

# **Pets in the Classroom<sup>1</sup>**

<b>Depending on Assistance Needed, Call:</b>	
DGS – Environmental Health and Safety	202–576–8962
IAQ Coordinator	
<b>School IAQ Team</b>	
IAQ POC	
IAQ Lead	
School Nurse	

## **Situation Description**

Keeping classroom pets can create many teachable moments that can be tied to the curriculum in many ways. However, classroom pets require a lot of care and attention, and your students will look to you as a model of responsible pet care. They will notice how you treat the animals and will pick up on the attitudes you project through both your words and actions<sup>2</sup>. If you currently have one or more classroom pets, or are simply thinking about introducing some into your classroom, please review the recommendations that follow. For more information, such as pet-centered activities and suggestions for which pet is right for your classroom, contact DGS-OSH.

## **Tips for Selecting Classroom Pets**

Classroom pets should be limited to animals that are bred in captivity, and necessary to achieve the learning objectives. DC Official Code 8-1851.01 states that only appropriately sized animals with good temperaments may be introduced into the classroom. The provision limits classroom use to instructional purposes only.

The terms “appropriately sized” and “temperament” are not defined by law, so it is up to the individual teacher or administrator to make decisions about student safety and how much space can be given up in a classroom.

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<sup>1</sup> This Protocol contains information developed and implemented by DCPS and approved by the Environmental Health and Safety (ESH) and can be used as a guideline for other District LEAs. Each LEA should review and edit the contents to conform to their procedures and contacts.

<sup>2</sup> *Is a Classroom Pet for You? The pros and cons of keeping a classroom pet in the K-6 classroom*, [http://www.humanesociety.org/parents\\_educators/classroom\\_pet.html](http://www.humanesociety.org/parents_educators/classroom_pet.html), (October 2009).

DC Official Code 8-1808(h)(1) specifies that only the following animals can legally be kept in the District: domesticated dogs, cats, rodents, and rabbits, and captive-bred species of common cage birds, non-poisonous snakes, fish, and turtles that are not kept for commercial purposes. Racing pigeons are also legal if the owner obtains a pigeon coop permit. Turtles fewer than 4 inches in diameter are illegal under federal law. There are no exemptions for classroom use, so animals such as small lizards, amphibians, or hedgehogs are prohibited.

### **Caring for Classroom Pets**

All classroom pets should be examined by a veterinarian prior to being introduced to a classroom. The animals should be up to date on all vaccinations and follow all of the veterinarian's guidance on proper handling, habitat, feeding, care, and other conditions appropriate for that kind of pet. The law also requires that the animals are cared for in a humane manner and that sufficient food and water are provided. Moreover, the storage of food must be kept sealed in "rodent proof" containers (hard plastic, such as Rubbermaid or Tupperware). Also, cleanliness in and around cages is paramount.

Animals may remain at the school during holidays only if there is a way to provide adequate care during this time. Animals must be adopted out or given to a humane organization when the animal is no longer needed for classroom purposes.

### **Students' Health**

Always consider the allergies and sensitivities of students before getting any classroom pet. Students should be observed for signs of pet allergies, since allergies can develop at any time. Communicate with parents/guardians so that they know a pet is present in the classroom in advance. Also, meals and snacks should never be served in classrooms with pets, nor should pets be allowed to roam in areas where food is being served or stored. Cleanliness in and around prepared habitats is paramount.