

# Plymouth County Comfort Dogs Program 2024-2025

Year  
**01**



## Program Update

The PCCDP received a **3 year COSSUP grant** from the Department of Justice to expand its services. **The Plymouth County DA's Office** partnered with researchers from **Bridgewater State University** to evaluate program effectiveness.

**Where:** East Bridgewater, Plymouth, Wareham, and Whiman-Hanson Public Schools

This evaluation focused on **safety and trust with officers, school climate, emotion regulation, focus & attention, & motivation to attend school.**

## At a Glance

During the Spring of 2025, the research team worked with school personnel and school resource officers (SROs) to design the evaluation and gather data from students, parents, and school personnel in four school districts within Plymouth County.

In schools, officer-comfort dog teams greeted students at drop-off, walked the halls, stopped into classrooms, and met one-on-one with kids who needed emotional support - tracking these students' mood before and after. These teams provided 10-minute classroom visits twice a week to see if the dog helped with settling the room, getting students ready to work, and keeping them on task.

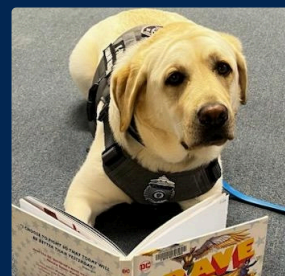
Students, parents, and school staff were also surveyed to provide their perspectives on how the PCCDP influenced school climate, student emotion regulation, focus, and motivation. **Next up: what we found.**

## What is the PCCDP?

The PCCDP consists of trained officer-comfort dog teams who work with schools and community partners to create welcoming environments, to provide emotional support, and to help connect students with trusted adults, including school resource officers. This work is supported by a federal COSSUP grant focused on prevention, wellness, and stronger community partnerships.

## By the Numbers

Participation in Year 1 included 4 districts, 892 students, 243 parents and caregivers, and 158 school staff members.



## Results

- Improves Relationships with Officers
- Enhances Student Emotion Regulation
- Positively Influences School Climate
- Improves Student Focus & Attention
- Improves Motivation to Attend School



### Stronger Relationships with Officers

When students knew their officer-comfort dog team, they were 7x more likely to agree they feel safe with the officer and 12x more likely to talk to them. As one parent put it, *"the comfort dog makes approaching the officer easier if the student is reluctant."*

### Academic Success: Calmer Classrooms & Better Focus

Students who knew the officer-comfort dog team were more likely to agree that the team helps them focus & that learning is more fun when the team is at school. Classroom observations described a calmer classroom temperature & positive effect on settling into work & time maintaining focus on the task. As one school staff member noted *"students are so engaged just with [the team's] presence."* Many students also look forward to seeing the team, a pattern that supports attendance & participation.

### Emotional Support on Rough Days



85% of students who interacted with the teams when upset reported improved mood.

Educators & families alike shared the program's positive emotional impact:

*"I have also seen [the dog] support multiple students in shifting from an extremely dysregulated/unsafe emotional state to regulated & safe. It literally brings tears to my eyes."*

### School Climate

Students who knew the teams were more likely to agree the dog & handler made them feel safe, helped everyone get along, and reduced problems when present. Parents & school staff echoed these benefits and called the program *"one of the most valuable programs to students and staff."*

### Tying it All Together

Based on these findings, the PCCDP created a safe, supportive school climate that helps to improve learning and build protective factors needed to reduce at-risk behaviors & substance misuse. It also strengthened student-officer relationships, improving perceptions of community policing and expanding SROs' role beyond enforcement to include social-emotional prevention efforts.

