An Integrated Curriculum For The Washington Post Newspaper In Education Program

Do Something

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Parents of children who lost their lives or were injured in mass shootings have formed groups to educate children and adults and to lobby legislators for gun reform. Victims of mass shooting have had their lives changed, whether a presidential assistant, a member of Congress, a student, an attendee of a movie or a concertgoer. In addition to the loss in mass shootings, there are many more lives affected by random, accidental and targeted shootings in which one to three persons are involved.

Students, their teachers and parents will March for Our Lives on March 24 in D.C. and cities across America. Other students have found ways in their schools and communities to bring people together, to express their points of view, to debate and to find solutions for their hometowns and states.

What are the limits on speaking out and demanding action by lawmakers and other leaders? This guide focuses on the rights of speech, assembly and petition when exercised by students and teachers. May students be activists during school hours? What may teachers say about their personal points of view? What lessons are to be learned by organizing and participating in protests? When may you take action?
**RIGHT TURN • Opinion**

**Five suggestions for the ‘March for Our Lives’ organizers**

BY JENNIFER RUBIN

*Originally Published February 23, 2018*

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**The Post reports:**

Organizers of a rally against mass shootings planned for next month in Washington are expecting up to 500,000 attendees, according to an event permit application.

The application filed this week with the National Park Service indicates the “March For Our Lives” will be March 24, although a location hasn’t been determined. The rally, organized by survivors of last week’s school massacre in Parkland, Fla., will have “sister marches” in other major cities, organizers said.

The event will include “student speakers, musical performers, guest speakers and video tributes,” according to the permit application, with 14 Jumbotrons and 2,000 chairs.

This is one more example of the sophistication, energy and media-mastery of the students, who have earned affection and admiration from millions of Americans. There are some lessons to be learned, I think, from previous mass demonstrations in the Trump era.

First, the more that the march and movement is about regular Americans, and not politicians or celebrities, the more impact it will have. The students are far more earnest and effective speaking for themselves than are even well-meaning advocates who share their views. Give the students and other people affected by gun violence — including families, teachers, first responders — center stage. Let the politicos, celebrities and the leaders of established groups play a supporting role.

Second, do not turn this into a rant about the National Rifle Association, although the NRA richly deserves a chewing out. The object here is to mobilize people who don’t already agree with them and to get gun owners, as well as people who haven’t focused on the issue and those who’ve supported the NRA in the past, to rethink their views. Besides, the NRA would relish the attention. The better strategy is to address some of its arguments (e.g., why more guns in schools is a terrible idea) and to create a positive, broad-based push for new laws.

Third, build the organization by first knowing who is there. Who came? Where do they live? Will they lobby? How do they find other people in their community? Since this should be just one step — not the final step — in the movement, it would seem critical to cull that information from as many participants as possible.

That brings us to the next item: What do they want people to do after they leave? It’s impossible for 500,000 individuals to decide on a particular bill to support or even to decide whether state or federal (or both) lawmakers should be their focus. The notion that everything and
anything (e.g. background checks, limits on magazine capacity, mental health funding, school retrofitting, age limitations on purchase of weapons) that can be done should be done is a wise philosophy at this stage. However, if there is a basic message, they might consider this: The best way to prevent kids from being slaughtered is to make it harder for dangerous people to get weapons of war. If they can get lawmakers, mayors, governors and other public officials to buy into that — an implicit recognition that the Second Amendment is not absolute and does not guarantee unfettered access to AR-15s — that would be a tremendous accomplishment.

Finally, the NRA has been successful because it can mobilize single-issue voters who are passionate about this one item. The march offers the opportunity to show that people who differ on all sorts of issues (taxes, gay rights, the environment, abortion, legalizing pot, etc.) can agree to prioritize this issue (e.g., ‘pro-life’ means surviving to graduation). The prospect of millions of voters who will care first and foremost about new gun safety laws may help to shift the political calculus for some politicians. A focused campaign, for example, of gun safety forces against an NRA absolutist like Gov. Rick Scott (R-Fla.), who likely will run for Senate, could be a test run for the new movement.

