

March 12, 2024

Dashana Dulin, Ed.D.
Acting Principal
Brentwood High School

Via e-mail: [REDACTED]

Dear Dr. Dulin:

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 Suffolk County that a juvenile was charged with cruelty to animals for allegedly beating a cat with a metal bar outside Brentwood High School, reportedly inflicting severe traumatic injuries on the animal. Apparently, the torture was documented on social media, and [the disturbing footage](#) allegedly contains audio in which sounds of the cat howling in pain and a human laughing can be heard shortly after the vicious attack.

As this individual was [reportedly](#) a student at Brentwood High School at the time of the alleged assault, there's no doubt that your community is grappling with the heavy news. TeachKind is dedicated to providing free humane education tools to support young people in processing such information and to assist leaders like you in preventing future acts of cruelty. An epidemic of youth violence is surging throughout the U.S., and your district is far from alone. We have dialogues with staff from schools nationwide on a regular basis about similar situations and can share how others have responded to such tragedies by using them as opportunities for growth.

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 the connection between violence against animals and violence against humans 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 school comply with [New York's law](#) that K–12 students must receive “[i]nstruction in civility, citizenship and character education,” including “respect for others, with an emphasis on discouraging acts of harassment, bullying, discrimination.”

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 [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. Plus, we're 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 students. 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](#). Last, we're sending a set of our [anti-bullying posters](#), which can be displayed throughout your school to remind kids that they have the power to help others by reporting abuse when they see it.

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—whatever would serve your team best.

On behalf of PETA and our many members and supporters who live in New York, 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: Wanda Ortiz-Rivera, Interim Superintendent of Schools ([REDACTED])
Matthew Gengler, Assistant Superintendent for Secondary Education ([REDACTED])

