

July 11, 2024

Alan Cosby, Ed.D.
Superintendent
Etowah County Schools

Via e-mail: [REDACTED]

Dear Dr. Cosby:

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 Etowah County that authorities had arrested two young people for allegedly shooting a gun at a dog named Bullet, apparently as "target practice," and that both individuals had been charged with cruelty to animals. This violent act was reportedly recorded on video, and the alleged [footage](#) appears to depict an individual shooting a long-barrel gun at close range at a dog tied to a tree as the canine seemingly tries to escape. Bullet, who had reportedly been missing, is apparently safe and has been reunited with his family, which says it's dedicated to supporting his recovery from this traumatic ordeal.

There's no doubt that your community is grappling with this news, and your students have likely heard reports of it as well. TeachKind provides free resources to support young people in processing such information and to assist leaders like you in preventing future acts of violence. We applaud your school district's dedication to [preventing bullying](#) and providing [mental health support](#), and we're on standby to help enhance your existing programming. By acting now and adjusting your curricula for this fall, you can help prevent future acts of cruelty by helping young people understand that all sentient beings, including those who neither look nor behave like them, 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 that have occurred 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.

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 school 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’re sending a copy of [Unlocking the Animal World: Incredible Facts and How Kids Can Be Superheroes for Animals](#) and a copy of [Animalkind: Remarkable Discoveries About Animals and Revolutionary New Ways to Show Them Compassion](#), both by PETA founder and President Ingrid Newkirk. These captivating books poignantly highlight the abundance of ways in which humans and other animals are more alike than different, opening the door to [meaningful classroom discussions](#). Incorporating [lessons and activities](#) about kindness to animals into your curricula has the power to capture students’ attention, enhance their motivation, and resonate with their growing sense of empathy, all while achieving academic goals. As you prepare for the school year ahead, now would be a great time to review the books and decide whether you’d like to receive a class set for the fall.

Along with 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 Alabama, 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: Tiffany Scott, Federal Programs, Elementary Curriculum, and EL ([REDACTED])
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