We are in uncharted waters on guns, which in and of itself is a dramatic change from decades the NRA monopolized the discussion and dominated legislatures. If a grass-roots, student-focused group can offer a positive, simple message to persuade Americans that kids, not those who want to own AR-15s, should be our first concern, we may see new laws that no one a month ago could have imagined passing.

Jennifer Rubin writes the Right Turn blog for The Post, offering reported opinion from a conservative perspective.
With gun campaign, students might discover limits of social media

BY CRAIG TIMBERG

• Originally Published February 21, 2018

A group of high school students who survived last week’s school shooting in Florida is attempting to break the political stalemate that typically follows mass shootings with urgent social media appeals for new gun laws, but to succeed they will have to outlast the entrenched resistance of gun-rights activists, experts say.

The students from Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School created Facebook and Twitter groups that have reached 100,000 followers in just days. The students are using their social media megaphone to call for new gun control measures, days after 17 people were killed by — according to police — a former student wielding an AR-15 in Parkland, Fla.

The grieving students, armed with harrowing stories of loss, have brought new urgency to the issue — and the savvy of a generation raised on smartphones.

“As teens, we’re a little obsessed with social media,” said Diego Pfeiffer, 18, a senior who has helped organize Never Again MSD. “Sometimes we’ve been posting serious messages, and other times it’s been funny stuff, the frustrations or jokes that come out of the stuff we’ve been dealing with the last few days.”

Mass shootings are commonly followed by demands for action on social media, research shows. Yet it also shows that such initial momentum gradually runs aground when faced with gun-rights activists. History suggests that the challenge for the gun-control activists goes beyond channeling grief and outrage into calls for new gun laws.

“People get stirred up, and there’s some activists who organize hashtags,” said Jonathon Morgan, founder of Data for Democracy, a nonprofit research group. “And, not to be cynical, it seems like it dies down quickly after no legislators get involved in the conversations.”

The debate over gun rights ranked as the nation’s most divisive political issue — more polarizing than even discussions of race — according to research by Morgan’s group.

In the hours after the shooting, several student reactions posted on social media went viral. Students also used Twitter and Facebook in attempt to locate friends who were missing, mourn friends who had been slain, and directly weigh-in on the gun-control debate their stories were beginning to fuel.

A handful of students soon launched Never Again MSD — referring to the name of their high school where the shooting happened — creating the related Facebook and Twitter pages.

Organizers say that a team of several students is charged with running the official Never Again MSD social media accounts on Twitter, Facebook and Instagram and have been helping out with the accounts of individual students who have gained national prominence. Before a tweet or Facebook status is posted, it is worked up with all of the members of the group who are present — often in the makeshift headquarters they’re running out of one member’s parents’ home.

“We want to make sure that a 19-year-old boy can’t get his hands on a machine of death,” said Dylan Baierlein, 18, a recent graduate. “This is the message that we want to get across, that is the change that we want to see.”

The speed of the burgeoning campaign, coming together in less than a week, suggests that a shift could be underway. Following the 2012 shootings at Sandy Hook Elementary School in Newtown, Conn., the online conversation over Twitter was largely non-partisan, focusing on shock and grief rather than calls for action, during the initial phase of the aftermath, according to New York University Research published by Psychological Science.

Beginning at about the tenth day, however, the Twitter debate became more partisan, with liberals more likely to retweet liberals and conservatives more likely to retweet...
conservatives as both sides used the platform to express their views about gun rights versus gun control.

“We suspect it got more polarized at that time because the conversation was switching to gun reform,” said Joshua A. Tucker, an NYU politics professor and one of the study’s co-authors.

University of Wisconsin researchers found a similar trend in their study of Twitter conversations after 59 mass shootings from 2012 to 2014. That research, which has not yet been published, analyzed 1.3 million tweets and 700 related hashtags, using machine learning to sort them into various categories, said political science professor Jon C. W. Pevehouse, who co-authored the study with Dhavan V. Shah, a journalism professor, and several others.

