



R.E.A.D.®

ON!

Continuing Education for R.E.A.D. Teams

VOL. XI ~ No. 8

September 2026

Differently Abled

We had another response on this subject, from **Rosemarie Princiotta-D'Amico** (*who goes by "Ro"*) & **Cooper** in New York —thank you!

The R.E.A.D.® Program with Blind, Visually Impaired Students

I have been a teacher for 42 years at the New York Institute for Special Education, Bronx, NY. For the past 8 years, I have worked as their Curriculum Developer in the Schermerhorn Program, a K-12 program which serves students with blindness and visual impairments. Some students also have mild secondary disabilities and need a specialized educational environment to be successful academically.

Cooper, my fur baby, is a 6-year-old Goldendoodle who has been part of my life since he was 8 weeks old. At an early age, I knew someday he would become a therapy dog. After having conversations with Nancy George-Michalson, executive director of New York Therapy Animals, the NYC Affiliate group of Intermountain Therapy Animals, Cooper and I were trained and became a Therapy Dog Team during the Winter of 2023. Shortly after, I was trained in the R.E.A.D. Program, and Cooper became a Reading Education Assistance Dog.

Having been a teacher for the past 42+ years, I knew I would love to bring Cooper with me to school and have him "R.E.A.D." with our students who needed extra help. I thought what a great support and motivator for our students to read to a dog who just sits, listens, and is nonjudgemental.



Cooper lying on his blanket next to a student reading.

After I was given the approval, I set-up a cozy corner in a room with a fluffy blanket on the floor, and a few students were scheduled twice a week to read individually with Cooper and me. Some students read braille and others read large print.

Although I am not a braille reader, I had a braille edition of each student's reading with print written above it so I could follow along and assist when needed (thanks to each student's TVI—teacher of the visually impaired). Each student came to the room with a book at his/her assigned time and they were so happy to see Cooper. After greeting each other, we sat, and students would read while Cooper laid down near them and "listened." And if they struggled, I was able to assist them. Students were scheduled to read to Cooper for 15 minutes each, and Cooper had a 5-minute break between students. Cooper "R.E.A.D." with three to four students each day. Students not only had FUN, but LOVED reading to him and looked forward to their



Cooper and I listening to a student reading braille at a desk.

(continued next page)

Differently Abled (cont.)

special sessions. It was a positive experience for everyone involved.

The only drawback? Cooper could not fit ALL students into the program who wanted to spend time and read with him!

If you need any suggestions on reading with children, especially those with special needs, please feel free to reach out to me.

Happy Reading!

Rosemarie Princiotta-D'Amico, Ed.M.

rdamico@nyise.org

