

August 7, 2024

Anna Faye Caminita, Ed.D.
Principal
Ponchatoula High School

Via e-mail: [REDACTED]

Dear Dr. Caminita:

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 Tangipahoa Parish regarding the arrest of three 15-year-olds following an investigation into a social media video that allegedly depicts an individual viciously beating and electroshocking a dog during what appears to be a failed attempt to use him to hunt ducks. The [footage](#), which reporters deem "extremely disturbing viewing," appears to depict an individual choking the dog, repeatedly punching him in the face, screaming profanities at him, and using an electric collar to shock him multiple times. The video clip contains audio in which the dog can be heard howling in pain, and laughing and jeering can be heard throughout the violent onslaught.

Since these individuals are [reportedly](#) from the Ponchatoula area, there's no doubt that your community is grappling with this heavy news. As students prepare to return to school this week, our team is on standby to provide free resources to support them in processing such information and to assist leaders like you in preventing future acts of violence.

[An epidemic of youth violence is surging](#) throughout the U.S., and your community is far from alone. As [former educators](#), we know the heavy responsibility teachers bear to help ensure everyone's safety to the best of their abilities. We applaud your school's dedication to [preventing bullying](#) and can provide a wide range of materials to help enhance your existing programming. We regularly dialogue with staff from schools nationwide about similar situations and can share how others have responded to comparable incidents by using them as opportunities for growth.

As mental-health and law-enforcement experts know well, [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, 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 help your school fulfill [Louisiana’s recommendations for character education](#).

To support this meaningful work without burdening your budget, **we’re sending you our free resources, including [Empathy Now](#), our step-by-step guide to addressing and preventing 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 our [Challenging Assumptions](#) curriculum, which is designed to encourage empathy and promote a positive school culture by supporting students in examining discrimination and other social justice issues. Plus, we’re sending a copy of [Animalkind: Remarkable Discoveries About Animals and Revolutionary New Ways to Show Them Compassion](#), and we’d be happy to send additional copies for students, which can be used to facilitate [meaningful classroom discussions](#). And to remind kids that they have the power to help others by reporting abuse when they see it, we’re sending a set of our [Empathy for All](#) posters, which can be displayed throughout Ponchatoula High School.

In addition to providing these and other free resources, we’re available to host [virtual presentations](#) by experts on various animal rights topics for your students or to work directly with teachers—whatever would serve your team best.

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

Sincerely,

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

cc: Christine Atkins, Assistant Principal ([REDACTED])
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