

Twelve U.S. school shootings into 2018, varying opinions on gun control have the issue of student safety...

CAUGHT IN A CROSSFIRE

story by

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Seventeen people were killed and 14 injured in a mass shooting at Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School in Parkland, Florida on Feb. 14. According to CNN, this was one of 12 school shootings that have occurred in the U.S. this year. CNN defines a school shooting as a shooting that involves at least one person being shot on school grounds, not including the shooter.

School shootings have rattled school communities and parents nationwide.

“(Hearing of the shooting at MSDHS) was horrifying, but unfortunately not all that surprising, just because stuff like that has been happening so often recently,” Wando High School sophomore Merritt Redden said.

Most would agree that school shootings are an issue. But where opinions conflict is in identifying the cause of school shootings and finding a way to stop them.

“I think it’s a really hard topic because everyone has really strong opinions about the issue, and it’s definitely something that needs to be solved, but it’s just a matter of how we’re gonna do that,” Wando High School junior Olivia Wader said.

Some feel that school shootings are happening so frequently because guns are too easy to access. Northwest Guilford High School English teacher Melanie Huynh-Duc shares this opinion.

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“Obviously I think allowing students to have such unlimited access to guns is not a good idea. There needs to be stronger background checks. I don’t think assault rifles should be part of the purchasing plan -- and I know things happen on the black market, but other countries have seemingly found ways around and I think we could too,” Huynh-Duc said. “I just think the unfettered access is what contributes the most.”

Others feel that school shootings are more so caused by problems in U.S. culture and mental health issues than they are by guns.

“I think it’s a combination of the fact that we live in a world where violence is just a part of our everyday lives, we’ve almost become accustomed to it,” Wando High School senior Cooper Walker said. “And also, I think a lot of these people you see going and doing this are young men who are angry with whatever be it, and a lot of these guys don’t have father figures.”

Those who believe gun control will help end school shootings have begun protesting for stricter gun legislation. School walkouts have become a popular form of student protest across the nation.

“The access to (guns) is just a lot easier these days, so people are able to get them from places like Walmart or Dick’s Sporting Goods. If someone who is crazy or

wants to do something, it’s pretty easy for them to get a gun,” Wando High School sophomore Erin O’Leary said. “I think it’s awesome that students are trying to have their voice heard and if (walkouts) are how they wanna do it, then good for them.”

Cambridge High School parent Tara Hays, like many on her side of the issue, does not think that stricter gun control will help end school shootings, but believes in other possible solutions.

“People who want to do something, if they want a gun, they’re gonna get a gun. So I don’t necessarily agree that stricter gun control or gun laws are gonna prevent that,” Hays said. “Do we need to have tighter laws around mental health checks and all that? Yes, I think so.”

On Feb. 24, President Donald Trump tweeted, “Armed Educators (and trusted people who work within a school) love our students and will protect them. Very smart people. Must be firearms adept & have annual training. Should get yearly bonus. Shootings will not happen again - a big & very inexpensive deterrent. Up to States.”

Trump’s advocacy to arm teachers has created its own controversy -- some agreeing that this will help end school shootings and some not.

“I think there’s obviously a balance.

I would never advocate that you go out and arm all teachers. What I would say is there are teachers in our schools that are qualified to do that,” Walker said. “Obviously if you don’t want to, you shouldn’t have to. But I think if a teacher wants to get qualified or is qualified, they should have an option to do that.”

As a teacher herself, Huynh-Duc does not believe arming teachers is a good solution.

“Absolutely not. There’s just no way that (arming teachers) would work. First of all, there’s not funding for us to even be (at the Southern Interscholastic Press Association conference). Students are fundraising to come to field trips like this and I have to provide my own supplies, so there’s no money for that, logistically speaking,” Huynh-Duc said. “Secondly, I’m not trusted with the front office’s copier code, so I shouldn’t be trusted with a firearm.”

O’Leary believes a combination of ideas from both sides of the issue would help end school shootings.

“I feel like a lot of people go back and forth and debate whether it’s a mental health issue or whether it’s a guns thing. I feel like it’s both. Like maybe we need to cut down on the age we sell guns, because you can get some guns at 18,” O’Leary said. “And also at the same time, look at

mental health and people need to take reports of mental health problems more seriously.”

Huynh-Duc worries that because of a lack of agreement on different sides of the issue of student safety, nothing will be done to stop school shootings from happening in the future.

“I’ve lived through Columbine and obviously several other shootings between then and now, and so it was heartbreaking to see yet another one,” Huynh-Duc said. “Often what I see is things just kinda go back to normal. There’s a period where people are upset and clamoring for change, and then it fades away and then it’s just back to normal.”

In a poll of 102 students at SIPA, 68 percent said they felt unsafe at school due to recent mass shootings at schools.

Redden, who’s school recently issued a “code red” after rumors of a possible shooting, says she worries about her safety at school on a daily basis.

“(A shooting at our school) is definitely a real possibility, which is really scary. I feel like, in a sense, with how large our school is, we’re almost just waiting for something to happen,” Redden said. “If there’s a way to avoid that, that should definitely be put in place.”

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What do you think the biggest proponent to gun violence in schools is?

access to guns / 59%

mental health issues / 18%

bullying / 14%

all combined / 9%