When an application is submitted for the AKC Therapy Dog title, the application often arrives with a letter of recommendation. Imagine our surprise when a recent application came with not one, but twenty-two hand-written letters carefully crafted by a class of third graders who will tell you with great conviction that their therapy dog is the world’s best teacher.

Kicho, a Rhodesian Ridgeback owned by Carol and Chris Wagner from Langhorne, Pennsylvania, pays weekly visits to the third grade class at Holland Elementary School (North Hampton, Pennsylvania) as part of a canine assisted reading program. The purpose of this program is to build student motivation, enhance focus, and increase task persistence.

Registered with Therapy Dogs Incorporated (TD Inc.), Kicho and Carol have been volunteering as a therapy team in schools, nursing homes, and hospitals for more than four years. Kicho has also passed the AKC’s Canine Good Citizen Test and has earned a Companion Dog title in obedience.

Included with Kicho’s AKC Therapy Dog title application was a letter from Dina Muncer, the teacher of the class visited by Kicho and Carol. Dina explained the positive impact the team has had on the class. “I am amazed at the benefits of reading-to-dogs therapy. The students jump at the opportunity to read with Kicho. His gentle and unassuming nature provides for a comfortable and exciting reading environment. This program provides an opportunity for students to develop a respect and appreciation for animals and develop a sense of accomplishment as readers at the same time. They associate their positive feelings about Kicho with positive feelings towards reading. Kicho and Carol are truly making a difference in the lives of many of our students!”

During a recent visit, Carol mentioned that she was going to apply to the American Kennel Club in order for Kicho to be awarded the AKC Therapy Dog title (THD). The class decided to assist by writing individual letters to the AKC in support of Kicho.

The twenty-two letters began with a common introduction provided by the teacher followed by the personal thoughts and feelings of the students. These heart-felt letters are about as close as one can come to capturing the simple but powerful value of therapy dogs in reading programs.

Carol Wagner said the first question every week was, “Has Kicho been awarded the AKC Therapy Dog title?” The students had taken Kicho’s application up as a class campaign.
Their letters were posted on the class bulletin board.

This story needed to have a happy ending. The school year was about to end. The AKC needed to let the students know their letters had been read, their thoughtful campaign was successful, and that Kicho had been awarded the title of AKC Therapy Dog.

Below is the letter sent to teacher Dina Muncer and her 3rd grade class. Every student also received a small AKC Therapy Dog patch and the school received a copy of the AKC’s Complete Dog Book for Kids.
The value of a therapy dog to a reading program, the commitment of a therapy dog's owner, the ingenuity of a third grade teacher, the development of a love for reading, the positive feelings about dogs, the success of the students thoughtful campaign to help a friend – it doesn't get any more positive than this!!