

Animals in School

The Board recognizes that having animals in the classroom can offer valuable student learning experiences, but is also concerned with the health and safety of students, staff, visitors, and the humane treatment of animals when they are brought to school.

For the purpose of this policy “animals”, with the exception of Therapy Dogs, which are addressed in Part II below, and Policy ACAC Service Animals includes mammals, reptiles, amphibians, birds, insects, and fish.

The following guidelines shall apply to the presence of animals in the RSU 9 schools: A. The presence of an animal in the classroom must be directly related to the instructional program. Staff who wish to have animals in the classroom must submit a written request to the principal. The request should include the instructional purpose and activity, the type of animal, the length of time the animal is expected to be present, and a plan for the care of the animal. The principal, at their discretion, may approve or deny the request.

B. Students or parents who wish to bring animals to school for educational purposes must consult with the teacher who, in turn, will request permission from the building principal. All other persons who wish to bring animals to school must obtain written permission, in advance, from the building principal.

C. The Superintendent is responsible for developing procedures to inform parents in advance that animals may be visiting or residing in classrooms during the school year. Parents are expected to notify the school if their child has an allergy or other health condition that will be affected by the presence of animals in the classroom. Parents will be notified in the welcome letter, parent-student handbook and on the school’s website.

D. The building principal and staff will respond appropriately when health considerations are brought to their attention. An animal will not be housed in a classroom if a student in that classroom has a documented allergy to the animal. E. Animals may not be transported in school vehicles.

F. No domestic mammals/pets (including dogs, cats, ferrets, and primates) or livestock will be allowed in school unless current proof of rabies and/or other vaccination is provided. Smaller mammals such as mice, hamsters, gerbils, guinea pigs, and rabbits do not need to be vaccinated against rabies. Bats, as they may be carriers of rabies, are not allowed in the schools.

- G. Parrots, parakeets and other psittacine birds (birds that may carry psittacosis, a severe infectious human respiratory disease) may not be brought to school unless they have been tested and certified as psittacosis-free. When inside a school building all birds shall be kept caged.
- H. Red-eared turtles (also known as painted turtles) are carriers of salmonella and shall not be kept in the classroom without written documentation from the supplier that they are salmonella-free.
- I. No wild, exotic, aggressive, or poisonous animals will be allowed in school unless under the control of an individual trained in the care and management of the animal and properly licensed by state or federal agencies as appropriate (e.g., zookeepers, veterinarians, biologists, Maine Fish and Wildlife personnel). Students will not be permitted to handle such animals.
- J. No animals will be allowed free range of the classroom or the school. All animals brought to school must be restrained by the owner/handler. The teacher is responsible for the proper supervision and control of students whenever there is an exhibit or activity involving animals in school.
- K. Animals kept in classrooms must be housed in suitable cages or containers, fed, and otherwise cared for appropriately. Only the teacher or students designated or supervised by the teacher may be allowed to handle these animals. Animal waste must be removed on an as-needed basis and in a sanitary manner. Only staff members or adult volunteers will be allowed to clean cages or containers or remove animal waste.
- L. If a student is bitten/injured by an animal on school premises, the building principal, school nurse, and parent/guardian must be notified as soon as possible. If a staff member or visitor is bitten/injured, the building principal must be notified. The building principal must notify appropriate public health authorities and the Maine Department of Health and Human Services Center for Disease Control of each incident. An accident/injury report must also be completed and forwarded to the Superintendent.
- M. If a stray or wild animal appears on school grounds, students must not be allowed in the area until the animal has left the premises or is removed by the local animal control officer, game warden or other appropriate official.
- N. No animal may be used as part of a scientific experiment or for any other purpose in which the normal health of the animal is interfered with or which causes pain or distress.

No person may practice vivisection or exhibit a vivisection of an animal in the schools. Dissection of dead animals will be confined to the classroom and to the presence of students engaged in the study of dissection and shall not be for the purpose of exhibition.

Therapy Dogs in Schools (See also Policy ACAC)

The school district recognizes the use of therapy dogs in the classroom setting may have academic, social, and emotional benefits for students and staff. The Board authorizes the presence of therapy dogs in school district classrooms subject to the following provisions.

A. Certification

Proof of training and certification for the dog/handler team by a formal Dog Assisted Therapy organization, such as Pet Partners (formerly Delta Society), Therapy Dogs International, Inc. (TDI), Alliance of Therapy Dogs (A.T.D.), or another formal organization approved by the Superintendent, is required. A copy of the certification document(s) will be kept on file in the Central Office.

B. Care

Care of a therapy dog is solely the responsibility of its certified team handler. This responsibility is not delegable

C. License and Tags

All therapy dogs must meet local, county, and/or state license or permit regulations. It is required that therapy dogs have an owner identification tag in addition to a tag or other identifier provided by the certifying agency.

D. Health

All therapy dogs must comply with local, county, and state vaccination and health requirements.

E. Liability

A copy of a current insurance policy that provides liability coverage for the handler and for the therapy dog must be provided by the certified handler and kept on file at the Central Office.

F. Notification

Parents/guardians must be notified that a registered therapy dog may be present in the school. Parents/guardians must be afforded the opportunity to notify school staff of any concerns.

G. Signage

Proper signage will be placed at the entrance to any RSU 9 building in which a Therapy Dog is working.

Other Animals on School Property

No animals are allowed in school facilities, at sporting events or on playing fields during or after school hours except as provided in this policy and policy ACAC.

Legal Reference: Americans with Disabilities Act (42 U.S.C. § 12101 et seq.) 7 MRS § 3971

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