

# THE PARKLAND SCHOOL SHOOTING

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WASHINGTON DC



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## CENTRAL QUESTION



Which policy options should lawmakers consider to try and prevent school shootings in the future?

## QUICK RECAP



On February 14, 2018, 19-year old Nikolas Cruz entered Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School (MSDHS) in Parkland, Florida, pulled a fire alarm, and as students and teachers left their classrooms, he shot at them with an AR-15 semiautomatic rifle. Before running off, Cruz had killed 17 people and wounded at least 14 more. Cruz had been a student at the school, but had been expelled for disciplinary issues. He was later caught by law enforcement and has confessed to the crimes.<sup>1</sup>

## CLASSROOM DISCUSSION GUIDE



**How have politicians and policymakers responded to this tragedy?** To help foster a classroom conversation about the appropriate political response to the Parkland school shooting, read the following quotes from politicians with differing views on gun control. After reading the quotes, ask students: *Which quote do you agree with most? Why? Do you believe common ground can be found between these positions? Do you think the problem is mostly about guns or mostly about something else, such as mental illness?*

“If you are not working today to try to fix this, to try to stop these shootings, then you’re an accomplice. Those are tough words but they’re true.” —Senator Chris Murphy, D-Conn.<sup>2</sup>

“The reaction of Democrats to any tragedy is to try to politicize it.... So they immediately start calling that we’ve got to take away the Second Amendment rights of law-abiding citizens. That’s not the right answer.” —Senator Ted Cruz, R-Texas<sup>3</sup>

“People say, what about their rights? And I’m cognizant of their rights and I spent a lifetime in law enforcement protecting people’s rights. But at the end of the day, the rights of our children must be first and foremost. We need to protect our kids.... And lawmakers got to change the way they do things. The same old, same old just ain’t working.... We need less guns in America, not more guns in America.” —Broward County Sheriff Scott Israel<sup>4</sup>



“The root cause is not that we have the Second Amendment. It is that we’re not adequately addressing mental illness across the United States. We need to focus on that, and we need to focus on substance abuse.” —Senator Joni Ernst, R-Iowa<sup>5</sup>

## WHAT ARE THE STUDENT SURVIVORS SAYING?



Have your students read statements or watch videos of MSDHS students talking about what they believe people in positions of power should do in response to the shooting. Ask your students: *Do you believe that political leaders will listen to these students and take action? Why or why not? What do you think these students could do to pressure lawmakers to take action?*

“This is not just another mass shooting. No shooting is just another mass shooting. This needs to be a turning point. This shooting was the result of a number of situations and individuals, but action can still and should still be taken to prevent something like this from happening. People in Congress, people in state legislatures, just lawmakers in general, need to stand up and not let these political divisions prevent them from saving children’s lives. ‘Cause this can happen and it will happen again if they just make false promises and don’t take action. Because ideas without action remain ideas, and when that happens, children die.” —senior David Hogg<sup>6</sup>



### [Read and watch MSDHS students’ calls to action](#)

“If people can’t purchase marijuana or alcohol at the age of 18, why should they be given access to guns?” —junior Lyliah Skinner<sup>7</sup>

“I’m not trying to take everybody’s guns away, but there was a 19-year-old who legally bought an AR-15, which is a weapon of war, and if he had been through the least bit of screening, somebody would have said, ‘This person does not need a weapon like that.’ And I think there need to be a lot more regulations put on guns, and it needs to be a lot harder to get them.” —junior Cameron Kasky<sup>8</sup>

“This shouldn’t be a fight between two different parties. This should be a coming together where we all realize that something is wrong. And even if we disagree on the way to fix it, we all just need to talk about it and stop being angry and stop slandering other people because that doesn’t help anyone. And that’s why people die, because we just can’t get along. And I don’t think pushing blame on anyone is a good idea because it just makes people more angry, even if that blame seems to make sense.” —senior Isabelle Robinson<sup>9</sup>

