

West Linn-Wilsonville School District

Guidelines for Animals in Classrooms and Schools

Justification

The School District supports teachers keeping animals in the classrooms and schools to integrate into curricula and provide unique student learning opportunities. The National Science Teachers Association (NSTA) expresses their support for using animals and animal dissections in science curricula. They comment on their website, "Student interaction with organisms is one of the most effective methods of achieving many of the goals outlined in the *National Science Education Standards (NSES)*." The School District also recognizes the value that animals can have in bringing real world and concrete examples of earth and life sciences into the classroom, as well as support character education. Keeping animals in the classroom provides opportunities for students to learn about responsibility, respect, ethical and safe treatment of animals and supports other important components of the District's vision themes.

Allowable Animals

All animals kept in classrooms and schools should come from a pet store or reputable dealer. Wild animals that are caught and caged are not permitted, as they have a greater chance of carrying a host of parasites and/or diseases and could be against Federal regulations. Animals brought to school or kept in classrooms must be vaccinated against transmittable diseases, if applicable, and properly and ethically controlled and housed in containers specifically designed for the species. Following studies or units that feature certain classroom animals, it is prohibited and unethical to release animals used for educational purposes into the wild. Additionally, the following invasive species to Oregon shall not be kept in classrooms or brought to schools without first consulting the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife (ODFW) and obtaining the required permits. Teachers and school administrators should consult the ODFW website for updated lists of these invasive animals.

- American Bullfrog
- Asian Carp or Silver Carp
- Chinese and Japanese Mystery Snails
- Chinese Mitten Crab
- Common Snapping Turtle
- Crayfish
- New Zealand Mud Snail
- Northern Snakehead
- Oriental Weatherfish
- Red-Eared Slider
- Zebra Mussel and Quagga Mussel

Approval Process

Teachers shall work with their administrators to coordinate and integrate keeping animals in the classroom for educational purposes. After this point, the principal and/or teacher shall provide written notification to all parents and guardians about the use of animals in the classroom and curricula. Parents will be asked to verify whether their student has any known allergies, asthma, or other health condition that may be affected by the animal's presence.

Additionally, parents can express whether or not they are comfortable with their student volunteering to help with the feeding of animals and cleaning of their cages. It should be noted that students are not required to participate in these activities. If any student has a health condition that may be triggered or affected by the presence of an animal, the teacher shall either remove the animal from the classroom or consider an alternative layout of the animals to accommodate the student's health condition. An alternative instructional activity must also be provided for affected students. Seating charts, room entrances and exits and other components of the layout of the room to separate instructional areas and the areas for animals should be taken into consideration. If students develop an aversion to certain classroom animals, considerations should be made to reduce interaction with that animal to a reasonable extent. Teachers shall maintain areas of the classroom that are free of classrooms animals to accommodate all student needs.

Care and Space Requirements

Animals brought to schools or kept in classrooms are the full responsibility of their owner. The District assumes no liability for the safety or care of these animals that are voluntarily brought to school or kept in classrooms for educational purposes. District custodial staff shall not be responsible for the care of cleaning required of animals in classrooms or schools. Custodial staff shall work with teachers to ensure that the keeping of animals in the classroom does not inhibit the effectiveness of their work and required cleaning schedules. Spaces should be ventilated properly and filters for the HVAC system cleaned regularly. If a teacher decides to integrate the use of classroom animals into their curricula, they shall work with the building engineer to determine if any modifications to their room's HVAC system (air intake and exhaust) are needed to ensure that proper ventilation is maintained during the time the animal is in the classroom. The teacher shall regularly clean cages and containers to mitigate odors, exposure to droppings and likelihood of increased pest presence. The food, bedding materials, or other supplies for classroom animals shall be stored in proper and sealed containers. Teachers shall also consider and research proper pairing and layout of animals and their cages based on animal species and predator and prey relationships. This is important for both the safety of students and animals working and learning in a single space.

Exposure to Animals

It is important that animals that are brought onto school campuses be clean and healthy so that the risk of transmitting diseases is minimal. Teachers must teach students about proper care and interaction with the specific classroom animals before handling occurs. This includes, but is not limited to, beginning of visual observation, conducting research, and becoming familiar with the animal's basic needs and any potential risks the animal may pose. Teachers must implement and oversee a comprehensive hand washing program with students so that students are reducing the risk of transmission of diseases by washing their hands immediately following the contact with animals. If a student is bitten or exposed to an animal in a way that could be potentially dangerous, the teacher shall follow the school's protocols for proper notification and seek immediate and proper medical care if needed.

Additional Resources

The following documents and websites were used and referenced in the above guidelines. Please consult them for additional information about keeping animals in classrooms and integrating them into educational curricula.

- PACE, Property and Casualty Coverage for Education: *Animals in classrooms: steps to reduce potential liabilities*, <http://pace.osba.org/alerts/Animals%20in%20classrooms%2009.pdf>
- Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife: *Wildlife in the Classroom or Laboratory*, http://www.dfw.state.or.us/conservationstrategy/invasive_species/docs/wildlife_in_classroom_bro.pdf
- Bronx Zoo: *Animals in the Classroom? A guide to decision*, http://www.bronxzoo.com/educators/educator-resources/~/_media/Files/15news%20PDFs/animalsinclassroomessay.ashx