

March 18, 2025

Roderick Richmond, Ed.D.  
Interim Superintendent  
Memphis-Shelby County Schools

Via e-mail: [REDACTED]

Dear Dr. Richmond:

I'm writing from [TeachKind](#), which works with thousands of schools throughout the U.S. to help bring compassion for animals into the learning experience. We saw a [report](#) that a teenager in Memphis faces an aggravated cruelty-to-animals charge after he was allegedly seen on video dragging a dog toward a pedestrian bridge and subsequently throwing the canine off of the bridge. The alleged surveillance footage – which reporters deemed “disturbing” and “so painful to watch” – apparently shows the teen initiating the violent assault twice, reportedly repeatedly dragging and dumping the dog, ultimately killing them.

Whether or not this individual attends Memphis-Shelby County Schools, it's clear that [your community is grappling with the news](#), with a neighbor [reportedly](#) shocked, relaying, “[I]got grandkids too. I wouldn't want them seeing something like that.” Your students have likely heard the news as well, and TeachKind is dedicated to providing free resources to help them process such information and assist leaders like you in preventing future hostility and aggression.

[An epidemic of youth violence is surging](#) throughout the U.S., and your district is far from alone. In light of this disturbing trend, we urge you to equip your staff members with humane education tools to foster prosocial behavior and help them be proactive against future violence. Because, **as mental health and law-enforcement experts know well, [cruelty to animals](#) and violence against humans are inextricably linked.** So much so that it's even included in Sandy Hook Promise's list of “[10 Critical Warning Signs of Violence](#).” Thankfully, this link works both ways: 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.**”

We applaud your school district's [dedication to social-emotional learning](#), and our services are designed to enhance existing programming by expanding students' circle of compassion to include other animals. This engagement-boosting approach fosters children's respect for all sentient beings, including their peers, and helps prevent future harm. Research indicates that incorporating humane education can [help students academically](#), and doing so would support your district's compliance with [Tennessee's code](#) requiring teachers to provide character education that helps students learn to “[a]ct in harmony with their positive values”.



To support this meaningful work without burdening your budget, we're sending you a selection of our free resources, including [Empathy Now](#), our step-by-step guide for schools 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. We're also sending a copy of our [Elementary](#) and [Secondary](#) school programs, which are designed to encourage empathy and compassion, and assorted [books](#) about kindness to animals. And to remind kids that they have the power to help others by reporting abuse when they see it, a set of our [Empathy for All](#) posters can be displayed throughout your schools. We would be happy to send additional copies for your students and staff.

On behalf of PETA and our many members and supporters in Tennessee, thank you for considering this important matter. I look forward to hearing from you as soon as possible.

Sincerely,

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

Cc: Angela Whitelaw, Deputy Superintendent ([REDACTED])  
Janice Tankson, Assistant Superintendent of Schools ([REDACTED])