Several MSDHS students began organizing an effort to pressure politicians to address gun violence. Thus far, this effort has included a march at the Florida State Capitol in Tallahassee in February and the following nationwide events:

- A national student and teacher walkout on March 14 at 10 a.m. for 17 minutes—one minute for each of the victims who lost their lives at MSDHS
- A student-led march in Washington, D.C., on March 24, which coincided with student marches in cities across the country
- A national school walkout on April 20, the 20th anniversary of the Columbine High School shooting in Colorado

Ask students: *Do you believe that these are effective methods for creating change? Why or why not? Do you think there are more effective methods for these students to create change? If so, what would you suggest? After these marches and walkouts, how would you follow up to keep the momentum going? What should be the goals of this movement?*



**Have students research gun laws in your state.**

- How strictly are guns regulated where you live? *The Washington Post* has created graphs and charts for comparison: [https://www.washingtonpost.com/graphics/2017/national/assault-weapons-laws/?utm\\_term=.92ea5525367f](https://www.washingtonpost.com/graphics/2017/national/assault-weapons-laws/?utm_term=.92ea5525367f)
- Gun-related advocacy organizations have their own databases of gun laws by state.
  - The National Rifle Association Institute for Legislative Affairs has a database of right-to-carry, concealed-carry, and reciprocity laws: <https://www.nracarryguard.com/resources/gun-laws-by-state/>
  - The Giffords Law Center to Prevent Gun Violence has a list of what is required and not required when purchasing and owning guns in each state: <http://lawcenter.giffords.org/search-gun-law-by-state/>

Have your students consider: *How do the laws in your state compare to those in others? Are the laws in your state adequate, or do they go too far or not far enough? Looking at the laws that have been passed, what do you believe should be done in your state?*

**Evaluate proposals.** On the next page is a chart with five proposals to reduce gun violence and/or make schools safer. Have students research each proposal and, using the evaluation matrix, determine how enforceable, just, and effective each proposal may be. After your students evaluate the proposals, discuss which ones they favor, which they would change, and which they would reject. Ask if they have any other ideas they would propose.

# WEIGHING POLICY OPTIONS TO PREVENT GUN VIOLENCE



Consider these policy options to address school safety, examining the pros and cons of each.

OPTION	WHAT SUPPORTERS SAY	WHAT OPPONENTS SAY
<b>Target-Harden Schools.</b> Schools and governments would spend money on metal detectors, surveillance cameras, emergency training, and security officers for schools, and would add one-point entry to all schools so everyone who enters is monitored.	“While it’s understandable that many school leaders don’t want their buildings to resemble prisons, the safety of students and staff is paramount. Just as many stadiums, concert venues, and workplaces require an increasing level of security, so should schools.” <sup>10</sup>	Hiring additional personnel would come at a great cost, and there is little evidence that such security measures decrease the likelihood of school shootings. Surveillance cameras were powerless to stop the Columbine shooting and lockdown policies did not save the children at Sandy Hook. “Filling schools with metal detectors, surveillance cameras, police officers, and gun-wielding teachers tells students that schools are scary, dangerous and violent places— places where violence is expected to occur.” <sup>11</sup>
<b>Ban Assault-Style Weapons.</b> Firearms containing a detachable magazine and one or more “military characteristics” would be banned, as would high-capacity magazines capable of holding more than ten rounds of ammunition.	During the ten-year ban on assault-style weapons (1994-2004), the number of gun massacres declined by 37 percent and the number of massacre deaths fell by 43 percent. Research shows that when the capacity of magazines is limited, both the incidence and fatality rate of gun massacres decline drastically. <sup>12</sup>	It is estimated that Americans already own more than 15 million AR-15-style weapons, so owners would need to voluntarily give up those firearms. Rifles only account for three percent of all homicides, while handguns account for over 65 percent. There are many other, just-as-deadly weapons that attackers could use, so this ban would not solve the problem. <sup>13</sup>
<b>Make Gun Ownership Illegal Before Age 21.</b> With the possible exception of hunting rifles, people younger than 21 years old would not be able to purchase or own handguns or semiautomatic weapons.	People under 25 years old account for almost 50 percent of gun homicides. Guns in the hands of young people also lead to more successful suicide attempts. The brain does not fully mature until the mid-20s, which is why rental car agencies do not rent to those under 25 years old. <sup>14</sup>	If a person can serve and use weapons in the military at age 18, drive at age 16, and vote at age 18, that individual should not be made to wait until age 21 to purchase a firearm. This would be an infringement of Second Amendment rights. <sup>15</sup>
<b>Allow Trained Adults in Schools to Carry Concealed Weapons.</b> After going through a training course, designated teachers and school administrators would be permitted to carry concealed firearms.	Assailants are targeting schools because they know that there will be little resistance and that they will have easy targets. Having law-abiding citizens who are trained and armed is a deterrent and can limit the damage an attacker inflicts. <sup>16</sup>	Increasing the number of guns in schools is not the answer. Whatever the training may be, teachers are not law enforcement professionals. This policy would place a great deal of pressure on teachers, and there is no guarantee that an armed teacher would be in the same place as an attacker. <sup>17</sup>

