

Back to School is Best with Pets

It's back to school season, and whether children are returning to the classroom in-person or virtually, research suggests that pets can facilitate engaged learning and promote good behavior.



1 Improved Academic Performance

HABRI funded the largest-ever study on pets in the classroom, which found that the presence of pets is associated with improved academic performance and social skills in children¹. Research has also demonstrated beneficial effects of pets in educational settings on cognitive measures such as adherence to instructions, memory tasks, categorization, and object recognition^{2,3}.

2 Motivation for Learning

According to one study, 60% of teachers with classroom pets agree their children are more excited about school with a pet present⁴. For many children, animals are likely to be powerful motivators, as children learn and retain more when they are emotionally invested⁵. The “predictable unpredictability” of animals can stimulate learning and curiosity in young children, especially around animals and biology⁶.



3 Increased Reading Competency

A friendly dog has the power to increase reading performance in small children⁷. Research has demonstrated that children are better able to concentrate while reading with a dog compared to reading alone⁸, and are more enthusiastic about reading when they can do it in the presence of a dog⁹.

4 Development of Social Skills

Research suggests integrating small animals such as guinea pigs in classroom settings¹⁰ and therapy dogs into social and emotional learning initiatives¹¹ can improve children's engagement and learning of social and emotional skills. Pets support the learning and development process by helping children develop a sense of responsibility, sensitivity towards others¹² and increased confidence¹³.



5 Reduced School-Related Stress

Studies have also found that pets, including small animals such as rabbits¹⁴, can reduce school-related stress, which can positively improve academic performance¹⁵. Pets don't just help younger students: studies show college-aged kids can benefit from the human-animal bond too! College students with pets report higher levels of social support than those without¹⁶, and targeted interventions involving therapy animals have been found to reduce stress^{17,18}.

For more information about the health benefits of pets, visit www.habri.org