

May 17, 2022

Linda Cash  
Director  
Bradley County Schools

Russell Dyer  
Director  
Cleveland City Schools

Via e-mail: [lcash@bradleyschools.org](mailto:lcash@bradleyschools.org); [director@clevelandschools.org](mailto:director@clevelandschools.org)

Dear Drs. Cash and Dyer:

I'm writing from [TeachKind](http://TeachKind.org), PETA's humane education division, which works with thousands of educators throughout the U.S. to bring compassion into the curriculum. We saw a [report](#) out of Cleveland that a teen allegedly beat a dog with a stick so viciously that the animal died, while another teen apparently filmed the incident. The horrifying video was then reportedly shared via social media and with local law-enforcement officials. The teens apparently face charges of aggravated cruelty to an animal and intentional killing of an animal. In light of this disturbing account, we urge you to equip your staff members with the tools that they need to prevent further tragedies like this, and we're offering our free resources—including "[Empathy Now](#)," **our step-by-step trauma-informed guide to addressing and preventing youth violence against animals**—to that end. Because the incident took place in your community and has gained media attention, your students have likely heard about it or seen the alleged video and some may be traumatized—so regardless of where the suspects attend school, it's imperative that this urgent matter be addressed with your students and staff members.

**As mental-health and law-enforcement experts well know, [cruelty to animals](#) and violence against humans are inextricably linked.** Many educators are aware that serial killers and school shooters tend to have a history of cruelty to animals, but it's also 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. Schools can help mitigate the effects that traumatizing incidents in their community can have on students.

Given that [young people all around the country are acting out and becoming violent](#), likely in part because of the challenges and trauma resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic, it's vital that schools set a standard of compassion. According to [Tennessee law](#), "[A]ll public schools shall include character education to help ... students learn to act in harmony with their positive values." Existing programming can be bolstered by incorporating [humane education](#) into your schools' curricula, which would allow you to reach susceptible kids before they engage in violent behavior. The school year may be nearly over, but by acting now and adjusting your curricula for this fall, you can help prevent acts of cruelty in the future.

While you may have seen some of PETA's attention-grabbing campaigns, you may not be as familiar with TeachKind's work. We're [former teachers](#) who strive to find common ground with school leaders and create educationally sound materials that help meet students' unique needs while developing their empathy. We're sending you our free "[Share the World](#)" curriculum. It's the perfect tool for teaching young students the Golden Rule and the importance of compassion and empathy. We're also sending you "[Challenging Assumptions](#)," our free secondary school social justice curriculum designed to encourage empathy toward others regardless of species, race, gender, sexual identity, age, or ability. Our staff would love to provide additional materials and even host virtual presentations for your students—all free of charge. We'd also be happy to work directly with teachers in your districts.

On behalf of PETA and our many members and supporters who live in Tennessee, thank you for your consideration. May I please hear from you both as soon as possible?

Sincerely,

Andrew Burton  
TeachKind Assistant

