

April 10, 2023

Jason Perez, Ed.D.
Superintendent
Deer Creek Schools

Via e-mail: [REDACTED]

Dear Dr. Perez:

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 Oklahoma City that two juveniles were allegedly seen in an online video violently beating a pair of dogs on Sunday, April 2.

Community members expressed difficulty watching the video due to its distressing content, and it was reportedly [circulated on campus](#), which was likely traumatizing to students who may have seen it and contributed to parents' fear for their children's safety at school. A second video, which reportedly featured a threat against a middle school, was released the following day, further legitimizing safety concerns.

In light of this disturbing report, we urge you to equip your staff members with the tools they need to address students' aggression, foster prosocial behavior, and help prevent further incidents of cruelty. To that end, we're offering our free resources—including [Empathy Now](#), our **step-by-step trauma-informed guide to addressing and preventing youth violence against animals**.

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—including [Salvador Ramos](#), [Payton Gendron](#), [Nikolas Cruz](#), and [Ethan Crumbley](#)—tend to have a history of cruelty to animals, and [Sandy Hook Promise](#) includes cruelty to animals on its "[10 Critical Warning Signs of Violence](#)" list. Considering that schools across the country continue to experience violence with staggering frequency, it's imperative that you and your staff be familiar with this critical warning sign and take it seriously—many lives could depend on it. Research indicates that 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.

It's vital that schools set a standard of compassion. Fostering empathy for animals throughout the curriculum is easy, and [research suggests that it can help students academically](#). It would also help your district meet the expectations of [Oklahoma's character education initiative](#), which include preparing students to be responsible and caring citizens. Existing programming could be bolstered by incorporating [humane education](#) into your schools' curricula, which would allow you to reach susceptible kids before they engage in violent behavior.

At TeachKind, we're [former teachers](#) who support school leaders in a variety of ways to help them simultaneously develop students' academic skills and empathy for others. 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 curriculum designed to encourage empathy toward others. Our staff is on standby to provide you and your teachers with 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 Oklahoma, thank you for your consideration of this important matter. May I please hear from you as soon as possible?

Sincerely,

Julie Everett (she/her)
Correspondence Coordinator

Cc: Lenis DeRieux, Assistant Superintendent ([REDACTED])
Jenny Richards, Principal, Deer Creek Middle School ([REDACTED])

