

ANIMALS IN THE CLASSROOM – Administrative Guidelines and Procedures

The Mansfield Public Schools (“CPS”) follows guidelines articulated by the National Science Teacher Association (“NSTA”) with respect to the responsible use of animals in the classroom. The NSTA guidelines provide, in pertinent part, that “[s]tudent interaction with organisms is one of the most effective methods of achieving many of the goals outlined in the National Science Education Standards” and that “educators and school officials [should] make informed decisions about the integration of animals in the science curriculum.” Nat’l Sci. Teacher Ass’n, *Position Statement, Responsible Use of Live Animals and Dissection in the Science Classroom* (June 2005). CPS also expects that the presence of any animals in the classroom will be consistent with the policies of the Mansfield School Committee, including its Policy on Animals in School. In order to ensure that interaction between animals and students is handled safely and responsibly, the following guidelines should be adhered to.

Live Animals in the Classroom

When there are live animals present in the classroom, teachers should:

- educate themselves about the safe and responsible use of animals in the classroom, seek information from reputable sources, and familiarize themselves with laws and regulations in their state;
- become knowledgeable about the acquisition and care of animals appropriate to the species under study so that both students and the animals stay safe and healthy during all activities;
- follow local, state, and national laws, policies, and regulations when live organisms, particularly native species, are included in the classroom;
- integrate live animals into the science program based on sound curriculum and pedagogical decisions;
- develop activities that promote observation and comparison skills that instill in students an appreciation for the value of life and the importance of caring for animals responsibly;
- instruct students on safety precautions for handling live organisms and establish a plan for addressing such issues as allergies and fear of animals;
- develop and implement a plan for future care or disposition of animals at the conclusion of the study as well as during school breaks and summer vacations;
- espouse the importance of *not* conducting experimental procedures on animals if such procedures are likely to cause pain, induce nutritional deficiencies, or to expose animals to parasites, hazardous/toxic chemicals, or radiation;
- shelter animals when the classroom is being cleaned with chemical cleaners, sprayed with pesticides, and at other times when potentially harmful chemicals are being used; and
- refrain from releasing animals into a non-indigenous environment.

Massachusetts law prohibits any teacher or other school official from using any live vertebrate “as part of a scientific experiment or for any other purpose in which said vertebrates are

experimentally medicated or drugged in a manner to cause painful reactions or to induce painful or lethal pathological conditions, or in which said vertebrates are injured through any other type of treatment, experiment or procedure including but not limited to anesthetization or electric shock, or where the normal health of said animal is interfered with or where pain or distress is caused.” Mass. Gen. Laws ch. 272, § 80G.

Nor may anyone in the presence of a public student “practice vivisection or exhibit a vivisected animal. Dissection of dead animals or any portions thereof in such schools shall be confined to the classroom and to the presence of pupils engaged in the study to be promoted thereby, and shall in no case be for the purpose of exhibition.” *Id.*

If a live animal is kept as a classroom pet or for any other purpose not prohibited by law, it must be “cared for in a safe and humane manner. Said animals shall not remain in school over periods when such schools are not in session, unless adequate care is provided at all times.” *Id.*

The above provisions of Section 80G of Chapter 272 of the Massachusetts General Laws “shall also apply to any activity associated with or sponsored by the school.” *Id.*

Animal Dissection

As to the use of animal dissection as an educational activity, CPS agrees that “[t]eachers, especially those at the primary level, should be especially cognizant of students’ ages and maturity levels when deciding whether to use animal dissection” as an educational activity. NSTA *Position Statement*.

Further, teachers should “be sensitive to students’ views regarding dissection, and to be aware of students’ beliefs and their right to make an informed decision about their participation.” *Id.* In 2005, the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education adopted its Student Choice Policy on dissection and dissection alternative activities, which states: “All public schools that offer dissection as a learning activity should, upon written request by a student’s parent/guardian/caregiver, permit a student who chooses not to participate in dissection to demonstrate competency through an alternative method.”

To that end, teachers should:

- conduct laboratory and dissection activities with consideration and appreciation for the organism;
- plan laboratory and dissection activities that are appropriate to the maturity level of the students;
- use prepared specimens purchased from a reputable and reliable scientific supply company or, as an acceptable alternative source for fresh specimens such as squid or chicken wings, an FDA-inspected facility such as a butcher shop or supermarket, keeping in mind that the use of salvaged specimens does not reflect safe practice;
- conduct laboratory and dissection activities in a clean and organized work space with care and laboratory precision;

- conduct dissections in an appropriate physical environment with the proper ventilation, lighting, furniture, and equipment, including hot water and soap for cleanup;
- use personal safety protective equipment, such as gloves, chemical splash goggles, and aprons, all of which should be available and used by students, teachers, and visitors to the classroom;
- address such issues as allergies and squeamishness about dealing with animal specimens;
- ensure that the specimens are handled and disposed of properly;
- ensure that sharp instruments, such as scissors, scalpels, and other tools, are used safely and appropriately;
- base laboratory and dissection activities on carefully planned curriculum objectives; and
- be prepared to present a meaningful alternative to dissection to students whose views or beliefs make this activity uncomfortable and difficult for them.