They found that the first hours after a shooting typically was followed by emotional expressions, what the researchers called “thoughts and prayers.” But those soon receded as a second group of tweets, advocating new forms of gun control, came to dominate the online debate. The volume of these tweets varied based on certain factors, including whether the victims were children or if there was an unusually large number of victims. But this group also gradually dwindled.

“For a few days, they talked about it, but then they faded away,” said Pevehouse.

There was a final group of tweets — ones espousing the Second Amendment’s guarantee of the right to bear arms and opposing any new restrictions on the sale of weapons or ammunition — that kept going steadily throughout the study period, apparently impervious to the amount of news about mass shootings. (This research did not attempt to determine which of these accounts used so-called “bots,” which are automated Twitter accounts programmed to push certain kinds of messages.)

“There’s just a constant narrative out there, and they’re not really perturbed about the shootings,” Pevehouse said of the gun-rights tweeters.

The researchers did find two factors that gradually changed over the course of their study. The period when tweets mainly were devoted to “thoughts and prayers” following a mass shooting grew shorter and shorter.

Perhaps more consequentially, the staying power of the gun-control advocates seemed to gradually grow on Twitter, said Pevehouse, lasting for about two weeks before beginning to falter.
Research, Speak, Protest

Students have expressed their points of view and beliefs in their dress (T-shirts, caps, jean designs), by sit-ins at a Woolworth’s lunch counter and a dean’s office, through social media and a 1963 Children’s Crusade. They knew why they acted and spoke up. They knew their First Amendment rights and responsibilities.

ON FREEDOM OF SPEECH | From the First Amendment Center

Public school students do not lose their constitutional rights when they walk through the schoolhouse doors. The U.S. Supreme Court has recognized that “students in school as well as out of school are ‘persons’ under our Constitution.” This means that they possess First Amendment rights to express themselves in a variety of ways. They can write articles for the school newspaper, join clubs, distribute literature and petition school officials.

But public school students do not possess unlimited First Amendment rights. Two legal principles limit their rights. First, as the Supreme Court has said, minors do not possess the same level of constitutional rights as adults. Second, the government generally has greater power to dictate policy when it acts in certain capacities, such as educator, employer or jailer. …

Balancing school officials’ educational concerns against students’ First Amendment rights is not easy. As the Supreme Court wrote: “Our problem lies in the area where students in the exercise of First Amendment rights collide with the rules of the school authorities.”

Research: Conduct research to learn about Tinker v. DesMoines Community School District. Conduct interviews and research to learn what your school system’s policy is regarding student and faculty speech. What limits are placed on them during school hours? Are there policies that govern after-school expressions of speech, including expressions on social media?

ON GUN OWNERSHIP | From the Library of Congress

On June 26, 2008, in District of Columbia v. Heller, the United States Supreme Court issued its first decision since 1939 interpreting the Second Amendment to the United States Constitution. The Court ruled that the Second Amendment to the U.S. Constitution confers an individual right to possess a firearm for traditionally lawful purposes such as self-defense. It also ruled that two District of Columbia provisions, one that banned handguns and one that required lawful firearms in the home to be disassembled or trigger-locked, violate this right. …

The Court stated that the right to keep and bear arms is subject to regulation, such as concealed weapons prohibitions, limits on the rights of felons and the mentally ill, laws forbidding the carrying of weapons in certain locations, laws imposing conditions on commercial sales, and prohibitions on the carrying of dangerous and unusual weapons. It stated that this was not an exhaustive list of the regulatory measures that would be presumptively permissible under the Second Amendment. …

The outcome of D.C. v. Heller left some issues unanswered, including whether the Second Amendment restricts state regulation of firearms, and the standard for evaluating the constitutionality of other laws and regulations that impact the Second Amendment right. These issues will be the subject of future litigation. [Update: In McDonald v. City of Chicago, 561 U.S. 742 (2010), the Supreme Court ruled that the Second Amendment right recognized in Heller applies not only to the Federal Government, but also to states and municipalities.]

