

November 1, 2024

Jeremy J. Batchelor
Superintendent
Youngstown City School District

Via e-mail: [REDACTED]

Dear Mr. Batchelor:

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 for animals into their curricula. We saw a [report](#) out of Youngstown that authorities were investigating a group of children suspected of violently attacking a 6-year-old dog named Nico, apparently stabbing him multiple times in addition to striking him with objects. The alleged attackers are reportedly ages 5, 7, and 12.

There's no doubt that [your community is grappling with the news](#), and your students have likely heard the reports as well. 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 crime was [reported](#) to be "unique" and "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. Plus, research indicates that doing so can [help students academically](#), meaning there's no need to sacrifice teaching time.

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 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 [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 [Unlocking the Animal World: Incredible Facts and How Kids Can Be Superheroes for Animals](#) by PETA founder and President Ingrid Newkirk along with the [corresponding activities](#), and we'd be happy to send additional copies for your fifth-grade students and teachers. 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 your schools.

On behalf of PETA and our many members and supporters who live in Ohio, thank you for considering this important matter. I look forward to connecting with you at your earliest convenience.

Sincerely,

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

cc: Aaron Bouie III, Chief Academic Officer ([REDACTED])
Tiffany Varney, Executive Director of Secondary Education ([REDACTED])
Linda Yosay, Executive Director of Student Services ([REDACTED])