Consider these policy options to address school safety, examining the pros and cons of each.

OPTION	WHAT SUPPORTERS SAY	WHAT OPPONENTS SAY
<b>Strengthen Policies to Keep Guns Out of the Hands of the Mentally Ill.</b> Family members and others would be permitted to petition a court to remove a person’s firearms if they are determined to pose a danger to themselves or others. Gun sales would be restricted for those who are, or have been, diagnosed, treated, or institutionalized for being a danger to themselves or others. These people would be flagged on the national background check system and prevented from purchasing firearms.	The best line of defense against mass shootings is an empowered, vigilant citizenry. Allowing friends and family to use due process gives power to those who know the situation best. <sup>18</sup> Currently, states (not the federal government) determine the types of behavior that must be reported to the national background check system, creating an incomplete patchwork of mental health data. With information falling through the cracks, there is no good database to refer to during a gun purchase background check. <sup>19</sup>	Those with mental illness have been found to be responsible for only one percent of gun-related homicides, and just 14.8 percent of mass killings. Such a reform would merely revoke individuals’ Second Amendment rights. While it may be true that there should be greater access to mental health care in the United States, this is not the root cause of gun violence. <sup>20</sup> Moreover, what types of mental health issues would trigger a gun ban? For how long? This is a slippery slope with no good definitions. <sup>21</sup>

Evaluate the five proposals using the criteria below. Grade each proposal on a scale of 1 to 5, with 1 being “Does not meet this criteria” and 5 being “Fully meets this criteria.”

PROPOSAL	ENFORCEABLE	JUST/FAIR	EFFECTIVE
Target-Harden Schools			
Ban Assault-Style Weapons			
Make Gun Ownership Il-legal Before Age 21			
Allow Trained Adults in Schools to Carry Concealed Weapons			
Strengthen Policies to Keep Guns Out of the Hands of the Mentally Ill			
Other (describe):			

**Defining Criteria**

- Enforceable:** How easily can the proposal, if passed, take effect? Will there need to be funding? Will it take time to apply? Who will make certain the proposal is followed? Is the proposal straightforward or does it lead to confusion?
- Just/Fair:** Does the law apply to everyone equally or does it single out an individual or group? Does it limit individual rights? Does it protect society as a whole? Is it moral?
- Effective:** If fully implemented, to what extent will the proposal reduce gun violence? To what extent will it make schools safer?



