



Sarasota County School Board

**Guidelines for
Visiting / Resident Animals
in the Classroom**

REVISED 2004 EDITION

Pupil Support Services
&
Curriculum
and
Instruction Grades K-12

School Board of Sarasota County Guidelines for Animals in the Classroom

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**Administrative Permission for Students
to Have Exposure to Animals in the Classroom or School**

(Keep copy for school records and return 1 copy to teacher)

Sarasota County School Board Guidelines require that Administrators (Principal or Assistant Principal) must receive written information when exposure to animals will occur in the school or classroom. Administrators have the option to limit or reject the housing or visit of an animal in a classroom or the school.

Teacher's Name: _____ Room # _____

Grade: _____ Subject Area: _____

Animal: _____

The curriculum objective for which this animal will be housed or allowed to visit:

Subject: _____ Objective Number: _____

Explanation of correlation or application to the Curriculum:

Length of time that the animal will be present:

_____ For the entire school year (housed)

_____ On the following date(s) _____ (Visiting)

_____ YES, Teacher may house this animal or allow this animal to visit in the classroom or school.

_____ NO, Teacher may not house this animal or allow this animal to visit in the classroom or school.

Administrator's Signature

Print

Date

Parent Notification for Students to Have Exposure to Animals in the Classroom

Sarasota County School Board Guidelines require that parents must receive written information when exposure to animals will occur in the school/classroom. Parents have the option to limit their child's participation and inform the teacher.

Teacher's Name _____ Room Number: _____

Curriculum Objective Grade: _____ Science Objective Number: _____

The correlation/application to the curriculum is:

The following animal(s) will be in your child's classroom: _____

_____ For the present school year _____ (Housed)

_____ On _____ date(s) (Visiting only)

If you have concerns about your child being in the classroom while this animal is visiting/residing, please contact your student's school.

* A copy of Guidelines for Visiting/Resident Animals in Sarasota County Schools is available at each school and may be reviewed upon request.

A. INTRODUCTION

The purpose of these guidelines is to provide information to promote safety for instructors and students when animals are brought into the classroom. Animals are part of our daily lives, they can be used effectively as teaching aids, and the positive benefits of the human-animal bond are well established. However, the special situation of classrooms necessitates certain safeguards.

1. Keeping animals, etc. in the classroom presents students and staff with these health and safety-related problems:
 - Scratches and/or bites
 - Infections
 - Allergic reactions
 - Asthmatic reactions
 - Infestations

Therefore, students and parents must receive written information for each student, which the teacher keeps on file.

Parents must have the option to inform the teacher of possible allergic reactions, and limit the student’s participation.

2. Wildlife in the classroom is acceptable only when it meets a curricular objective. Administration, students, and parents need to be informed in writing of the objective.
3. Students whose parents have limited their access to the wildlife must have an alternative assignment of equal value.
4. **It is the teacher’s responsibility to care for and clean up after the wildlife. The custodians are not responsible for cleaning the cages, etc. or the area upon which they are placed.**

All Children who handle animals should be instructed to wash their hands immediately after handling them under the supervision of the teacher. See Appendix I for Hand Washing Recommendations to Reduce Disease Transmission.

5. Students must be aware that during emergency drills, the wildlife remains in the classroom, and in the event of a real fire, would not be protected. This prevents the well-intentioned student from returning to a dangerous situation to “save a pet.”

Live Animals Not Permitted Under Any Circumstances*	Live Animals Permitted for Housing
Wild Animals (example: wolf-dog hybrid, lions, tigers) Stray Animals Bats Raccoons Skunks Stinging and/or Biting Insects Reptiles (snakes, lizards, iguanas, turtles, alligators, etc.) Amphibians Giant African Land Snail Aggressive Animals Birds (feathered vertebrate)	Aquarium (fresh or salt water) fish, coral, anemone, hermit crab Ant Farm Butterflies Ladybugs Fruit flies Earthworms

Arachnids (spiders, scorpions, etc.)	
Live Animals Permitted for Visiting	
Domestic Dog	
Domestic Cat	
Domestic Cow, Sheep, Pig, Horse	
Ferret	
Pet rodent (mouse, rat, guinea pig, and chinchilla)	
Pet rabbit	
Hermit Crab	

*Middle and High School Science Teachers may contact the Science Curriculum Specialist at the Landings for further guidelines.

