

February 27, 2024

Dan Butler, Ed.D.  
Superintendent  
Western Dubuque Community School District

Via e-mail: [REDACTED]

Dear Dr. Butler:

I'm writing from [TeachKind](#), PETA's humane education division, which works with thousands of educators throughout the U.S. to help bring compassion into their curricula. We saw a [report](#) out of Dubuque County that the Iowa Department of Natural Resources was investigating a case involving two juveniles who were allegedly seen in a Snapchat video beating an opossum to death. The video—which the news outlet warned was disturbing and difficult to watch—appears to show the teens repeatedly striking the animal with metal folding chairs, at one point maneuvering a chair like a guillotine.

Whether or not these young people are currently enrolled in your school district, your students have likely heard the news reports. TeachKind is dedicated to providing humane education tools to support young people in processing such information and to assist leaders like you in preventing future acts of cruelty. We applaud your district's [dedication to social-emotional development](#) as well as your personal commitment to fostering positive relationships to support successful school cultures, and we'd be pleased to help enhance your existing programming.

**As mental-health and law-enforcement experts know well, [cruelty to animals](#) and violence against humans are inextricably linked.** Tracking this concerning connection, the FBI's extensive criminal database categorizes acts of cruelty against animals on par with serious felony offenses, such as arson, burglary, assault, and homicide. Many educators are aware that serial killers and school shooters 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. Research indicates that it's 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. 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.

A recent [study](#) on this connection concluded, "Teaching children to be more humane, compassionate, and respectful towards living beings can help reduce all types of violence." It's critical that schools set a standard of compassion by fostering empathy for animals throughout their lessons and activities, and [research suggests that this can even help students academically](#). Existing programming can easily be bolstered by incorporating [humane education](#) into the curricula, which would allow you to reach susceptible kids *before* they engage in violent behavior. It would also help your district comply with [Iowa's law](#) that schools make every effort to cultivate positive character qualities, including respect, kindness, and compassion.



To support this meaningful work without burdening your budget, **we're sending you our free resources, including [Empathy Now](#), our step-by-step trauma-informed guide to addressing and preventing youth violence against animals.** We're also sending our [Share the World](#) program, which is the perfect tool for teaching young students the Golden Rule and the importance of kindness and compassion. For your secondary educators, we're sending our [Challenging Assumptions](#) curriculum, which is designed to encourage empathy and promote a positive school culture by supporting students in examining discrimination and other social justice issues. We're also sending a copy of [Animalkind: Remarkable Discoveries About Animals and Revolutionary New Ways to Show Them Compassion](#), and we'd be happy to send additional copies for your schools. This mesmerizing book poignantly highlights the abundance of ways in which humans and other animals are more alike than they are different, opening the door to [meaningful classroom discussions](#).

These resources are ideal for supporting essential aspects of social-emotional learning, such as self-awareness and relationship skills, and were created to empower students as they become the next generation of global leaders—responsible critical thinkers who honor the dignity and individual needs of all sentient beings, including those who neither look nor behave like them.

Our team is comprised of [former classroom teachers](#), and we're dedicated to providing educators with free resources to help them [develop students' academic skills](#) and empathy for others simultaneously. We're available to host [virtual presentations](#) for your students by experts on various animal rights topics as well as to work directly with teachers in your district—whatever would serve your team best.

On behalf of PETA and our many members and supporters who live in Iowa, thank you for considering this important matter. I look forward to connecting with you at your earliest convenience.

Sincerely,

Julie Everett (she/her)  
Correspondence and Project Administrator  
[TeachKind](#) | PETA's Humane Education Division

cc: Kelly Simon, Curriculum & Assessment ( [REDACTED] )  
Ryan Fritz, Principal Cascade Jr./Sr. High School ( [REDACTED] )  
Jacob Feldmann, Principal Western Dubuque High School ( [REDACTED] )

