

May 23, 2024

Diana Sayavedra
Superintendent
El Paso Independent School District

Via e-mail: [REDACTED]

Dear Ms. Sayavedra:

I'm writing from [TeachKind](http://TeachKind.org), 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 El Paso that authorities were investigating a group of [apparent Charles Q. Murphree PK-8 School students](#) suspected of animal abuse related to the violent beating of a family's dog. This cruelty was reportedly recorded on video and shared in a group chat. The [footage](#) appears to depict a young person repeatedly kicking, stomping on, and hitting a dog as the canine seemingly tries to escape. The video, apparently recorded in a disturbingly entertained spirit, allegedly includes audio in which someone asks, "Are you gonna make him throw up?" along with sounds of people laughing throughout the vicious attack.

There's no doubt that your community is grappling with the news, and your students have likely heard the reports as well. TeachKind is dedicated to providing free resources to support young people in processing such information and to assist leaders like you in preventing future acts of cruelty. We applaud your school district's [dedication to social-emotional learning](#) and commitment to providing a whole-child educational experience, and we're on standby to help enhance your existing programming. The school year may be nearly over, but by acting now and adjusting your curriculum for this fall, you can help prevent future acts of cruelty by helping young people understand that all sentient beings deserve respect.

[An epidemic of youth violence is surging](#) throughout the U.S., and your district is far from alone. As [former educators](#), we know what a heavy responsibility teachers bear to help ensure *everyone's* safety to the best of their abilities. We have dialogues with staff from schools nationwide on a regular basis about similar situations and can share how others have responded to comparable incidents by using them as opportunities for growth. To that end, we're offering our free resources—including [Empathy Now](#), our research-based guide that outlines steps to address and prevent youth violence against animals. This tool was developed with trauma-informed principles at its core as a direct response to frequent similar instances nationwide.

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. Doing so would also support your district in abiding by the [Texas Education Code](#) requiring K–12 schools to implement classroom instruction for positive character traits and personal skills, including kindness, respect, empathy, and compassion.

To support this meaningful work without burdening your budget, we're sending you a selection of our free resources. These include our [Share the World](#) program, which is the perfect resource for teaching young students the Golden Rule and the importance of kindness and compassion, and our [Challenging Assumptions](#) curriculum, which is designed to encourage empathy and promote a positive school culture by supporting secondary students in examining discrimination and other social justice issues. We're also sending a set of our anti-bullying posters, which can be displayed throughout your schools to remind kids that they have the power to help others by reporting abuse when they see it. In addition, we'd love to send some free children's books that promote kindness to animals to the PK–8 schools in your district. Please let us know where we should ship them. We believe they'd be an excellent addition to your annual "I Heart Reading" fair next year.

In addition to providing free materials, TeachKind is 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 Texas, 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: Dr. Carla Gonzales, Chief Schools Officer ([REDACTED])
Marta Carmona, Deputy Superintendent Academics ([REDACTED])
Adalberto Garcia, Chief Academic Officer ([REDACTED])

