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## Teachers Share the Value of Classroom Pets

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

**ABINGDON, MD (July 19, 2019)** - Teachers across the U.S. and Canada have shared valuable insight about the transformative power of classroom pets through [a survey](#) conducted this spring by the Pets in the Classroom grant program. The survey — which received over 10,200 overwhelmingly positive responses from teachers who have received Pets in the Classroom grants within the past two years — shows how teachers are using pets in the classroom and the multitude of **ways that students are benefiting from them**.

A staggering 96 percent of respondents said that having a pet in the classroom has been a positive experience, and over 90 percent would be **extremely likely** to recommend the Pets in the Classroom program. While the survey yielded some impressive statistics, the most heartwarming results were the comments shared by teachers about how pets are transforming their students' lives — from children who were able to overcome crippling anxiety about attending school, to those whose anger and behavioral issues subsided after a classroom pet helped them learn empathy.

According to the survey, over 50 percent of teachers use classroom pets almost every day as part of their curriculum, with 35 percent incorporating pets in reading activities every day or a few times per week and another 25 percent using pets with reading activities one to three times per month. Teachers reported that their students had demonstrated improvements in the following areas:

**Attendance:** Nearly 78 percent of teachers saw an improvement in attendance due to their classroom pet. A teacher shared, "One of the 3rd grade students suffered from a lot of anxiety about coming to school. They got sick on the bus almost every day on the way to school and ended up being sent home. This student was transferred to my homeroom and put in charge of choosing other students to help them take care of Spike [bearded dragon]. After the homeroom change, and starting each day with classroom pet interactions, the student's attendance improved significantly and they hated missing school!"

**Decreased anxiety:** Over 93 percent of teachers saw some decrease in anxiety among students. A teacher remarked, "I had a student with severe anxiety. She would be hysterical each day and unable to come into the room. When I assigned her to care for the hamster before school, she became excited to get to school and couldn't wait to come to class. She would feed, water, and exercise the pet each morning. It changed her life for the better!"

**Empathy/Compassion:** An overwhelming 98 percent of teachers saw an increase in empathy and compassion, thanks to a classroom pet. "I saw a student who was not in control of his emotions and angry all the time, become so sweet and compassionate with my bunny," stated one teacher. Another teacher commented, "Teaching

empathy with our class pet has been great. We have talked about feelings and emotions from a hamster's perspective, which leads into feelings and emotions about our own self and others."

**Test/academic performance:** Nearly 78 percent of teachers saw an improvement in test/academic performance. One teacher stated, "I had a student who did not do well with change and shut down on a daily basis. After getting our pet, Little G, I talked to him and his mom and came up with a behavior plan. If he participated and completed his work, he was able to feed and help take care of Little G on a daily basis. His behavior quickly improved and he became engaged in the classroom! He went from being in the 20th percentile on standardized tests, to being in the 90th percentile in math!"

**Responsibility:** Ninety-eight percent of teachers saw an increase in student responsibility. "Our leopard gecko, Layla, has been a huge help teaching responsibility in my classroom," stated one teacher. "Students know they need to feed, water, and keep her lights on for her to grow and thrive."

**Self-Esteem:** Ninety-two percent of teachers surveyed saw an improvement in self-esteem in students. One teacher commented, "I have found that our classroom pets have allowed some of the shyer students to come out of their shells. Being exposed to the pets has given these students more confidence in their interactions with their fellow students."

**Increased social skills:** Ninety-five percent of teachers saw an increase in social skills. "I have a non-verbal student in my classroom this year and being able to have this student develop social skills with the other students by feeding and caring for our pet has been phenomenal," commented one teacher. "It has helped our classroom grow and build solid relationships that have lasted the whole year!"

**Student engagement:** Over 97 percent of teachers saw an increase in student engagement. One teacher said, "I teach a PreK/K Special Needs class with Autistic children. The kids became more engaged in activities during instruction time. Kids that were nonverbal are now verbal. They always wanted to do things and include their fish." Another teacher commented, "Some of my students are 'reluctant readers.' They have become much more engaged during read-to-self-time when they are able to sit near our leopard gecko and read."

**Decrease in necessary student disciplinary measures:** Of the teachers surveyed, 86 percent saw a decrease in necessary student disciplinary measures. "Students that have been identified as having severe behavior problems in the past because of fighting were hired as veterinarians for the month," shared one teacher. "They took their responsibility seriously and didn't want to lose their job. Ultimately their attitude towards school changed drastically. They became some of the most responsible class veterinarians."

In addition to these encouraging statistics, **51 percent of teachers (5,238 respondents) shared a "success story" - a meaningful way that a pet has helped a student or students in the classroom.** These inspirational success stories are what drives the Pets in the Classroom grant program to continue providing grants to teachers each school year.

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. During the 2018-19 school year, 25,550 Pets in the Classroom grants were awarded — the largest number of grants awarded in a single year — bringing the total number of grants to over 144,895 grants 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.

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