Classroom Pets Still Making an Impact

Through the Pets in the Classroom grant program, students are experiencing the joys and benefits of interacting with pets, both in the classroom and through remote learning.

The Pet Care Trust is pleased to announce the impact theirPets in the Classroom grant programhas made since the program’s inception in 2011, helping millions of students experience the joys and benefits of companion animals both at school and remotely. Through December 31, 2020, the program has brought classroom pets to over 171,000 classrooms, impacting nearly 7 million students nationwide and in Canada.

The program, which provides funding for a small animal or pet supplies to pre-kindergarten through 9th grade teachers in both private and public schools, was established by the Pet Care Trust with the knowledge that, while pets are a valuable teaching tool, many teachers have very limited resources for the support of classroom animals. About 49% of the program’s grants go to Title 1 schools and 44% go to classrooms serving students with disabilities.

With all that has occurred over the last year, teachers have been coping with students experiencing emotional and behavioral problems – such as anxiety, difficulty focusing, and self-control problems – on an even greater scale than prior to the pandemic. Pets in the Classroom is one of the tools teachers have been able to utilize to give students emotional support during school, in whatever form it occurs.

A survey conducted in the spring of 2020 by the Pets in the Classroom grant program highlighted the ways that classroom pets are impacting students. Through the survey, teachers reported that their students had demonstrated improvements in the following areas:

- 98% of teachers saw an increase in empathy and compassion, thanks to a classroom pet.
- 98% of teachers saw an increase in student responsibility.
- 98% of teachers saw an increase in student engagement.
- 97% of teachers saw an improvement in attendance due to their classroom pet.
- 96% of teachers saw an increase in social skills.
- 95% of teachers saw some decrease in anxiety among students.
- 93% of teachers surveyed saw an improvement in students' self-esteem.
- 88% saw a decrease in necessary student disciplinary measures.
- 76% of teachers saw an improvement in test/academic performance.
The survey also showed that 67% of teachers incorporated their classroom pet into virtual learning, meaning classroom pets are still making an impact despite the changes in education over the past year. As teacher Stephanie Looney stated, “Erni, our bearded dragon, has helped students cope with the changes brought by distance learning. Her picture greets them when they log into Google Classroom. I’ve also had her hanging out with me during some class Zooms, and I’ve shared additional videos and photos of her with the students. She helps things feel a little more normal for them.”

In addition to aiding teachers in providing the transformative power of classroom pets, Pets in the Classroom strives to be a resource to teachers through their website (www.petsintheclassroom.org), which features over 300 lesson plans (including video lessons teachers can share with their classes), 12 animal care sheets, and a detailed chart containing an extensive list of animals, the recommended experience level, diet recommendations, etc. for teachers deciding which type of classroom pet to get.

To learn more about the program, visit www.petsintheclassroom.org.