

## **332 ANIMALS IN SCHOOLS**

### **Beliefs**

The Maskwacis Education Schools Commission (MESC) follows cultural and traditional teachings of the Maskwacis Cree, in particular Wahkohtowin. Wahkohtowin is the belief that all things are related and connected, that all of existence has spirit and that living in a good way requires us to maintain good relationships with each other and other aspects of existence. We recognize that respect for mother earth, elders, youth, and the Treaties are paramount to planning ahead and making decisions for future generations.

Animals hold great cultural significance and MESC believes that they fulfill a variety of roles including offering spiritual and educational benefits, acting as pets, assisting children and adults with disabilities (service dog) or providing therapeutic support (emotional support or therapy animals).

Administrators, staff and parents should be aware of the potential health risks associated with handling and caring for animals. The decision to allow animals at a school or worksite should consider potential health risks to staff and students, animal supervision and care, precautions for safe handling and the educational purpose. Before approving animals in a school or work setting, administrators must ensure the potential hazards are assessed and appropriate safe work practices and controls are in place.

### **Definitions**

**Animal:** is an animal or classroom pet brought into the school for a presentation or approved to be kept in the classroom for some type of educational value, such as a means to stimulate learning and/or teach students about responsibility and compassion through their care and upkeep. The teacher is ultimately responsible for the care and maintenance of the classroom pet within the classroom and to ensure the health and safety of the school community.

**Emotional Support and Therapy Dogs/Animals:** Emotional support or comfort dogs and therapy dogs are not considered service dogs under Alberta's Service Dogs Act and Service Dogs Qualifications Regulations.

- Emotional support dogs provide comfort and companionship to the dog owner, but are not trained to do specific tasks that assist a disability.
- A therapy dog is brought by the owner on visits to people in institutions or in their homes, providing others with an opportunity to interact with a dog.

Service Dog: A service dog is defined as a “dog trained as a guide for a disabled person and having the qualifications prescribed by the regulations”. (Service Dog Act)

- For the purposes of this Administrative Procedure, the service dog definition would include dogs that have been trained by a recognized program such as Canine Vision Dog Guides, Special Skills Dog Guides, Hearing Ear Dog Guides, Seizure Response Dog Guides, and Autism Assistance Dog Guides, etc.
- A dog that is a “pet” or “support animal” shall not be considered a service dog.
- Service dogs must be registered in Canada. The Government of Alberta developed provincial standards and a qualified list of animal training schools to support the safety and inclusion of Albertans who rely on Service Dogs. (See Alberta Training Standard of Organizations to be Eligible for the Qualification List pursuant to the Service Dogs Qualification Regulation A/R 59/2017 as amended from time to time.
- The use and access of Service Dogs are protected under the Alberta Service Dogs Act.

## Procedures

### 1. Animals

- 1.1. Animals are not permitted at Commission-owned, leased or rented school buildings, grounds or worksites. **Exceptions** may be given for service dogs, educational assistance animals and animals serving a specific educational purpose such as pet therapy, participation in pet days, short term educational projects or social events.
- 1.2. The approval of an animal into the working or learning environment shall be determined by the Principal or Designate based on information gathered:
  - 1.2.1. All animals shall be in good health, well groomed, show no evidence of disease and be friendly toward staff and children.
  - 1.2.2. Animals shall be restrained (for example, in a cage or on a leash), appropriately licensed and exhibit suitable controlled behaviour.
  - 1.2.3. Proof of relevant vaccinations and licensing may be requested.

- 1.2.4. Aquariums are permitted if keeping fish serves an educational purpose.
  - 1.2.5. Reptiles including turtles and iguanas may carry salmonella bacteria and are not appropriate pets for schools.
  - 1.2.6. Ferrets or wild animals (for example, bats, raccoons, skunks, foxes, etc.) that carry a higher risk for transmission of rabies shall not be permitted.
  - 1.2.7. Venomous or toxin producing spiders, insects, reptiles and amphibians shall not be permitted.
  - 1.2.8. Young farm poultry and ruminants (for example, cattle, goats, sheep, deer) shall be avoided unless meticulous attention to personal hygiene can be assured.
2. The person bringing the animal on site shall be responsible for its proper care, supervision and clean-up associated with the animal. If this person is a young child, alternative arrangements may need to be made with a staff member to assist if necessary.
3. Classrooms or worksites that include individuals with poor health status, asthma or allergies shall not allow animals that may negatively impact those individuals. Before bringing an animal on site, staff and parents shall be notified in advance to identify any potential health issues or concerns.
4. Animals shall not be left unattended. The teacher is ultimately responsible for the care and maintenance of any animal kept in the classroom and for ensuring the health and safety of the school community.
5. Animals shall not be left on site during extended breaks or holidays or brought on site by staff during this time as this can interfere with custodial and maintenance activities.
6. The Principal or Commission can request the immediate removal of the animal from Commission property at any time for any reason.
7. The Commission shall not accept responsibility for injury to or related liabilities in the event an animal is injured while on Commission property.

8. Animals shall not be allowed to roam free in a classroom or building and shall always be kept on a leash or in the appropriate enclosure.
9. Staff and students shall wash their hands thoroughly with soap and water before and after handling animals or animal items.
10. Students shall be instructed how to behave around an animal. They shall not tease or provoke the animal or remove the animal's food.
11. Students shall be instructed to keep their faces away from a pet's mouth, beak or claws and never to kiss an animal. Unsupervised handling of animals by children under 12 shall not be permitted. Specific areas for animal contact shall be designated.
12. A tray or drop sheet shall be kept under animal cages to capture waste and other materials. These materials shall not be permitted to spill onto floors and furnishings. Surrounding room surfaces shall be kept clean to avoid attracting mice and other pests.
13. The animal's living area shall be kept clean at all times. Students assisting with this task shall be under adult supervision.
14. Cleaning cages or aquariums in kitchens or anywhere food is eaten or drinking water is obtained shall not be permitted.
15. Disposable or household cleaning gloves shall be worn when cleaning aquariums or animal cages. Anyone who assists with cleaning these items shall wash their hands well when finished.
16. All animal waste shall be disposed of immediately. Animal waste boxes shall not be accessible to students. Feces and waste shall be placed in a separate plastic bag and then disposed of in the outside trash bin.

#### References

[Alberta Human Rights Act](#)  
[Alberta Service Dogs Act](#)  
[Blind Persons' Rights Act](#)  
[Alberta Occupational Health and Safety Act](#)  
[Regulations and Code Alberta Public Health Act and Regulations](#)  
[Alberta Service Dogs Qualifications Regulation 197/2008 \(consolidated up to 34/2015\)](#)