B. Animals which are UNACCEPTABLE for School Visits

1. Wild Animals

Defining a wild animal is difficult and subjective. For the purposes of these guidelines, a wild animal is any mammal that is **NOT** one of the following:

- a. Domestic dog
- b. Domestic cat
- c. Domestic ferret
- d. Domestic ungulate (e.g. cow, sheep, goat, pig, horse)
- e. Pet rabbit
- f. Pet rodent (e.g. mice, rats, hamsters, gerbils, guinea pigs, chinchillas)

Wild animals pose a risk for transmitting rabies as well as other *zoonotic diseases* (i.e. diseases which can be transferred from animals to humans) and should never be brought into schools or handled by children.

Wild animals' behavior also tends to be unpredictable. A wild animal that has been raised in captivity is still a wild animal. Domestication takes thousands of years, not just a generation or two.

2. Poisonous Animals

Spiders, venomous insects, poisonous reptiles (including snakes), and poisonous amphibians should be prohibited from being brought onto school grounds.

3. Reptiles (including non-poisonous snakes, lizards, turtles and iguanas) and amphibians

These animals (reptiles and amphibians) can transmit salmonellosis to humans and are more likely than other animals to do so.

Because of the high risk of salmonellosis from these animals even when reared in captivity, they are inappropriate in schools. These animals may intermittently shed salmonella. Negative cultures will not guarantee that they are not infected. Treatment of infected animals with antibiotics has not proven useful and may promote the development and spread of resistant bacteria.

4. Wolf-dog Hybrids

These animals are crosses between a wolf and a domestic dog and have shown a propensity for aggression, especially toward young children. Therefore, they should not be allowed on school grounds.

5. Stray Animals

Stray animals should never be brought onto school grounds because the health and vaccination status of these animals is unknown.

6. Baby Chicks and Ducks

Because of the high risk of salmonellosis and campylobacteriosis from these animals, they are inappropriate in schools. Transmission of these diseases from chicks and ducklings to children is well documented in the medical literature.

7. Aggressive Animals

Animals that are bred or trained to demonstrate aggression towards humans or other animals, or animals that have demonstrated such aggressive behavior in the past, should not be permitted on school campuses. Aggressive, unprovoked, or threatening behavior should mandate the animal's immediate removal.

8. Psittacine Birds

Because psittacine birds can carry zoonotic diseases such as psittacosis (*Chlamydia psittaci*, parrot fever), such birds (parrots, parakeets, budgies, and cockatiels) should not be handled by children. The infection can be transmitted by inhaling the agent from desiccated droppings, secretions and dust from feathers of infected birds. "Even birds that appear healthy can be carriers and shed the infectious agent."

C. Special Conditions for Animals listed as "Permitted for Visiting"

1. Ferrets

Ferrets can be allowed to visit school classrooms, but the person responsible for them must handle them. They should be currently vaccinated against rabies. Because of their propensity to bite when startled, it is not recommended that school children hold ferrets visiting the classroom. Children should never be left alone with a ferret.

2. Guide, Hearing, and other Service Animals and Law Enforcement Animals

These animals should not be prohibited from being on school grounds or in classrooms.

D. Special Conditions for Animals listed as "Permitted for Housing"

All animals housed in schools should be provided an appropriate environment (e.g. secure housing, suitable temperature, adequate exercise) and a proper diet. In addition, there should be a plan for the continued care of these animals during the days that school is not in session. Consultation with a veterinarian is advised to help with environmental and nutritional needs and provide care in the event of illness or injury to the animal.

E. General Guidelines For Animals Which Are Permitted To Visit Schools

It is important that animals that are brought onto school campuses be clean and healthy so that the risk of transmitting diseases is minimal. Children tend to be more susceptible to zoonotic disease and parasitic infections than adults because of their lack of hand washing and greater propensity for putting hands in their mouths. Therefore, animals that are brought to school

should be clean and free of disease and external parasites such as fleas, ticks, and mites to decrease the likelihood of the animal transmitting these agents or vectors to the students.

Visiting animals should be restricted to an area designated by the principal or administrator. Kittens and puppies are appropriate only for short classroom visits.

Pets brought on campus should be spayed/neutered as altered pets have a tendency to display better behavior as per recommendation of the Humane Society of Sarasota County.

The following are specific recommendations for some common-visiting animals:

1. Verified Rabies Vaccination

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 or not vaccinated against rabies should not be handled by children.**

2. Health Certificates for Dogs

A **health certificate signed by a licensed veterinarian** showing proof of current vaccinations **must be provided** to the principal per recommendation of the Humane Society of Sarasota County. The animal should be free of internal and external parasites such as fleas, ticks, and mites, and free of obvious skin lesions. Dogs over four months of age should be housebroken.