Classroom Safety and Wellness

Use of animals to achieve specific curriculum objectives may be allowed with prior approval of the principal. The principal's approval or denial of any such request shall be done in accordance with the requirements set forth in the Mansfield School Committee Policy on Animals in School.

While animals in the classroom can enrich the educational experience of students, they can also harbor diseases, parasites, bacteria, and other potentially infectious organisms. Children are among those most susceptible to diseases transmitted from animals. CPS follows the guidelines of the Massachusetts Department of Public Health ("MDPH"), Executive Office of Health and Human Services, as set forth in the MDPH's publication, *Animals in the Classroom: Recommendations for Schools*, to promote classroom safety and wellness when animals are involved. These guidelines provide, in pertinent part, that:

Enteric diseases are diseases predominantly of the digestive system and include illnesses caused by organisms such as *Salmonella* and *E. coli*. People can be exposed to these enteric organisms by eating food contaminated with feces or by touching a contaminated object and then touching their mouths. Animals can carry these organisms without being ill.

In order to prevent the transmission of enteric disease-causing organisms, students should receive very clear instructions on how to wash their hands thoroughly after handling animals, their cages, or surfaces animals have come in contact with, and always before eating. For questions on safe and proper handling procedures, contact the MDPH, Division of Epidemiology and Immunization at 617-983-6800.

Because of the high risk of enteric disease (namely, salmonellosis and campylobacteriosis) from baby chicks and ducks, these animals are inappropriate in schools without education on safe and proper handling procedures.

Because of the risk of contracting salmonellosis from reptiles and amphibians, even when reared in captivity, special precautions are necessary when handling them. Because salmonellosis can

be more severe in young children and because their hygiene practices are less thorough, handling of reptiles and amphibians by young children is not recommended.

Psittacosis is a bacterial disease that is primarily transmitted through inhaling dust from the contaminated droppings of infected birds. Because psittacine birds (parrots, parakeets, budgies, and cockatiels) can carry psittacosis without showing signs of illness, these birds should not be handled by children without education on safe and proper handling procedures. Birds showing any signs of illness should not be brought into school. If psittacine birds are brought to school, they should be kept caged, their cages kept clean and the bird's wastes frequently and safely removed and discarded.

Rabies is a fatal viral infection that can infect any mammal, though it is more common among certain mammals such as bats, skunks, raccoons, and foxes. Rabies is rare among small rodents such as squirrels, rats, hamsters and mice. Fish, reptiles, amphibians, birds and insects cannot get or spread rabies. Rabies can be spread to domestic animals and to humans through contact with an infected animal's saliva, usually through a bite or scratch, or through contact with nervous tissues (brain and spinal cord) of infected animals.

Wild mammals pose a risk for transmitting rabies and should never be brought into schools or handled by children. Because of the high incidence of rabies in bats, skunks, raccoons, groundhogs/woodchucks, and wild carnivores such as coyotes and foxes, these animals, *including recently dead animals*, should not be permitted on school grounds unless they are under the control of a licensed professional responsible for preventing exposure to students and staff. It is against the law to keep or transport wild animals without authorization from the Massachusetts Department of Fisheries and Wildlife.

Stray domestic animals also pose a risk for transmitting rabies because the health and vaccination status of these animals is unknown. Therefore, stray animals should never be brought into classrooms or onto school grounds.

Bats and poisonous animals, such as spiders, venomous insects, and poisonous reptiles, including poisonous snakes and lizards, are prohibited from school buildings and school grounds.

As a general rule, only domesticated mammals with current USDA-approved rabies vaccinations should be permitted to have contact with students. Currently, USDA-approved vaccines exist only for the following domesticated animals: dogs, cats, ferrets, cattle, horses, and sheep. Current rabies vaccination by a licensed veterinarian should be documented for all dogs, cats, and ferrets brought onto the school campus for instructional purposes. Dogs and cats under three months of age (too young to be vaccinated for rabies) or otherwise not vaccinated for rabies should not be brought into classrooms or onto school grounds without taking precautions to prevent exposure. In accordance with the Mansfield School Committee Policy on Animals in School, prior advance approval is required from both the principal/head of upper school and the Superintendent of Schools before any fur-bearing animal is brought into a school building or onto school grounds. In all cases, students should be educated on safe and proper handling procedures before handling or touching any such animals.

Students who volunteer to foster classroom pets, especially mammals, during school vacations and summer should keep the animals exclusively indoors in order to prevent interaction with wild animals that may be infected with rabies.

If a student has been exposed to the saliva or nervous tissue of any wild or stray mammal, *including recently dead animals*, the wound or area of skin contact should be washed immediately with soap and water for at least ten (10) minutes. The student's parents/guardians/caregivers should be notified and told to contact their child's pediatrician for evaluation. The local board of health should also be notified; they will help coordinate any follow-up by the town animal control officer or animal inspector, including quarantine of the animal and submission of the animal to the State Laboratory Institute/Rabies Laboratory, if appropriate, and can help determine if the person needs to be treated for rabies.

Policy references: IMG

Legal references: 28 C.F.R. Part 35

Adopted: December 11, 2018