

November 12, 2024

Austin Obasohan Ed.D.
Superintendent
Duplin County Schools

Via e-mail: [REDACTED]

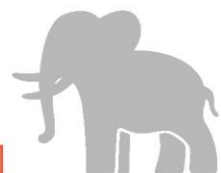
Dear Dr. Obasohan:

I'm writing from [TeachKind](#), PETA's humane education division, which works with thousands of educators throughout the U.S. to help bring compassion for animals into their curricula. We saw a [report](#) out of Duplin County that a 15-year-old was charged with felony and misdemeanor cruelty to animals for allegedly beating a cat to death with a baseball bat. Reportedly, the torture was documented on social media, and the disturbing footage apparently depicts the teen striking the feline three separate times before the video cuts off.

As this individual is [reportedly](#) a student at East Duplin High School, there's no doubt that your community is grappling with the heavy news. Students have expressed their concerns as well, with one person apparently [sharing](#), "**He goes to my school and I fear for what he's going to do next. He is not ashamed of what he did, he is proud of it.**" TeachKind is dedicated to providing free resources to help young people process such information and to assist leaders like you in the weighty task of preventing future acts of hostility and aggression.

Although this and similar crimes are often viewed as rare or unprecedented, [an epidemic of youth violence is surging](#) throughout the U.S., and **your district is far from alone**. 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. As former educators, we know the heavy responsibility schools bear to help ensure everyone's safety to the best of their abilities. Considering that schools across the country continue to experience violence with staggering frequency, it's critical that you and your staff be familiar with this 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." Fortunately, existing programming can easily be bolstered by incorporating [humane education](#), which would support you in reaching susceptible kids *before* they engage in violent behavior. Research indicates that doing so can [help students academically](#), meaning there's no need to sacrifice teaching time. Doing so would support both your district's [Strategic Plan](#) and



compliance with [North Carolina's mandate](#) requiring schools to provide character education instruction that includes “[k]indness,” “compassion,” “and treating others as you would like to be treated.”

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 our [Share the World program](#), designed to teach elementary students the Golden Rule and the importance of kindness and compassion, and our [Challenging Assumptions curriculum](#) for secondary schools, which encourages empathy and promotes 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 at East Duplin High. And to remind students 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 your schools.

On behalf of PETA and our many members and supporters who live in North Carolina, 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: Kevin Smith, Assistant Superintendent for Educational Innovation and Accountability

([REDACTED])

Kristen Hall, Chief Officer for District Effectiveness/Student Support Services/Digital Learning

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