3. Health Certificates for Cats

A **health certificate which is signed by a licensed veterinarian** showing proof of current vaccinations **must be provided** to the principal as recommended by the Humane Society of Sarasota County. The animal should be free of internal and external parasites such as fleas, ticks, and mites, and free of obvious skin lesions.

4. Health Certificates for Ferrets

A **health certificate that is signed by a licensed veterinarian** showing proof of current vaccinations **must be provided** to the principal as recommended by the Humane Society of Sarasota County. The animal should be free of internal and external parasites such as fleas, ticks, and mites, and be free of obvious skin lesions.

F. **Proper Restraint of Animals**

Because animals may react strangely to classroom situations, it is important to have an effective way to control them. Fear may cause an animal to attempt to escape or even act aggressively in situations that are unusual to them (the “flight or fight” phenomenon). Appropriate restraint devices will allow the holder to react quickly and prevent harm to students or escape of the animal.

1. Collars and Leashes

Dogs, cats, and ferrets should be wearing a proper collar, harness, and/or leash when on the school campus or in the classroom so they can be easily controlled. Household rope or string is not an appropriate restraint tool. The owner or responsible person should stay with the animal during its visit to the school. No animal should be allowed to roam unrestrained on the school campus or in the classroom.

2. Designated Areas

All animals should be restricted to the area designated by the principal or administrator. In school facilities in which the common dining area is also used as an auditorium, gymnasium, or multi-purpose room animals may be allowed in the area at times other than meals if:

- a. Effective partitioning or self closing doors separate the area from food storage and food preparations areas
- b. Condiments, equipment, and utensils are stored in enclosed cabinets or removed from the area when animals are present
- c. Dining areas, including tables, countertops, and similar surfaces are effectively cleaned before the next meal service. Cleaning should be done with a 10% bleach solution or commercial disinfectant. **Animals should not be in dining areas during mealtime.**

3. Estrus

Female dogs and cats should be determined not to be in estrus (heat) at the time of the visit.

G. **Student Contact With Animals**

Increased activity and sudden movements can make animals feel threatened; so all student contact with animals should always be supervised and conform to a few basic rules. Even very tame animals may act aggressively in strange situations.

1. Animal bites can usually be avoided if students are kept in small groups.
Animal Bites: “Any person bitten or having knowledge of any person bitten by any dog, cat or other animal, shall report the fact immediately to the County Health Officer and Animal Services” (Sarasota County Ordinance: Section 13 of Ordinance 95-042).
Treatment of Animal Bites: See School Health Services Manual of Sarasota County Public Schools, p. 31-32.
2. Rough play or teasing should absolutely not be allowed.
3. Children should not be allowed to feed pets directly from their hands.
4. Small animals such as rabbits, hamsters, gerbils, and mice should be handled very gently.
Rabbits rarely like to be held and will struggle to free themselves.
Rodents may bite when they feel threatened, but rabies post-exposure prophylaxis is almost never warranted with small rodent bites.
5. Children should be discouraged from “kissing” animals or having them in close contact with their faces.
6. Education with animals should be used to reemphasize proper hygiene and hand washing recommendations. All children who handle animals should be instructed to wash their hands immediately after handling them.
7. Animals should not be allowed in the vicinity of sinks where children wash their hands or in any areas where food is prepared, stored, or served. Animals should not be kept in areas used for cleaning or storage of food utensils or dishes. Animals should also be restricted from school health rooms or sterile and clean supply rooms.

8. Do not allow cats or dogs in sandboxes where children play.
9. Immunocompromised students (e.g. children with organ transplants, children currently receiving cancer chemotherapy or radiation therapy) may be especially susceptible to zoonotic diseases; therefore, special precautions may be needed to minimize the risk of disease transmission to these students. Consultation with the child's parents about precautionary measures is strongly advised.
10. Ringworm can be transmitted from animals (example: guinea pigs, hamsters) to humans and from humans to animals.

H. Handling and Disposal of Animal Wastes While On School Campuses

1. Clean Up of Animal Wastes.

Children should not handle or clean up any form of animal waste (feces, urine, blood, etc.). Animal wastes should be disposed of where children cannot come into contact with them, such as in a plastic bag or container with a well-fitted lid or via the sewage waste system for feces. Food handlers should not be involved in the cleanup of animal wastes.

2. Prohibited Areas

Animal wastes should not be disposed of and visiting animals should not be allowed to defecate in or near areas where children routinely play or congregate (e.g. sandboxes, school playgrounds).

3. Litter Boxes

Litter boxes for visiting animals should not be allowed in the classroom.

