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## Sharing the Value of Classroom Pets

*Survey produced by the Pets in the Classroom grant program shows behavioral and school performance improvements as a result of having a classroom pet*

As part of a recent survey conducted by the Pets in the Classroom grant program, teachers across the U.S. and Canada have shared valuable insight into the many benefits that classroom pets can bring to the educational setting. The survey — which was conducted this spring and received 6,700 overwhelmingly positive responses from teachers who have received Pets in the Classroom grants within the past two years — reinforces what teachers have been sharing with the program through thank you notes, letters, photos, and stories: these miniature classmates are more than just another teaching tool.

**Academics:** Seventy percent of teachers incorporate their pet into their classroom curriculum at least 1-2 times per week. Nearly 50 percent do so every day. And over 60 percent have seen some improvement in students' academic performance since incorporating the pet into the curriculum. "It was such a fight to get some of my students to read," commented one teacher. "After getting Pipsqueak, our hamster, they started voluntarily reading to her! It increased their reading stamina as well as their fluency!"

**Attendance:** Fifty-nine percent of teachers saw an improvement in attendance due to their classroom pet. A teacher shared, "One of my students had very poor attendance from 2nd-4th grade. At open house, her mom explained to me that she has a hard time getting her daughter to come to school. That student was there every day- even when she didn't feel good, because she didn't want to miss seeing me and Darwin. At the end of 5th grade, this student had missed zero days! Darwin had a huge impact on this!" Another teacher commented, "I had a girl come into our school earlier this year with severe anxiety and depression. She was deathly afraid of our leopard gecko. She barely came to school once a week. She now is to the point where she hasn't missed a day in months, and she loves holding Leo (our gecko). She loves being in charge of feeding/watering him! Thank you so much, Pets in the Classroom!"

**Decreased anxiety:** Eighty-six percent of teachers saw some decrease in anxiety among students. A special education teacher remarked, "Your grant has contributed so much to our classroom environment. The students have responded to the sound of the water in the fish tank, and it seems to calm them and ease anxiety behaviors."

**Empathy/Compassion:** An overwhelming 95 percent of teachers saw an increase in empathy and compassion, thanks to a classroom pet. "My kids are more connected, they care deeply for our Reggie and it has become okay to talk about emotions, needs, and wants," stated one teacher. "They have also learned responsibility, not only for Reggie's feeding, etc., but also for his need for love, affection, even quiet time." Another teacher commented, "Our classroom pets serve as a primary source of self-regulation for students with some of the most significant social, emotional, and behavioral needs in our district. Pets have natural qualities which bring out kindness, compassion and caring in people. I witness it on a daily basis in my classroom and throughout the school."

**Collaboration among students:** Ninety-two percent of teachers surveyed saw an improvement in collaboration among students. One teacher commented, "My favorite thing about having a class pet is that I have noticed kids who would never choose to socialize and interact in free time will get in groups and talk and laugh over something the guinea pig did or pet and play with her. My 24th "student" is the best peacemaker and behavior manager ever!"

**Responsibility:** Ninety-seven percent of teachers saw an increase in student responsibility. "Our classroom guinea pig, Piper, has definitely made my first graders more responsible," stated one teacher. "They feed her and love her throughout the week. She has also been a positive behavior reward that the students can earn special time with her."

In addition to these attributes, teachers also indicated that they saw an **increase in social skills, leadership, student engagement, and self-esteem**. As one teacher put it, "Teaching in a Title 1 District, our guinea pig Max has brought smiles to students who I had never seen smile before getting to hold him. He has made the quietest students talk. He has taught the students responsibility, given them unconditional love that they desperately need. I only wish you could see firsthand just how beneficial your program is to students."

The Pets in the Classroom grant program was established by the Pet Care Trust with the knowledge that classroom pets can be a valuable teaching tool that many teachers do not have access to because of a lack of funding. 24,311 Pets in the Classroom grants were awarded during the 2017-18 school year — the largest number of grants awarded in a single year — bringing the total number of grants to over 119,300 since the program's inception in 2011. With the significant impact that classroom pets are having on students, the Pets in the Classroom grant program is gearing up for another school year of providing funding to PreK – 9th grade teachers across the U.S. and Canada beginning August 1<sup>st</sup>.

Learn more about the Pets in the Classroom grant program by visiting [www.PetsintheClassroom.org](http://www.PetsintheClassroom.org).