

## **ANIMALS IN SCHOOLS**

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

While this policy covers therapy dogs, it does not apply to service dogs which are governed by policy IMG.A.

For the purpose of this policy “animals” includes mammals, reptiles, amphibians, birds, insects, and fish.

The presence of live animals in the classroom must be directly related to the objectives of the instructional program. Permission must be obtained from the building principal before any animal is brought into the school by a teacher, student or any other person.

### **I. COMMUNICATION**

The Superintendent will be responsible for developing procedures to inform parents that animals may be visiting or residing in classrooms during the school year. Once parents/guardians have been notified, they 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.

The building principal and staff will respond appropriately when health considerations are brought to their attention.

### **II. SAFETY**

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. All dogs must be leashed.

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.

If a stray or wild animal appears on school grounds, students shall 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.

### III. INSTRUCTIONAL PROGRAM ANIMALS

The following guidelines shall apply to the presence of animals in the RSU No.5's schools directly related to the instructional program:

- A. 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. Animals may not be transported in school vehicles.
- D. 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.  
  
Parrots, parakeets and other psittacine birds (birds that may carry psittacosis, a severe infectious human respiratory disease) shall not be brought to school unless they have been tested and certified as psittacosis-free.  
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.
- E. 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.
- F. Animals kept in classrooms must be housed in suitable cages or containers and 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.
- G. 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 vivisected animal in the schools. Dissection of dead animals shall 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.

#### IV. CERTIFIED THERAPY DOGS

The following guidelines cover the presence of certified therapy dogs in the schools.

- A. The State of Maine defines a therapy dog as follows: “Therapy dog – often referred to as a “comfort” dog that is trained specifically to provide comfort and love to community groups like hospitals, nursing homes, schools, and other settings. A therapy dog does NOT support a specific person. Therapy dogs do not have rights under the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) or the Maine Human Rights Act (MHRA) and there must be prior authorization for their use.” (Department of Corrections–Policy 4.7.2)
- B. The only dogs allowed in schools other than service dogs are therapy dogs who are trained and certified as therapy dogs. Dogs must be certified by either 1) Therapy Dogs International, or 2) a certification program approved by the Superintendent. A copy of the certification must be submitted to the principal.
- C. Therapy dogs must be accompanied by their certified handler.

Legal Reference: Americans with Disabilities Act (42 U.S.C. § 12101 et seq.)  
7 MRSA § 3971  
22 MRSA §§ 801-825

Cross Reference: IMGA - Service Animals in the Schools  
JLCE - First Aid and Emergency Medical Care

Adopted: April 24, 2024