I. Humane Treatment

To avoid the intentional or unintentional abuse, mistreatment, or neglect of animals, the guidelines of the National Association of Biology Teachers and the National Science Teachers Association should be adopted (Appendix I).

J. Conclusion

Animals can serve as excellent teaching tools and students love to have them visit the classroom. When using animals as an instructional aid, the objective should always be well planned in advance. By following the above recommendations, the use of animals in the classroom can be made safe and enjoyable for both the animals and the children.

Appendix I

Hand Washing Recommendations to Reduce Disease Transmission from Animals in Public Settings

Hand washing is the single most important prevention step for reducing disease transmission.

How to Hand Wash:

- Wet hands with running water, place soap into palms, rub together to make a lather, scrub hands vigorously for 20 seconds, rinse soap off of hands, then dry hands with a disposable towel.
- It is advisable to turn off the faucet using a disposable towel. Young children need assistance in washing hands.

Hand Washing Facilities or Stations:

- Hand washing facilities should be accessible, sufficient for the maximum anticipated attendance, and configured for use by children and adults.
- Hands should always be washed after leaving animal areas and prior to eating or drinking.
- Hand wash stations should be conveniently located between animal and non-animal areas (exit transitional area) and in food concession areas.
- Maintenance should include routine cleaning and restocking of towels and soap.
- Running water should be of sufficient volume and pressure to remove soil from hands. Volume and pressure might be significantly reduced if the water supply is furnished from a holding tank. Therefore, a permanent pressured water supply is preferable.
- The design of the hand wash unit should leave the hands free for hand washing.
- Hot water is preferable, but if the hand wash stations are supplied with only cold water, a soap that emulsifies more easily in cold water should be provided.
- Communal basins do not constitute adequate hand washing facilities.

Hand Washing Agents:

- Liquid soap dispensed by a hand or foot pump is recommended.
- When soap and water are not available, alcohol-based hand sanitizers are effective against many common disease agents, such as *E. coli*, *Salmonella*, and *Campylobacter*.
- Hand sanitizers may be less effective if hands are grossly soiled. They are also ineffective against certain organisms (i.e., bacterial spores, *Cryptosporidium*, and certain viruses). Therefore, gross contamination and dirt should be removed to the extent possible before using hand sanitizers.

Signs:

- Hand wash reminder signs must be posted at exits from animal areas.
- Signs should direct visitors and animal handlers to the location of hand wash stations.
- Instructional signs should be posted at the hand wash stations and at restroom lavatories to ensure proper hand wash practices.
- The placement of hand wash reminder signs at food concession areas is recommended.

An example of the type of information that should be considered for a hand washing sign is:

Hand Washing: How and When

How:

- ✓ Wet hands with running water
- ✓ Place soap into palms
- ✓ Rub together to make a lather
- ✓ Scrub hands vigorously for 20 seconds
- ✓ Rinse soap off of hands
- ✓ Dry hands

When:

- ✓ After going to the toilet
- ✓ After exiting animal areas
- ✓ Before eating
- ✓ Before preparing foods

Appendix II

References for Animals in the Classroom

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Guidelines for Responsible Use of Animals in the Classroom

These guidelines are recommended by the National Science Teachers Association for use by science educators and students. They apply, in particular, to the use of nonhuman animals in instructional activities planned and/or supervised by teachers who teach science at the precollege level.

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. This study, however, requires appropriate, humane care of the organism. Teachers are expected to be knowledgeable about the proper care of organisms under study and the safety of their students. These are the guidelines recommended by NSTA concerning the responsible use of animals in a school classroom laboratory:

- Acquisition and care of animals must be appropriate to the species.
- Student class work and science projects involving animals must be under the supervision of a science teacher or other trained professional.
- Teachers sponsoring or supervising the use of animals in instructional activities--including acquisition, care, and disposition--will adhere to local, state, and national laws, policies, and regulations regarding the organisms.
- Teachers must instruct students on safety precautions for handling live animals or animal specimens.
- Plans for the future care or disposition of animals at the conclusion of the study must be developed and implemented.
- Laboratory and dissection activities must be conducted with consideration and appreciation for the organism.
- Laboratory and dissection activities must be conducted in a clean and organized work space with care and laboratory precision.
- Laboratory and dissection activities must be based on carefully planned objectives.
- Laboratory and dissection objectives must be appropriate to the maturity level of the student.
- Student views or beliefs sensitive to dissection must be considered; the teacher will respond appropriately.

--Adopted by the Board of Directors, July 1991