Research: Conduct research to update any laws or Supreme Court decisions since 2010 related to gun ownership, gun reform, gun modification and rights of owners.
ON PROTEST  | From The Washington Post

1. Read “Five suggestions for the ‘March for Our Lives’ organizers” by Jennifer Rubin, The Post’s conservative perspective blogger. Summarize the five suggestions that she makes:
   A. 
   B. 
   C. 
   D. 
   E. 

2. What do you think of her suggestions? Agree, disagree, or partial agree?

3. Read “With gun campaign, students might discover limits of social media” by Craig Timberg, a national technology reporter for The Post.
   A. What does he say is the usual pattern of activism using social media?
   B. What is the “savvy of a generation raised on smartphones”?
   C. What has been the success of previous demands after mass shootings?
   D. How successful do you think Never Again MSD will be? Why?

4. What form(s) of protest would you suggest for a cause that you support?
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Down with gun control

BY RACHEL CHASON

• Originally Published February 20, 2018

Seventeen high school students lay down for three minutes in front of the White House on Monday to represent the lives lost during the shooting at Florida’s Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School and the amount of time it takes to buy a gun.

They were joined by several hundred protesters who demanded that lawmakers act to end gun violence during an emotional demonstration on Presidents’ Day.

The D.C. protest echoed those orchestrated in Parkland, Fla., and beyond by teenagers who are emerging as powerful advocates for stronger gun control following one of the worst mass shootings at a school in U.S. history.

“This could be a breaking point,” said Whitney Bowen, 16, an organizer of the D.C. protest. “We’re still just 16, but at least we’re old enough to have our voices be heard.”

Bowen, a junior at the Potomac School in McLean, Va., was at school when she received a news alert about the shooting in Florida. She and her friend, Eleanor Nuechterlein, created a Facebook group, Teens for Gun Reform, and a Facebook event invitation to promote the “lie-in.” News of the event spread quickly online, with more than 700 people from around the region expressing interest.

“We’re not 18 yet so we can’t vote, but we have an advantage living in D.C. and as teenagers with access to social media,” Bowen said. “I don’t want to be known as a member of the mass shooting generation. It’s horrible and it’s devastating and it’s not the legacy I want to leave.”

The protesters — adults as well as students — were joined by a group of activists who have been demonstrating outside the White House every Monday since the 2012 shooting in Aurora, Colo., when 12 people were killed in a movie theater.

For two hours each week, members of the group talk with passersby about changes in gun laws, including instituting universal background checks and creating gun-free school zones.

Linda Finkel-Talvadkar, 66, an original member of the group, said the youths’ passion mirrors that of students in her generation who took to the streets demanding an end to the Vietnam War.

“That resulted in policy changes and a president not running again, so definitely these young people have the power to create the change we want to see,” she said. “They are our future, and our hope lies with them.”

After the three minutes had passed, scores of young people and adults joined the original 17 for the lie-in,
resting with their arms crossed on the wet street outside the White House for nearly 20 minutes. Several parents wiped away tears as they watched.

Some students then turned in the direction of the White House, chanting, “Shame on you,” “Don’t be complacent” and “Hey, hey, NRA, how many kids have you killed today?” They carried American flags and signs, including one that read “Am I next?”

President Trump, who visited Parkland, Fla., last week, was playing golf on Monday in West Palm Beach, 40 miles from the site of the school shooting.

The White House said Monday that Trump, who met with members of the Parkland community, is open to congressional efforts to strengthen federal background checks for gun buyers. But Congress for years has not enacted even modest gun measures, and it is not clear that this effort will be different.

Jackson Baer, 17, who was among those chanting, said he thinks that the younger generation will be responsible for affecting change.

“I believe in the Second Amendment,” said Baer, a junior at Winston Churchill High School in Montgomery County, Md. “But change needs to happen. It won’t be easy, but we will make it happen.”

Nuechterlein, a junior at Potomac, said students are pushing for background checks before all gun sales, public and private, among other changes.

