

# ANIMALS IN SCHOOLS FOR CURRICULAR PURPOSES

## Background

The District acknowledges that students can benefit from the use of live animals (“animal(s)”) to enhance curriculum and education. The decision to have animals in schools must consider student and staff health and safety as a priority. The responsible use and care of animal(s) must be provided for and the animal(s) cannot be an impediment to learning. The District also acknowledges that guide dogs or assistance dogs, which assist a student or employee with a disability, provide known benefits, are recognized in legislation, and their presence at school or work is covered under *Administrative Procedure #XXX - Assistance Dogs (under development)*.

## Procedures

### 1. General

- 1.1 The use of animals in schools for curricular purposes ranges from the presence of a classroom pet, to demonstration in a classroom setting, to the participation in a science fair. *Youth Science Canada (YSC)* oversees the use of animals in K-12 education, science classes, and science fairs across Canada and employees and students must comply with YSC requirements.
- 1.2 The vast majority of animals are not appropriate for curricular use in schools and are prohibited. See *Appendix A - Prohibited Animals*; the *City of Vancouver Animal Control Bylaw*, and relevant provincial and federal legislation.

## Ownership

- 1.3 The District will not take ownership of animals unless a third-party organization certifies, prior to purchase that:
  - 1.3.1 The animal species is known to have a natural lifespan that is close to or less than the duration of classroom curricular activity;
  - 1.3.2 Releasing the animal(s) into the wild as part of the educational and curricular goals is known to be safe, humane, environmentally sound, and legal. Caution must be taken by the employee introducing the animal(s) to adequately research and rule out detrimental environmental impacts before purchase when the deposition plan is to release the animal(s) into the wild. Example of this may include, but are not be limited to: Salmon fry supplied and coordinated via *BC Fisheries* being released to local creeks or rivers.; or,
  - 1.3.3 A transfer of ownership agreement is in place for the end of the educational use of the animal(s) with the third-party supplier of the animals. Any third-party owner of any animal(s) used in curriculum must provide assurance that the

animal(s) will be cared for in an ethical and humane fashion beyond the animals' time in the curricular activity.

- 1.4 A teacher may procure and personally own an animal(s) used in curriculum and must commit that the animal(s) will be cared for in an ethical and humane fashion beyond the animals' time in the classroom or curriculum. The only exceptions are sections 1.3 - 1.3.3 above.

### Replace, Reduce, Refine

- 1.5 All District schools and educational programs will practice the foundation concept of "*Replace, Reduce, and Refine*" with respect to animals used in education. Replace, Reduce, Refine is endorsed by YSC, the *Canadian Council on Animal Care*, and other relevant agencies. In order of consideration, all animals in schools for educational purposes will align with the practices below:

- 1.5.1 **Replacement:** Replacement refers to methods which avoid or completely replace the use of live animals where such animals are not essential to the educational outcomes. Replacement is the preferred strategy over Reduction, or Refinement.

Examples of Replacement in K-12 education include, but are not limited to:

- 1.5.1.1 Using videos, models, graphics, observations in the wild, or visits to farms in place of using or viewing live animals at school or the classroom.

- 1.5.2 **Reduction:** Reduction refers to any method, considered after Replacement, that will result in fewer animals being used to achieve the educational outcomes. Reduction is always used in conjunction with Refinement.

Examples of Reduction methods in K-12 education include, but are not limited to:

- 1.5.2.1 Housing one or two classroom pets (as per species recommendation) not more; using one demonstration animal or one per lab partnership/group, not one per student; decreasing the duration over which animals are kept in classrooms; having third-parties bring animal(s) for demonstration rather than having animals housed in classrooms on an ongoing basis.

- 1.5.3 **Refinement:** Refinement refers to any method, after Replacement and Reduction, that modifies the environments, activities, care, treatment, and methods applied to an animal which will reduce animal suffering and/or support natural behavior and habitats in achieving educational outcomes. Reduction with Refinement are the minimum expected strategies to be applied for the use of animals in education.

Examples of Refinement methods in K-12 education include, but are not limited to:

- 1.5.3.1 Selecting appropriate and diurnal animals (animals that are naturally awake during the daytime, such as gerbils and guinea pigs); providing appropriately sized enclosures for the species and

number of animals; providing for the animal's natural behaviours with environmental enhancements (running wheels, hiding places, water, natural environmental features, etc.); enforcing rest periods from stimulation; provide training on proper animal handling and care; providing care plans that include detailed provisions for school breaks.

