

Pasco County Guidelines for Animals in Schools

Animals are effective and valuable teaching aids. Safeguards are required to reduce the risk of infection and injury. These abbreviated recommendations are based on guidelines developed by Dr. Bill Johnston of the Alabama Department of Public Health and adapted by Dr. Gail Hansen of the Kansas Department of Health and Environment.⁹² Recommendations are also available from the National Science Teachers Association⁹³ and the National Association of Biology Teachers.⁹⁴ We have adapted them to meet the needs of our county.

Animals that pose an increased risk

These animals are prohibited in school displays:

- Wild mammals
- Animals at higher risk of rabies such as raccoons, skunks, foxes, coyotes, and wild bats
- Wolf-dog hybrids
- Aggressive or unpredictable animals
- Stray animals with unknown health and vaccination history
- Venomous or toxin-producing animals (some spiders, insects, reptiles, and amphibians)

Conditions for specific animals

Some animal species may be permitted for school demonstrations, under special conditions:

- Non-psittacine birds such as canaries, finches, mynahs, and diamond doves are appropriate for school use. Due to risk of infection with psittacosis, psittacine birds such as parrots, parakeets, budgies, and cockatiels should be allowed only if children do not handle them or clean their cages. Cages should be clean and the bird's wastes contained.
- Fish can be excellent pets in schoolrooms, if disposable gloves are worn when cleaning aquariums, and used tank water is not disposed of in sinks used for food preparation or obtaining drinking water.
- Pet rabbits and rodents (e.g., mice, rats, hamsters, gerbils, guinea pigs, and chinchillas) are appropriate for school use, if housed indoors in cages and not previously exposed to rabies reservoir species.
- Guide, hearing, or other service animals and law enforcement animals may be allowed if under the control of a responsible adult familiar with the specific animal.
- Ferrets can be allowed but should not be handled by children, just the person responsible
- Reptiles (including turtles, lizards, and non-venomous snakes) and amphibians are allowed but special precautions must be taken when there is student contact.

General guidelines for animals permitted in schools

Animals should be handled and housed humanely with appropriate precautions:

- **Children must wash hands after all contact.**
- **Parents are notified of animals in classroom through newsletter at beginning of year.**
- They are displayed by an experienced professional in enclosed cages or under restraint.
- Animals are not allowed to roam or fly free. Areas for animal contact are designated.
- Contacts with children are supervised.
- Animals are not allowed in areas where food or drink are consumed.
- Areas contaminated by the animal or its wastes are thoroughly cleansed.
- Animals are clean and free of internal (worms) and external parasites such as fleas, ticks, and mites.
- Special precautions may be necessary with children who are immunocompromised or are asthmatic.¹