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Pets in the Classroom Program Recognized by U.S. Department of Education for Advancing STEM Education

FOREST HILL, Md. — December 10, 2024 - The Pet Care Trust's **Pets in the Classroom** and **Dogs in the Classroom** programs have been recognized by the U.S. Department of Education for their innovative contributions to STEM education. During the Department's recent discussion, "[Innovative STEM Education Approaches Beyond Emerging Technologies](#)," these programs were celebrated for inspiring the next generation of STEM leaders through hands-on learning with classroom pets.

Melinda Thomas, Executive Director of the Pet Care Trust, was a featured panelist at the event, highlighting how these programs foster curiosity, critical thinking, and problem-solving skills by integrating animals into classroom learning.

"Innovation in STEM education inspires the next generation of leaders through experiential learning, cross-disciplinary thinking, and community engagement," said Mekka Smith, Senior Policy Advisor in the Office of the Deputy Secretary, U.S. Department of Education. "We are proud to spotlight programs that ensure all students have access to high-quality STEM experiences."

Supporting STEM Growth in Classrooms

The Pet Care Trust strives to support educators in fostering STEM growth through their grant programs, animal care sheets, and free, standards-based lesson plans. These resources empower teachers to integrate hands-on, animal-related activities into their curriculum, helping students explore concepts in biology, math, environmental science, and more.

Classroom Pets and STEM Education

Classroom pets offer students engaging, real-world ways to explore STEM concepts:

- **Hands-On Learning:** Students observe and care for animals, studying life cycles, behaviors, and habitats, which deepens their understanding of biology and environmental science.
- **Creative Problem Solving:** Classroom pets spark curiosity and innovative thinking as students explore biodiversity, adaptation, and ecosystems.
- **Real-World Applications:** Measuring a pet's growth or calculating care costs applies math and science to everyday scenarios, reinforcing STEM concepts in practical ways.

“The presence of pets in the classroom connects theoretical concepts with real-world experiences, making STEM learning both fun and impactful,” said Melinda Thomas, Executive Director of the Pet Care Trust.

About Pets in the Classroom and Dogs in the Classroom

Pets in the Classroom provides grants for pre-kindergarten through 9th-grade teachers to purchase and maintain classroom pets. These grants enable students to experience the joy and responsibility of animal care while enhancing their educational development.

Dogs in the Classroom, in partnership with select leading national therapy dog organizations, brings trained therapy animal teams to schools, offering emotional support to students and creating unique STEM learning opportunities.

Both programs, established by the Pet Care Trust, aim to positively shape children’s lives by fostering meaningful interactions with animals.

For more information, visit www.petsintheclassroom.org.