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Hosting a Bee Hive

by Scarlett Sadler

In some school districts, bee hives are giving off quite the buzz. Bee hives can provide ample opportunity for students to learn more about the ecosystem, a bee's basic needs, and why bees are important to the environment. However, bee hives can also bring a swarm of concerns. Bee hives require year-round care, including inspection and maintenance. School district staff responsible for this level of care also need to be provided with the knowledge and resources necessary to manage and maintain a bee hive and avoid creating a nuisance for neighbors or the public.

When evaluating whether a school site will host a bee hive, the district should first consider the following:

1. Will the bee hive serve an educational purpose as required by Education Code?
 - Pollinator Live and Whole Kids Foundation can help develop a lesson plan
2. Some cities and counties do not allow bee hives. School sites will need to check to ensure bee hives are allowed. School sites should also familiarize themselves with any local ordinances pertaining to bee hives. The surrounding city/county may also require special bee hive registration. In California, [AB 2468](#) requires all California beekeepers to register an apiary.
3. It is possible that modifications to facilities at the school site will need to be made in order to accommodate a bee hive. If the school district is required to obtain permits or special approval for necessary modifications, the school district will need to determine if it can accommodate these requirements.



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4. A school site will need to have a plan to mitigate safety concerns not only for students and staff but the plan will need to address the safety concerns of visitors and nearby neighbors.
5. As with any project, there will be initial and ongoing costs. In order to maintain a bee hive, training, supplies, personal protective equipment, signage, site modifications, and unexpected expenses all need to be budgeted for. A school site should have a plan in place to support the project.



School districts should also consider partnering with a beekeeper association and/or a beekeeper before placing a bee hive at a school site. A beekeeper can provide a school site with the knowledge, support, and guidance needed to identify a suitable location that is appropriate for a bee colony and assist the school site with addressing bee hive maintenance concerns. Ideally, a bee hive should be placed in a location that maintains adequate distance from areas regularly occupied by students, staff, and visitors. The entrance to the bee hive should also be oriented or designed so that people, and near-

by properties are not adversely affected by the bees' flight pattern. The bee hive will also need to be placed in a location that allows whoever is responsible for beekeeping to open, inspect, and manage the bee hive. If students will be accessing the bee hive, ADA accessibility must also be maintained. School sites should consider that significant buy-in from staff, parents, and surrounding community members might be needed, and a school site may need to validate the community benefits of hosting a bee hive.

There may be additional considerations a school site needs to take into account, and the following points can provide an idea of potential considerations:

- Staff responsible for bee keeping will need to be trained to ensure the health and safety of those around the bee hive as well as the health and safety of the bees. The school site will need to determine who is responsible for maintaining the bee hive and how staff carries out the maintenance.
- If staff and/or students are responsible for harvesting the honey, they will need to receive training on not only the process of extracting the honey, but how to do so under hygienic conditions. It is likely personal protective equipment will be needed for this task. The school site might consider outsourcing this task and partnering with an experienced bee keeper.
- If students are allowed to access the bee hive, they will need to be provided with proper training and personal protective equipment. Students who access bee hives will also need to provide the school site with a signed permission slip by a parent or guardian to access the bee hive. School sites will also need to consider how access will be restricted during non-school hours, weekends and holidays.
- A School site will need to clearly post warning signs notifying staff, students, and visitors that bees may be found in the vicinity.



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- In some cases, bees can pose a significant health and safety risk. The school site should have a protocol for responding to bee stings and allergic reactions, including access to epinephrine auto-injectors (commonly known as epi pens). The plan should contemplate the availability (or lack) of a school nurse and local first aid protocols.
- Swarming typically occurs in late spring / early summer when staff, students, and visitors are likely to be on campus and outdoors. The school site should have a bee hive swarm procedure in place should a swarm occur. There are management methods that can be utilized to minimize or eliminate the possibility of swarming; however, these methods should only be utilized by school site staff or bee keepers trained and experienced in swarm management and capture.



In order to successfully host a bee hive at a school site, proper planning is imperative. By developing and implementing thorough protocols to follow, hosting a bee hive can offer an enjoyable educational experience for students and staff. For more information on bee hive programs or grant opportunities to host a bee hive check out [The Bee Cause Project](#). For additional information or questions about bee hives, contact the [PRISM Risk Control Department](#).