

May 10, 2022

Tim Forson
Superintendent
St. Johns County School District

Via e-mail: [REDACTED]

Dear Mr. Forson:

I'm writing from [TeachKind](#), PETA's humane education division, which works with thousands of educators throughout the U.S. to bring compassion into the curriculum. We saw a [report](#) out of Jacksonville that five Ponte Vedra High School students allegedly gutted a shark and hung the animal up in the rafters of the school, presumably as part of a senior prank. There is reportedly video surveillance of this act, and the shark may have been a protected species. In light of this disturbing account, we urge you to equip your staff with tools to prevent similar such horrific incidents and make sure that both present and future classes of students understand that a "prank" like this one involving cruelty to animals is never funny or OK, and we're offering our free resources—including "[Empathy Now](#)," **our step-by-step trauma-informed guide to addressing and preventing youth violence against animals**—to that end.

As mental-health and law-enforcement experts well know, [cruelty to animals](#) and violence against humans are inextricably linked. Many educators are aware that serial killers and school shooters tend to have a history of cruelty to animals, but it's also common for young people to have witnessed the abuse of animals, which can be a [form of trauma](#), and children who have observed acts of cruelty to animals are more likely to abuse animals themselves. Schools can help mitigate the effects that traumatizing incidents in their community can have on students.

Given that [young people all around the country are acting out and becoming violent](#), likely in part because of the challenges and trauma resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic, it's vital that schools set a standard of compassion. According to [Florida law](#), teachers are expected to provide instruction in "[k]indness to animals." This can be achieved, in part, by incorporating [humane education](#) into your schools' curricula, which would allow you to reach susceptible kids before they engage in violent behavior. The school year may be nearly over, but by acting now and adjusting your curricula for this fall, you can help prevent acts of cruelty in the future.

While you may have seen some of PETA's attention-grabbing campaigns, you may not be as familiar with TeachKind's work. We're [former teachers](#) who strive to find common ground with school leaders and create educationally sound materials that help meet students' unique needs while developing their empathy. We're sending you our free "[Share the World](#)" curriculum. It's the perfect tool for teaching young students the Golden Rule and the importance of compassion and empathy. We're also sending you "[Challenging Assumptions](#)," our free secondary school social justice curriculum designed to encourage empathy toward others regardless of species, race, gender, sexual identity, age, or ability. Our staff would love to provide additional materials and even host virtual presentations for your students—all free of charge. We'd also be happy to work directly with teachers in your district.

On behalf of PETA and our many members and supporters who live in Florida, thank you for your consideration. May I please hear from you as soon as possible?

Sincerely,

Andrew Burton
TeachKind Assistant

