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NEW STUDY HIGHLIGHTS EDUCATIONAL VALUE OF PETS IN THE CLASSROOM

Phase I of “Pets in the Classroom” study by American Humane Association and Pet Care Trust surveys nearly 1,200 North American teachers, reveals that teachers see classroom pets having real educational, leadership and character-building value

Researchers designing second phase of study to measure effects of classroom pets on schoolchildren

WASHINGTON, D.C., July 22, 2015 — A class hamster, guinea pig, lizard, or even goldfish can be fun and exciting for schoolchildren, but it also has real educational, leadership and character-building value, according to a new study published today by American Humane Association in collaboration with the Pet Care Trust. Phase I of the two-phase **“Pets in the Classroom”** study features surveys and interviews of nearly 1,200 teachers and reveals that having a class pet can teach children important values like compassion, empathy, respect, and responsibility for other living things, as well as give them much-needed leadership skills and stress relief. Certain challenges still remain, according to the study’s findings, like teaching children to cope with pet loss, the cost of ownership for teachers, and responsibility for the animal when school is not in session. The study’s objective is to advance the research of Pet Care Trust’s Pets in the Classroom program, which provides grants to Pre-K through eighth grade educators to adopt and provide ongoing care for small animals in their classrooms. The full report is available online at www.americanhumane.org/pets-in-classroom-study.

Between November 2014 and February 2015, teachers who had received a Pet Care Trust grant and had cared for their classroom pet for at least three months were asked to participate in online surveys or phone interviews with American Humane Association researchers with the goal of learning about their experiences to date. The first phase of the study endeavored to find out how classroom pets are being utilized throughout the United States and Canada and what the perceived benefits and challenges of keeping pets in today’s classroom environment are.

By far, the most common classroom pets adopted by surveyed teachers were fish at 31 percent. The next most common type of classroom pet was the guinea pig (13.7%), followed by the hamster (10.5%), the bearded dragon (7.8%), and the leopard gecko (7.3%). Overall, findings indicate that teachers view both the uses and benefits of classroom pets as primarily centering around six objectives:

- To teach children responsibility and leadership via animal care.
- To teach children compassion, empathy and respect for all living things, including animals, humans, nature, and the world we share.
- To enhance and enrich a variety of traditional academic lessons, from science to language arts.
- To provide an avenue for relaxation when children are stressed or when their behavior is unstable and/or challenging to manage (for both typically developing children and those with special needs).
- To help students feel comfortable and engaged in the classroom and with their peers, so that the school environment is more conducive to quality learning, growth, and social connections.
- To expose students to new experiences and opportunities (particularly for those who do not have pets of their own), which may translate to a decrease in unfounded fears and biases among children.

According to survey and interview participants, the primary challenges of having a classroom pet included:

- Spending out-of-pocket money to care for the pet, both on a daily and long-term basis.
- Assuming responsibility of pet care and/or other accommodations when school is not in session.
- Ensuring safe, productive, and educational interactions between the students and the pet(s).
- Managing and coping with pet loss for students and themselves.

The results from this phase not only provide important contributions to this exciting area of human-animal interaction research, but they also highlight the welfare needs of classroom pets and will be used to design a rigorous study for Phase II that will measure the impact of classroom pets on children in select U.S. and Canadian elementary schools over a period of ten weeks. Based on the findings from Phase I, American Humane Association researchers will examine and measure how children with a pet in the classroom benefit in the areas of increased social skills, decreased problem behaviors, and improved academic competence when compared to children who do not have a pet in the classroom.

“Phase I of this groundbreaking study confirms our long-held belief in the inherent value of classrooms having a pet,” said Dr. Robin Ganzert, American Humane Association president and CEO. “We hope through this study to examine and measure the degree to which these animals can help develop young people’s academic growth and social and leadership skills, as well as instill in them the vital value of compassion, which will benefit them, the world’s animals, and all of us throughout their lives.”

“When the Pet Care Trust launched the Pets in the Classroom program nearly five years ago, we had high hopes that the program would have a positive impact on children in schools throughout North America,” commented Steve King, Pet Care Trust executive director. “The Phase I study results confirm what we have been hearing from teachers since day one—classroom pets do make a difference. We are delighted that we have been able to award more than 56,000 grants, bringing a pet into the lives of more than two million children. And we are committed to doubling that number within the next few years.”

To read the full Phase I report of American Humane Association and Pet Care Trust’s “Pets in the Classroom” study, please visit www.americanhumane.org/pets-in-classroom-study.

About American Humane Association

American Humane Association is the country's first national humane organization and the only one dedicated to protecting both children and animals. Since 1877, American Humane Association has been at the forefront of virtually every major advance in protecting our most vulnerable from cruelty, abuse and neglect. Today we're also leading the way in understanding the human-animal bond and its role in therapy, medicine and society. American Humane Association reaches millions of people every day through groundbreaking research, education, training and services that span a wide network of organizations, agencies and businesses. You can help make a difference, too. Visit American Humane Association at www.americanhumane.org today.

About Pet Care Trust

Incorporated in 1990, **The Pet Care Trust** is a non-profit, charitable, public foundation whose mission is to help promote public understanding of the joys and benefits of pets through education, support, and interaction, and to enhance knowledge about companion animals through research and education.