



PACE

Property and Casualty Coverage for Education

An ounce of prevention can save the day



Animals in classrooms: steps to reduce potential liabilities

Most teachers, students and parents agree that animals provide extremely valuable instructional opportunities. They interest students in science, biology and animal behavior; help develop skills of observation; teach respect and appreciation for living things and develop a concept of stewardship for our world. Students who participate in the care and feeding of classroom animals build a sense of responsibility. Studies have also shown that children who have a difficult time sitting still and reading can benefit from sitting with a calm dog and reading to the animal.

The flip side of the issue is that there are some potential risks that need to be mitigated when animals are present in school settings.

Transmission of disease: There are diseases that can be transmitted from animals to humans. (For example, reptiles are a primary source of salmonella.) To reduce the risk of disease always maintain healthy animals (be cautious of animals brought in from the wild), keep cages or aquariums clean and implement a comprehensive hand-washing program so students wash their hands properly after any contact with animals.

Allergens: Animals can diminish indoor air quality so good ventilation is essential.

Bedding materials for small animals can develop mold and fungus. Some children are sensitive to dust, animal hair and dander which may trigger asthma.

Bites and scratches: Cats and dogs are the most common sources of bites and scratches. Proper supervision can mitigate risk and knowing the behavior patterns and history of an animal is important. In Oregon, legal liability includes a requirement that there was a *foreseeable* risk of danger. That means that any action taken to ensure the temperament and obedience of an animal not only reduces potential risk to students, but also reduces risk of liability claims if a problem occurs.

(For more information on preventing dog bites in schools, dogbitelaw.com/PAGE/prevent.html)

Questions to ask

Before allowing animals in school, ask the following questions:

- Are hygienic procedures in place for handling the animal?
- Does the animal have the required license and immunizations?
- Does the school need any licenses?
- What is the history of the animal? (Behavioral history, where did the animal come from, has it been sick, etc.)
- Have parents been notified? (Parents should always be notified when animals are going to be present in classrooms.)

Animals (especially dogs) require special attention around young children.

Children need to be instructed on how to approach and interact with animals. Animals should have experience with children and

dogs, specifically, should have received obedience training at a young age. Restraint devices such as leashes and leads should be required. Visiting animals and their handlers can be required to have insurance.

Service animals for the physically and mentally impaired

State law provides the right to have a service animal in any place of public accommodation or transport, including schools and school buses. Federal laws (ADA and IDEA) may also require school districts to allow animals to accompany a person in school.

Conclusion

The educational benefits of animals in school situations can certainly exceed the risks, if care is taken to mitigate problematic situations. Applying basic common sense and an understanding of animal and human behavior will greatly reduce potential liabilities. OSBA can provide a sample policy regarding animals in district facilities; contact Policy Services, 503-588-2800 or 800-578-6722.



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For assistance reducing potential liabilities in your schools, contact a PACE pre-loss consultant:

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