Teachers Share the Impact of Classroom Pets in 2019-20 School Year

Survey produced by the Pets in the Classroom grant program shows that, while the 2019-20 school year was different, children still experienced behavioral and school performance improvements as a result of having a classroom pet.

ABINGDON, MD (June 22, 2020) – While this past school year was quite different for most teachers and students, the transformative power of classroom pets has not changed. Through a survey conducted this spring by the Pets in the Classroom grant program, teachers across the U.S. and Canada have shared valuable insight into how teachers are using pets, both in the classroom and in remote learning, and the multitude of ways that students are benefiting from them.

According to the survey, 97 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. Additionally, 79 percent of teachers use classroom pets every week as part of their curriculum, with nearly 69 percent incorporating their pet into virtual learning. One teacher stated, “This is an awesome program and even through distant learning, our class leopard gecko has been a part of our daily Google Meets. Especially during these unusual learning experiences, our class pet has helped students with anxiety and engagement. I have had feedback from many parents that seeing our Little Leo was something that helped their kids during this time.”

Many teachers shared inspiring comments through the survey, with 56 percent of teachers (1,471 respondents) telling about the meaningful ways that their pet has helped a student or students in the classroom. These comments coincide with the results from the survey in which teachers reported that their students had demonstrated improvements in the following areas:

**Attendance:** Seventy-nine percent of teachers saw an improvement in attendance due to their classroom pet. One teacher shared, “I had a child in my second grade class, let’s call him J. J had bad attendance and would act out in school. Since Tootie (our guinea pig) came along, J’s attendance was almost perfect and he would do whatever he could to behave and earn his daily Tootie Time.”

**Decreased anxiety:** Nearly 95 percent of teachers saw some decrease in anxiety among students. A teacher remarked, “As a 6-8th grade science teacher, I find a lot of my students struggle with anxiety. Many of my ‘kids’ have found solace in coming into my classroom to take care of our classroom pets or to simply watch them. My students have found that being in the quiet presence of an animal is a safe and healthy way to calm the mind.”

**Empathy/Compassion:** An overwhelming 98 percent of teachers saw an increase in empathy and compassion, thanks to a classroom pet. “Having classroom pets has decreased anxiety and increased empathy. I’ve noticed that my students have shown much more compassion and sensitivity towards one another,” stated one teacher.

**Test/academic performance:** Nearly 76 percent of teachers saw an improvement in test/academic performance. One teacher stated, “A little girl in my classroom always was super stressed out and had a hard time focusing and staying awake. I used the bunny as a reward for her to stay awake and she LOVED that. She was soon making all A’s and B’s on her report card.”

Contact:  
Jackie King  
Executive Director  
The Pet Care Trust  
3465 Box Hill Corporate Center Drive  
Suite H  
Abingdon, MD 21009  
Phone: 443-921-2825 ext. 105  
E-mail: jackie@kingmgmt.org  
www.petsintheclassroom.org
Responsibility: Ninety-eight percent of teachers saw an increase in student responsibility: “I have a student who had some behavioral issues when he started the school year. By giving him the responsibility of caring for this pet and working to get to do his caretaker chore, we saw a reduction in unwanted behaviors. Many of my other students saw how often the student was able to ‘engage’ with the pet and they wanted to earn the same opportunity! What an awesome sight to see!”

Self-Esteem: Ninety-three percent of teachers surveyed saw an improvement in self-esteem in students. One teacher commented, “The fish have been wonderful to have in the peace center. It has done wonders with self-esteem and behavior with the majority of students.”

Increased social skills: Ninety-six percent of teachers saw an increase in social skills: “I had a student last year who was very shy and never spoke up in class. Since getting our classroom pet, he rushes into class and stares at him in the tank and asks questions about him. He was so eager to pet the snake and is now an integral part of our classroom discussions. Even my supervisor noticed a change in the student during a teacher observation.”

Student engagement: Ninety-eight percent of teachers saw an increase in student engagement. One teacher said, “I have a child in my class who was quite disengaged prior to Timbit’s arrival. Now, he will do anything to be able to sit with Timbit. While my class of Grade 4/5 students have all benefited from having a gecko, Timbit has unknowingly motivated this student and changed the course of his year.”

Decrease in necessary student disciplinary measures: Of the teachers surveyed, 88 percent saw a decrease in necessary student disciplinary measures: “I have had several students with poor behavior. I made a deal that if they could make it through the day without any issues that I would allow them to hold the guinea pigs for fifteen minutes at the end of the day. They really and truly worked very hard to reach this goal. After doing this over the course of days and sometimes weeks, I have seen several students turn their behavior around.”

While the survey yielded some impressive statistics, it’s the heartwarming comments shared by teachers about how pets are transforming their students’ lives that truly show the impact of the program — 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, to those who needed extra emotional support and encouragement during remote learning. As one teacher stated, “To say that having class pets is beneficial would be an understatement. It is therapeutic for both staff and students. I am amazed at how my students responded in such a positive way to our pets. It opened the floor for honest conversations about managing emotions, stress, and how our actions and reactions affect others.”

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 2019-20 school year, 26, 309 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 171,196 since the program’s inception in 2011. As we anticipate unprecedented challenges when children transition back to the classroom, the Pets in the Classroom grant program is ready to help by providing funding for classroom pets 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).