smart and agile, which helps in developing confidence when students work with him. He picks up tricks easily so students have immediate positive reinforcement which builds their confidence."

Rebecca Rabe has been trained in Animal Assisted Human Health by the Firefly Institute for Research and Education and has met the requirements for certification. All student contact with therapy dogs at CMS is voluntary.

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#### PHOTOS (3):

Miso (left) and Mushu pose in the front hall of Coronado Middle School. The therapy dogs are on the CMS campus to help support student and staff wellness.



