

SELF-INSURED SCHOOLS OF CALIFORNIA

PROPERTY & LIABILITY UPDATE

OCTOBER 15, 2012

ADVISORY REGARDING ANIMALS IN SCHOOLS

According to the National Science Teachers Association, "Observation and experimentation with living organisms give students unique perspectives of life processes that are not provided by other modes of instruction. Studying animals in the classroom enables students to develop skills of observation and comparison, a sense of stewardship, and an appreciation for the unity, interrelationships, and complexity of life." Beyond that, kids just like animals.

The following information is meant to provide guidance to district administrators as they consider incorporating the use of animals into school programs.

Animals On Campus

Districts should discourage the practice of students or teachers bringing household pets onto campus. Such "pets" pose an unknown risk of disease, scratching, and/or biting injury. There have been several reports of injury to individuals in SISC member districts from incidents involving an instructor's pet that was brought to the school site. Instructors should also be aware that they might be held personally liable in the event their pet injures someone or damages property. Although an instructor may feel that his or her pet is safe, or a student may want to bring a pet for class viewing, the risks outweigh the benefit in most cases.

Schools often have outside vendors or animal handlers bring animals for viewing and/or demonstration. Such

practice is acceptable if the following conditions are met. Only "professional" animal handlers should be allowed to bring animals onto campus for viewing/demonstration. Prior to administrative approval, all animal handlers should be able to produce the following:

- A certificate of insurance that covers the handler and names the district as an additional insured.
- A list/description of all prior incidents/injuries involving animal viewing and demonstration or certification that no such incidents/injuries have occurred.
- A list of precautions to follow to prevent injury to students, including a description of appropriate student behavior and appropriate participant age.

The following section outlines the animals that are inappropriate to house in schools and may also be used as guidance for evaluating animal viewing/demonstrations brought onto campus.

Animals Housed On Campus

Although housing animals in classrooms is popular, care should be taken in the selection of such animals as well as the ongoing maintenance and handling.

Some animals are not appropriate choices to house on campus because of the potential risk of injury and/or

disease transmission. Several sources have listed the following animals as unacceptable for the classroom:

- Poisonous animals (spiders, snakes, venomous insects).
- Wild, non-domestic, animals (especially those at high risk for rabies; armadillos have been implicated in Hansen disease; Salmonella in hedgehogs; tuberculosis in brushy-tailed opossums; Hantavirus and leptospirosis in wild rodents).
- Wolf-hybrids (crosses between wolf and dog).
- Stray animals (dogs and cats—particularly those less than one year of age).
- Baby ducks and chicks (high risk of Salmonellosis and campylobacteriosis).



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SCHOOLS HELPING SCHOOLS

- Aggressive animals (an animal displaying unprovoked threatening behavior should be removed from the classroom).
- Other animals that should not be brought onto campus include: wild birds, snapping turtles, bats or skunks.

Reptiles are notorious for carrying salmonella, especially turtles. For this reason many schools have opted not to have reptiles in the classroom.

The “safest” animals are those that are handled and exhibited in an appropriate manner. Clearly, the small mammals pose the least threat to children with regard to disease transmission. These include mice, hamsters, gerbils, rats, and rabbits. Hamsters and gerbils are known to be biters so the other species are preferable. None of these species are known to transmit rabies to humans.

Partnering with a local veterinarian can help ensure proper animal selection as well as ensure the health of the animal.

Whenever feasible, animals that are brought into the classroom should be cleared by a veterinarian before entering the class. In addition, strong consideration should be given to allowing only animals bred in captivity to be housed on campus due to the wide variety of diseases carried by “wild” animals. Animals must have current vaccinations appro-

priate to the species. If possible a certificate of health should be obtained by the supplier or a veterinarian before introducing the animal to the class.

An effort should be made to minimize student handling of animals, especially in elementary classes, in order to reduce the risk of transmission of disease, bacteria, and ringworm. Limited student handling also reduces the risk of bites and/or allergic reactions/aggravations. Students should not be charged with cleaning pens and/or cages unless they are closely supervised, gloves are worn, and strict procedures are followed. This activity significantly increases the risk of disease transmission and allergic reactions if not controlled properly.

Although it is common for students to take class animals home during weekends or over school breaks, such practices should be carefully planned and controlled. Written permission and acknowledgement from the student’s parent or guardian should be obtained in advance to sending the animal home with the student.

Also, explicit written procedures outlining how to properly care for the animal should accompany the animal to the student’s home. If there is any questions regarding the animal’s health or safety, the instructor should not send the animal to the student’s home.

If you have any questions or would like additional information, please contact your SISC II Safety representative at (661) 636-4604.

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