Animals in the School

Animals in Schools

The Board of Education (“Board”) recognizes that the presence of live animals (including mammals, reptiles, birds, amphibians, fish, and spiders) at school can provide a valuable learning experience, and that instruction related to the care and treatment of animals teaches students a sense of responsibility and promotes the humane treatment of living creatures. In addition, qualified assistance animals can provide valuable services to individuals with qualified disabilities, and qualified therapy animals can help students achieve certain educational goals.

However, the Board also recognizes that live animals can pose dangerous risks to the health and safety of students and employees of the District. Some students and employees are highly allergic to certain types of animals. Animals can spread disease, or behave in dangerous or unpredictable ways that can cause injury to persons or property. Therefore, it is the policy of the Board to prohibit the presence of live animals on District property, unless expressly permitted by this policy.

A. Animals Permitted on District Property. The Board permits certain live animals on District property:

1. Qualified Assistance Animals. A qualified assistance animal under the control of its owner or trainer may be permitted on District property. A “qualified assistance animal” is not a companion animal or a pet, but rather is defined by New Mexico law as “any assistance dog or other animal that has been or is being trained to provide assistance to an individual with a disability,” including guide dogs that aid persons who are blind or visually impaired, hearing dogs who aid persons who are deaf or hearing-impaired, and service dogs that aid persons with disabilities other than sight or hearing impairment. NMSA 1978, § 28-11-2.

2. Qualified Therapy Animals. A qualified therapy animal is a trained animal that possesses the necessary skills, training and aptitude to facilitate therapy under the direction of a health care or human services professional. A qualified therapy animal is not a companion animal or a pet, but rather is used by its handler/trainer to achieve specific physical, social, cognitive, and emotional goals as part of animal-assisted therapy (“AAT”) or animal-assisted activities (“AAA”). An example of such a program is the Reading Education Assistance Dogs (“R.E.A.D”) program. Both the qualified therapy animal and its trainer must maintain current therapy registration with a nationally recognized organization, such as Therapy Dogs Incorporated, Intermountain Therapy Animals, or the Delta Society.
3. **Live Animals in the Classroom with the Prior Approval of the Principal.** Teachers may permit live animals or non-poisonous insects to be brought to, or be housed in, the classroom to support approved science curricula.

4. **Exemption for Law Enforcement Animals.** Law enforcement animals under the supervision and control of law enforcement officers trained in animal handling or animals used by contract personnel for search and seizure purposes under the District’s search and seizure policies are permitted under this Policy and are exempt from Section D of this Policy.

B. **Liability.**

Any animal brought to school must remain under control of the responsible adult at all times. The animal shall be restrained on a leash or contained in a suitable carrier. The owner or handler of any animal, including a qualified assistance animal, is responsible for the animal’s behavior and shall be liable for all damages suffered by persons who may be bitten or injured by the animal, and all damages to public or private property. The District reserves the right to have any animal on school property removed based on safety or health concerns; if the animal is out of control or the animal’s handler does not effectively control the animal’s behavior; if the animal is not housebroken or hygienic; or if the animal’s presence or behavior interferes in the functions of the District.

C. **Humane treatment of animals:**

Animals within the school shall be handled, treated, and housed in a humane manner. Animals will be kept in an environment appropriate to the species. Students or staff who are found to have mistreated, abused, or otherwise injured animals in the school shall be disciplined and may be referred to local law enforcement authorities.

D. **Procedures.** The Superintendent or his/her designee shall develop and promulgate procedures consistent with this policy that address health and safety concerns that may arise when a qualified assistance animal or qualified therapy animal is requested to be present on District property, as well as procedures addressing the review and approval process, the care and handling of on-site animals or insects, and health precautions relating to live animals or insects in the classroom. As part of the District’s consideration of a request for the presence of an animal permitted on District property pursuant to this policy, the District may require certain documentation, including but not limited to:
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a. documentation that the qualified assistance animal or qualified therapy animal is properly trained and licensed;

b. certification of proper vaccinations verified by a veterinarian licensed in the State of New Mexico;

c. documentation that the trainer/handler for the qualified therapy animal is properly trained; and

d. documentation of adequate liability insurance.