

January 7, 2024

Michael Maine  
Superintendent  
Martin County School District

Via e-mail: [REDACTED]

Dear Superintendent Maine:

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 Martin County that authorities had arrested a 16-year-old suspected of stabbing a pit bull to death, and the gruesome aftermath was apparently recorded on video and shared on social media. The disturbing footage allegedly depicts the dog tied to a tree, bleeding, and suffering from gaping stab wounds.

Whether or not this individual attends Martin County Schools, it's clear that [your community is grappling with the news](#), with dozens of people expressing concern for potential future violence. Your students have likely heard the reports as well and TeachKind is dedicated to providing free resources to help them 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 "exceedingly rare," [an epidemic of youth violence is surging](#) throughout the U.S., and **your district is far from alone**. Whenever a case of a child who has abused an animal is reported, we reach out to area schools, offering free humane education tools to help them be proactive against future violence and build a kinder future for us all. Because, **as mental health and law-enforcement experts know well, [cruelty to animals](#) and violence against humans are inextricably linked**. So much so that it's even included in Sandy Hook Promise's list of "[10 Critical Warning Signs of Violence](#)."

Thankfully, that link works both ways: 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.**" Considering that communities across the country continue to experience violence with staggering frequency, it's vital that schools take every opportunity to encourage compassion and consideration in their students. Plus, research indicates that incorporating humane education can [help students academically](#), meaning there's no need to sacrifice teaching time. 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. It would also help your district comply with Florida's [law](#) requiring instruction in "kindness to animals" and character development curricula promoting "citizenship; kindness; respect for authority, life, liberty and ... self-control."



**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 a copy of our [Elementary](#) and [Secondary](#) school programs, which are designed to encourage empathy and compassion, and assorted [books](#) about kindness to animals. And to remind kids that they have the power to help others by reporting abuse when they see it, a set of our [Empathy for All](#) posters, which can be displayed throughout your schools. We would be happy to send additional copies for your students and staff.

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

Sincerely,

Julie Everett (she/her)

Correspondence and Project Administrator

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

Cc: Daniel Moore, Director of Curriculum and Instruction ( [REDACTED] )  
Lisa Estevez, Assistant Superintendent of Student Support Services ( [REDACTED] )  
Troy Labarta, Assistant Superintendent of Academics ( [REDACTED] )

