

October 22, 2021

Jodi Gonzales  
Principal  
John W. North High School

Via e-mail: [REDACTED]

Dear Ms. Gonzales:

I'm writing from [TeachKind](#)—PETA's humane education division, which works with thousands of educators nationwide to bring compassion into the curriculum—after having seen a [disturbing video](#) showing John W. North High School teacher Candice Reed wearing an imitation Native American headdress and dancing around a classroom in what appeared to be a racist display. As you may know, PETA is an organization that has long championed equality for *all* individuals and has dedicated decades of hard work to stopping the disrespectful treatment of those regarded as different from or lesser than others. We urge you to adopt TeachKind's [Challenging Assumptions](#)—our secondary school social justice curriculum designed to encourage empathy toward others regardless of race, gender, sexual identity, age, ability, or species—to help prevent offensive incidents like this one from occurring in your community. I think you will be pleased with its ability to help students (and sometimes teachers) open their eyes and hearts.

As former classroom teachers, we understand that social justice can be an intimidating subject matter to explore with students, but Reed's actions highlight the necessity of classroom conversations about reasons why it's wrong to disrespect marginalized groups. Challenging Assumptions gently helps educators broach this topic and engage students—especially members of Gen Z, who are generally highly motivated by social justice issues, including animal rights—in civil and productive dialog about the importance of respecting *all*, including those who don't look or behave like them.

The Common Core-aligned lesson plans and activities included in Challenging Assumptions foster students' higher-order thinking skills as they focus on the theme of the systematic "othering" of and discrimination against people of color, women, the LGBTQ+ community, people with disabilities, and various animal species. Students explore reasons why we should take all living, feeling beings into consideration, reflecting on and evaluating students' beliefs and behavior and identifying areas in which they can better align their actions with their values.

Developing empathy for animals can be a key step in developing empathy for and rejecting violence against humans who some may not readily relate to. Bullying and youth violence are rampant in school communities today, so it's vital to equip educators with the tools and training to teach compassion and encourage students to embrace differences and diversity.

TeachKind staff work with schools throughout the country to assist them in integrating humane education into their curricula, and we'd love to discuss with you the possibility of working with your school. Please let me know when you might be available.

Sincerely,

Megan Snyder  
Manager  
TeachKind, PETA's Humane Education Division