- <sup>1</sup> Turkewitz, Julie, Patricia Mazzei, and Audra Burch. "Suspect Confessed to Police He Began Shooting Students 'in the Hallways.'" *New York Times*. 15 Feb. 2018. Web. 19 Feb. 2018. Lopez, German, and Jen Kirby. "Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School Shooting in Florida: What We Know." *Vox*. 16 Feb. 2018. Web. 19 Feb. 2018.
- <sup>2</sup> Keneally, Meghan. "The Mix of Politicians Saying It's Either Not the Time to Talk about Gun Control or It's Past Time." *ABC News*. 16 Feb. 2018. Web. 17 Feb. 2018.
- <sup>3</sup> Greenwood, Max. "Cruz Blames Dems for Politicizing Shootings." *The Hill*. 15 Feb. 2018. Web. 17 Feb. 2018.
- <sup>4</sup> Colarossi, Sean. "Broward County Sheriff Busts NRA Talking Points: 'We Need Less Guns in America, Not More.'" *PoliticusUSA.com*. 15 Feb. 2018. Web. 17 Feb. 2018.
- <sup>5</sup> Noble, Jason. "Mental Health Care, Not Gun Regulation, Is the Key to Ending Mass Shootings, Joni Ernst Says." *Des Moines Register*. 15 Feb. 2018. Web. 17 Feb. 2018.
- <sup>6</sup> Andone, Dakin. "These Young Survivors of the Parkland Shooting Give Voice to the Nation's Outrage." *CNN*. 16 Feb. 2018. Web. 17 Feb. 2018.
- <sup>7</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>8</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>9</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>10</sup> *Detroit News* Editorial Board. "All Schools Must Boost Security Now!" *Detroit News*. 17 Feb. 2018. Web. 17 Feb. 2018.
- <sup>11</sup> Warnick, Bryian, Benjamin A. Johnson, and Sam Rocha. "Opinion: More Security Measures Won't Stop Mass Shootings in Schools." *Marketwatch*. 15 Feb. 2018. Web. 17 Feb. 2018.
- <sup>12</sup> Ingraham, Christopher. "It's Time to Bring Back the Assault-Weapons Ban, Gun Violence Experts Say." *Washington Post*. 15 Feb. 2018. Web. 18 Feb. 2018.
- <sup>13</sup> Sullum, Jason. "An Assault Weapon Ban Won't Stop Mass Shootings." *Hit and Run Blog. Reason*. 15 Feb. 2018. Web. 17 Feb. 2018.
- <sup>14</sup> Winkler, Adam, and Cara Natterson. "There's a Simple Way to Reduce Gun Violence: Raise the Gun Age." *Washington Post*. 6 Jan. 2016. Web. 17 Feb. 2018.
- <sup>15</sup> *Beaumont Enterprise* Editorial Board. "PRO/CON: Should 18 Year Olds Be Able to Carry Concealed Guns?" *Beaumont Enterprise*. 24 May 2011. Web. 17 Feb. 2018.
- <sup>16</sup> BBC News. "There Have Been 18 U.S. School Shootings This Year. Is It Time to Arm Teachers?" 15 Feb. 2018. Web. 18 Feb. 2018.
- <sup>17</sup> Pefley, Al. "Should Teachers Be Armed in Wake of Parkland Shooting?" *CBS12.com*. 15 Feb. 2018. Web. 18 Feb. 2018.
- <sup>18</sup> French, David. "A Gun Control Measure Conservatives Should Consider." *National Review*. 16 Feb. 2018. 18 Feb. 2018.
- <sup>19</sup> Jansen, Bart, and Brett Murphy. "Florida Shooting Rampage Sparks Review of Mental Health Restrictions on Gun Purchases." *USA Today*. 16 Feb. 2018. Web. 18 Feb. 2018.
- <sup>20</sup> Kiesel, Laura. "Don't Blame Mental Illness for Mass Shootings; Blame Men." *Politico*. 17 Jan. 2018. 19 Feb. 2018.
- <sup>21</sup> Beatty, Gary. "Opinion: Why Mental Health Test for Gun Ownership is a Slippery Slope." *FloridaToday.com*. 15 Nov. 2017. Web. 18 Feb. 2018.





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