

February 6, 2024

Rebecca Newcomer
Principal
Hamilton High School

Via e-mail: [REDACTED]

Dear Ms. Newcomer:

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 the curriculum. We [saw](#) reports that an [apparent](#) student at Hamilton High School allegedly suffocated an 8-year-old Chihuahua named Batman while babysitting a 4-year-old child at their Waukesha County home where he lived with his guardians. Batman was reportedly found the following day with a plastic bag over his head and a stab wound to his chest, allegedly inflicted by scissors. The teen apparently admitted to police that she "just wanted the dog to leave her alone," that she "lashes out" when angry, and that the child she was babysitting likely saw her kick Batman. She reportedly faces a felony charge of mistreatment of animals with the use of a dangerous weapon.

In light of this disturbing report, we urge you to equip your staff members with the tools they need to address students' potential aggressive actions, foster prosocial behavior, and help prevent further incidents of cruelty. Although the alleged incident didn't take place on school grounds and we applaud your district's commitment to social-emotional learning, young people don't commit violent acts like this out of the blue, and with humane education, tragedies like this can hopefully be prevented in the future.

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—including [Salvador Ramos](#), [Payton Gendron](#), [Nikolas Cruz](#), and [Ethan Crumbley](#)—tend to have a history of cruelty to animals, and [Sandy Hook Promise](#) has cruelty to animals on its list of "[10 Critical Warning Signs of Violence](#)." 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. Research indicates that 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.

It's vital that schools set a standard of compassion throughout their lessons and activities. It's easy, and [research suggests that it can help students academically](#). Existing programming can be bolstered by incorporating humane education into your school's curricula, which would allow you to reach



susceptible kids *before* they engage in violent behavior. It would also facilitate your mission to support students’ “sense of responsibility toward others” in a “respectful and engaging learning environment.”

An epidemic of youth violence is surging nationwide, and as former educators, we know what a heavy responsibility teachers bear to help ensure *everyone’s* safety to the best of their abilities. Your school district isn’t alone. We have met with leaders in education around the country about similar situations, and we remain dedicated to providing them with free resources and support for years to come.

To enable this critical work without burdening your budget, we’re offering 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 you [Challenging Assumptions](#), our secondary school curriculum designed to promote a positive school culture by supporting students in examining discrimination and other social justice issues, and a copy of [Animalkind: Remarkable Discoveries About Animals and Revolutionary New Ways to Show Them Compassion](#) by PETA’s founder and president, Ingrid Newkirk. This book takes readers on a tour through the lives of countless animals and poignantly highlights the abundance of ways in which we’re more alike than not, opening the door to [meaningful student discussions](#). We’d love to send you a class set for free, so please let me know the best way to do that.

Our staff is on standby to provide you and your teachers with additional materials and even host virtual presentations for your students—all free of charge. We’d also be happy to work directly with teachers at your school.

On behalf of PETA and our many members and supporters who live in Wisconsin, thank you for your consideration of this important matter. I look forward to connecting with you as soon as possible.

Sincerely,

Julie Everett (she/her)

Correspondence Coordinator

[TeachKind](#) | PETA’s Humane Education Division

cc: Christopher Laurishke, Associate principal ([REDACTED])
Mark Otto, Associate principal ([REDACTED])