- 1.6 All school employees must practice Replacement, Reduction, and Refinement methods with respect to animals in curriculum or classrooms as well as the ethical and responsible use and care of such animals.
- 1.7 All Principals must review education plans involving animals to ensure Replacement, Reduction, and Refinement methods are used by employees and students to achieve educational outcomes. This must be completed prior to approval of animal(s) being added to the school for curricular purposes.
- 1.8 The use of animals must be connected to defined curricular outcomes which have been set-out by the teacher and approved by the Principal.
- 1.9 Whether in science curriculum or at science fairs, the demonstration or experimentation on animals must be ethical and responsible and, at a minimum, must meet YSC recommendations/requirements. The use of an animal(s) for entertainment purposes only is not supported by the District. Similarly, class demonstration or experimentation on animals which is invasive or causes the animal excessive stress or harm is not supported by the District.

## **2. Classroom Pets**

- 2.0 One of the more common ways that K-12 educators utilize animals in education is through the addition of a classroom pet; particularly in elementary schools. Classroom pets are characterized as smaller domestic diurnal animals (such as gerbils, guinea pigs, domestic rats and mice, or freshwater fish) which are restricted to enclosures and which remain in the classroom for longer durations (several months or up to a school year). Classroom pets must meet certain criteria in advance of their introduction to the classroom, in order to be permitted in a school and must not be explicitly prohibited by the District. Refer to *Appendix A – Prohibited Animals* and *Appendix B – Request to Introduce a Classroom Pet*.
- 2.1 A classroom pet will be owned by the full-time teacher or other full-time classroom employee who works in the classroom where the pet is to reside. The District or school will not own classroom pets. When and if the owner transfers schools or is no longer employed by the District, they must take the animal with them and remove the animal(s) from the school. Classroom pets must not breed or reproduce while at the school. Any incidental offspring of a classroom pet will remain the property and sole responsibility of the employee owner. The employee owner of any classroom pet(s) must provide for the humane care of the animal(s).
- 2.2 The animal must have a curricular purpose and the animal(s)'s employee owner must request permission in writing and receive approval from the Principal in advance of introducing any animal as a classroom pet. Refer to *Appendix B - Request to Introduce a Classroom Pet*.

- 2.3 The Principal may deny an employee's request for a classroom pet based on the presence of concerns over allergies and allergens, fear, health or safety issues, or logistical issues including space, workload on school administration, or other issues that may be raised by the presence of the pet(s) in the classroom.
- 2.4 If a classroom pet(s) is approved by the Principal, the approval will be for the duration of one (1) school year or less. Each year, or at the end of the approved term, the employee may re-submit their written request to the Principal for approval to extend the use of the animal(s) as classroom pet(s).
  - 2.4.1 Classroom pets must not remain in the school over the summer break. Animal care plans are required for weekends and other breaks in the school calendar. In the foreseeable event of the employee's occasional absence, animal care plans must include the assignment of an alternate employee care giver at the school and be listed in day books to inform on-call employees regarding care requirements. Such planning should be made in advance of introducing the pet(s) and must be included with the request to introduce a classroom pet. Management of the care plan during any school break is the sole responsibility of the owner. The employee owner may not rely on the custodial staff at the school to provide this care.
- 2.5 Classroom pets will be kept in an enclosure and will not free roam in classrooms or the school.
- 2.6 Classroom animals/pet(s) are to be provided an appropriate environment for their care and needs, including:
  - 2.6.1 Appropriate enclosures, in size, configuration, and internal accessories for the animal's well-being and specific to the species.
  - 2.6.2 Ready access to food and constant access to water or other necessities of life for the species.
- 2.7 Classroom pets must have access to veterinary services on a diligent and as needed basis at the expense of the employee owner.
- 2.8 Cleaning up and housekeeping associated with a classroom pet(s) is the responsibility of the owner, not the custodial staff at the school.

Reference: *BC Guide Dog and Service Dog Act; Administrative Procedure XXX – Assistance Dogs (Under development); Animal Control Bylaw No 9150, City of Vancouver, BC; Youth Science Canada; Canadian Council on Animal Care; Appendix A – Prohibited Animals; Appendix B – Request to Introduce a Classroom Pet*

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