

# GETTING 'PAWSITIVE' ABOUT READING



SUBMITTED PHOTO

Therapy dog Breeze, a German shepherd/chow chow mix, poses for a photograph with students in one of Ramblewood Middle School's reading classes. Reading teacher Janice Cihak, back center, brings her pet to school once a month as part of Share-A-Pet's Pawsitive Reading Program.

## Therapy dog makes reading a breeze at Springs school

By Arun Sivasankaran

STAFF WRITER

There is an immediate buzz in the hallways at Ramblewood Middle School in Coral Springs every time Breeze makes an appearance.

But if Breeze, a therapy dog, is excited, she doesn't show it.

"She is used to the attention," reading teacher Janice Cihak said about her pet German shepherd/chow chow mix. "She is mellow and enjoys being around kids."

Breeze's visits began in 2009 after Cihak got the school to sign up for Share-A-Pet's Pawsitive Reading Program. Ramblewood is the only middle school in the county that has the program, in which students practice reading to a therapy dog to improve their

skills.

"Share-A-Pet is a nonprofit organization that provides pet therapy to hospitals, nursing homes, schools and other facilities," Cihak said. "I bring Breeze in for students in eighth-grade reading classes. They need a bit of extra help with reading. They get so excited when they see Breeze. She makes them feel special."

Breeze walks around the room freely while students do their work.

"I see a positive effect on their studies," Cihak said. "They are motivated to do well in class. Breeze gives them unconditional love [and] makes them want to come to school. They read to her and have a great time."

Principal Tina Recchi agreed.

"The kids just love Breeze. She also seems to like it here," she said.

Eighth-grader Giovanni Zepeda looks forward to the days Breeze comes to school.

"It is great having her in class," he said. "Ms. Cihak teaches us how a dog can bring the best out of a person."

"Some of us might be in a bad mood, but Breeze always makes us feel better," said eighth-grader Bryanna Matos. "Every time we know she is coming, we are all excited."

Cihak said Breeze's visits teach students things beyond the classroom.

"Ever since I started bringing Breeze in, my students have learned about service dogs, organ donations and organizations like Share-A-Pet, Canine Assistants and Care.org," she said. "Kids who don't have pets learn how to handle them. I also take

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Breeze to a special-needs classroom at the school. The kids there can't have enough of her."

Cihak, who adopted Breeze from the Humane Society of Broward County, wants to continue bringing Breeze to school "as long as I can do it."

"It makes my students happy, and that makes me

happy," she said. "In the summer, Breeze and I go to Westside Regional Medical Center in Plantation once a week. It is all about making people happy."

For more information, visit [www.shareapet.org](http://www.shareapet.org).

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