The Mutt-i-grees Curriculum

• Collaboration between The Pet Savers Foundation/North Shore Animal League America and Yale School of 21st Century
• Uses dogs and stories/activities about dogs to enhance resiliency and social and emotional competence
Mutt-i-gree®/(mūt · i · grē)

1. A word created to convey the unique characteristics and desirability of shelter pets

2. Dog, puppy, cat or kitten that has been adopted or is available for adoption

3. A very special pet – adopting one saves a life

ORIGIN:
Shelter or rescue group
A Social and Emotional Learning Program with A Difference

- Dual Goal: To promote awareness of Mutt-i-grees and enhance resiliency and social and emotional competence
- Includes the school, home, and the community
- Programmatic continuity: Pre-K to Grade 12
- National and local contests and events promote sustainability
- Ancillary activities and binders extend the scope
The Dog

The star! Intriguing and fun for all children and educators

• The lessons include readings and activities related to dogs
• Provides connections to nature and the community
• The presence of a dog is not required:
  - the Mutt-i-grees puppet
  - visits/collaborations with local animal shelter
Why Dogs?

- Historical connection (cross-adaptation)
- Dogs keyed into human emotion
- Cross-species communication
- Synchronization of hormonal states
- Increase of oxytocin, serotonin, endorphins & dopamine
Dogs Are Associated With ...

• Joy (laughter and excitement)
• Increased social skills
• Decrease in problem behaviors
• Increased understanding of feelings and empathy
• Improved cooperation
• Increased physical wellness
• Reduced stress
• Calmer classroom climate
What does the research tell us?

- Oxytocin
- The gaze
- Virtual aspect
- Reciprocity
- Benefits to humans and dogs:
  - social interaction
  - increased oxytocin
- Cortisol levels drop for humans, rise for dogs
“This is much more than a dog-in-the-classroom program... Most kids have an instinctive, positive emotional connection to animals. This program recognizes that connection and meets the kids where they are. It then adds complexity and structure to develop the interpersonal and emotional skills kids need for academic achievement. Skills like empathy, self-regulation and impulse control are crucial for student success. In fact, I would argue that Mutt-i-grees helps provide a social and emotional bridge that takes kids where they need to be to become successful students.”

- Miguel A. Cardona, EdD
  Assistant Superintendent for Teaching and Learning
  Meriden Public Schools
  Meriden, CT
Ecological Approach and Attention to Emotional, Social, Physical, and Cognitive Development

Source: Centers for Disease Control and Prevention
**Objective:** the aim of the lesson

**Rationale:** description of how the lesson fosters key social-emotional skills and competencies

**Materials:** listing of items needed to implement the lesson

**Vocabulary:** highlight of featured words

**Introduction:** a scripted overview of key concepts

**Discussion:** topics for discussion, including scripted prompts and role-play

**Learning by Doing:** suggested activities and approaches to engage students

**Closure:** scripted discussion points for completing the lesson

**Readings and Resources:** books and websites that complement the lesson

**Family and Community Involvement Activities:** suggested activities to encourage collaboration with families and local agencies

**Advanced Activities:** additional options to engage students
Wide Applicability

• At school
  – Mainstream PreK-12 classrooms
  – Special education classrooms
  – Humane education programs
  – Character education / life skills programs
  – Service learning programs
  – Bullying prevention programs
  – Health education programs
  – Mentoring programs
  – Preschool / Head Start programs

• After school
  – Libraries
  – Clubs & afterschool programs

• Parent education workshops

• Youth programs
  – Outreach to at-risk/homeless youths & residential educational facilities
  – Internships
  – Assemblies

• Museums
Mutt-i-grees at Stepping Stones and Other Museums
Mutt-i-grees Traveling Exhibit