

## **ANIMALS IN SCHOOL**

### **Policy**

The Slate Valley Unified Union School District is committed to promoting safety for faculty and students when animals are brought into the classroom and to provide guidance about which animals pose a public health threat in a school setting.

### **I. Animals Prohibited from School**

Rabies is now endemic in Vermont's wildlife populations. Any fur-bearing animal is susceptible to this very serious fatal disease and, if infected, can transmit it to students and staff. A single wild animal or unvaccinated pet carrying rabies has the potential to expose a large number of children.

Based on the recommendation from the Vermont Department of Health the following animals are prohibited from the Slate Valley Schools:

**Wild Animals and Domestic Stray Animals** – Wild animals and domestic stray animals pose a risk for transmitting rabies as well as other zoonotic diseases (disease which can be transmitted from animals to people) and, therefore, should not be allowed in schools or handled by staff and children. These include bats, raccoons, skunks, foxes and other wild animals (either live or dead) as well as any stray domestic animal.

**Pet Dogs, Cats, Wolf-Hybrids, Ferrets and Farm Animals** – These pets do not belong in the school. They may pose a risk for transmitting rabies, as well as parasites, fleas, other diseases and may cause harm to students and staff. Guide, Hearing and Other Service Dogs or Law Enforcement Dogs may be allowed in school or on school grounds with proof of current rabies vaccination.

**Poisonous Animals** – Spiders, venomous insects and poisonous snakes, reptiles and lizards should be prohibited for safety reasons.

**Bats** – Bats pose a high risk for transmitting rabies and for this reason bat houses should not be installed on school grounds.

### **II. Guidelines for Other Animals**

Slate Valley Schools will determine whether the following animals are allowed or prohibited.

**Birds** – Psittacosis, a serious disease that infects birds, can be transmitted to humans. Even birds that appear healthy can be carriers of this disease. Because of the risk of psittacosis, birds (especially parrots, parakeets, macaws, pigeons, doves, etc.) should not be handled by children and should never be allowed to fly free in the classroom.

**Reptiles and Amphibians** – Reptiles (iguanas, snakes, lizards and turtles) and amphibians (frogs, salamanders and toads) can spread salmonella to humans, resulting in diarrhea and fever. This disease can be life-threatening in very young children, the elderly and people with weakened immune systems. These animals should not be handled by children, pregnant women or individuals with infants at home. Anyone handling a reptile or amphibian should wash their hands thoroughly, immediately following contact.

**Chicks and Ducks** – Chicks and ducks can spread salmonella to humans. This disease can be life-threatening in young children, the elderly and people with weakened immune systems. These animals should not be handled by children, pregnant women or individuals with infants at home. Anyone handling chicks or ducks should wash their hands thoroughly, immediately following contact.

**Guinea pigs, hamsters, gerbils, rabbits** – Healthy guinea pigs, hamsters, gerbils and rabbits pose a limited health risk. Such animals may be allowed as classroom pets or as occasional visitors with advance notification to the principal and teacher and under the strict supervision of an adult. Even tame animals may react aggressively in strange situations; therefore, student contact with animals should always be closely supervised and animals should not be allowed to run loose in the classroom.

Students should not be allowed to “kiss” these animals.

**Fish** – Fish pose a very limited health risk and may be allowed in the classroom. Tank water should not be disposed of in sinks that are used for food preparation or for obtaining drinking water. Wash hands thoroughly after cleaning tanks.

**If any animals are allowed on school property:**

- Any animal present in the school or on school grounds must be clean and healthy so that the risk of their transmitting disease to students and teachers is minimal. Any education with animals should also be used to re-emphasize proper hygiene and hand washing recommendations.
- In the event of an animal bite or scratch, procedures for first aid and notification of parents or legal guardians should be followed. In addition, animal bites should be reported to the local health officer in the town where the bite occurred **within 24 hours**, so the biting animal can be observed for any signs of illness.
- No animals should be allowed in food preparation areas at any time. Food handlers should not be responsible for clean-up of animal wastes, and cages and tanks should not be cleaned in food handling areas.
- Animal cages or tanks should be cleaned thoroughly on a regular basis. Students should not be allowed to handle or clean up any form of animal waste (feces, urine, blood, etc.) and wastes should be disposed of in a plastic bag or container with a lid. Anyone who cleans a cage or tank should wash their hands immediately after completing the task.
- Children with allergies or those with immune deficiencies may be especially susceptible to diseases transmitted by animals or allergic reactions; therefore, special precautions may be needed to minimize risks. Consultation with the school nurse and the child’s parents about precautionary measures is strongly advised.

**III. Implementing and Communicating the Animal Policy**

To effectively protect students and staff, this Animal Policy must be followed by the entire school community. Parents, teachers, school nurses and other staff must be reminded of the policy on a regular basis and know of its provisions.

*Date Warned: September 6, 2019*

*Date Adopted: September 16, 2019*

Slate Valley Unified Union School District