“Both Republicans and Democrats should believe we need to end school shootings,” she said. “At the end of the day this doesn’t come down to politics — it’s about trying to make sure fewer kids are scared when they are going to school.”

More than 150,000 students attending at least 170 primary or secondary schools have experienced a shooting on campus since the killings at Colorado’s Columbine High School in 1999, according to an ongoing Washington Post analysis.

For Elodie Camus, a sophomore at the British International School of Washington, mass shootings and the lack of government action that follows them have become almost routine.

“It’s so horrible that we keep watching this unfold, and that nothing much has been done to change it,” said Camus, 16, who was in elementary school in 2012 when a shooting rampage in Newtown, Conn., left more than two dozen people dead, most of them first-graders. “There is a constant threat of this happening because you can get these weapons so easily.”
Role Play: Student Activism on Gun Violence

When the First Amendment Addresses the Second Amendment

School administrators, staff, educators and students together create a safe environment. In recent years that includes drills for an active shooter as well as fire drills. After the February 14 mass shooting at Marjory Stoneman Douglas H.S., students in Parkland and around the country have wanted to express their feelings, to protest gun violence and to seek solutions — now.

Student editor of your school’s print and online newspaper staff
Read: Covering Walk-Outs and Protests
http://www.splc.org/page/covering-walkouts-and-protests

Student council member
Read: “The Parkland shooting victims are the most trusted people in America”
https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/the-parkland-shooting-victims-are-the-most-trusted-people-in-america/2018/02/27/4639c5ca-1be0-11e8-ae5a-16e60e4605f3_story.html?utm_term=.2a97c594da11
AND
“They survived a school shooting only to wage battle in one of the nastiest corners of the Internet”

Student member of the school’s rifle team
Read: “AP finds the NRA gave $7 million to hundreds of schools”

Student who hid in a closet during the shooting, a Teenlink reporter for the local newspaper
Read: “A shooting survivor’s plea: ‘Ideas are great’ but ‘what we need is action’”
https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/a-shooting-survivors-plea-ideas-are-great-but-what-we-need-is-action/2018/02/16/c5a5e87a-135c-11e8-9065-e53346f6de81_story.html?utm_term=.5d2883a04004

School’s nurse
Read: “Mental Health Funding Tied to Florida’s Controversial Gun Legislation”
AND
“Is There a Link Between Mental Health and Gun Violence?”
https://www.newyorker.com/science/maria-konnikova/almost-link-mental-health-gun-violence

Librarian whose friend was the librarian at Sandy Hook Elementary School in 2012
Read: “The club no one wants to join: Mass shooting survivors find solace in one another.”

Student who is organizing an all-city, student protest for gun reform
Read: First Amendment Rights for Student Protesters

School system psychologist
Read: “How to stop the next shooter”
High school assistant principal (responsible for discipline)
Read: “Can Schools Discipline Students for Protesting?”
https://www.aclu.org/blog/free-speech/student-speech-and-privacy/can-schools-discipline-students-protesting
AND
“17 minutes to memorialize 17 lives lost”

High school’s Government teacher
Read: “School Walkouts in the Wake of “Parkland” — Protected by the First Amendment or Not?”
AND
“School shootings are rare. We’re still terrified.”

High school’s English teacher
Read: “I’ve had guns pointed at me. I’m glad I didn’t have one.”
https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/ive-had-guns-pointed-at-me-im-glad-i-didnt-have-one/2018/03/02/87710bbc-l379-11e8-ae5a-16e60e6605f3_story.html?utm_term=.bd62de22f1bd

High school’s coach who is a veteran
Read: “Veterans running as Democrats challenge GOP on guns in key races”
AND
“A congressional bill could allow veterans deemed mentally incompetent to own guns”

Parent who is a NRA member
Read: “Attacking the NRA is really attacking everyday Americans”
https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/attacking-the-nra-is-really-attacking-everyday-americans/2018/02/27/915c8c74-1be8-11e8-9de1-147dd2df3829_story.html?utm_term=.17925d17793b

Parent whose niece was killed at country music festival in Las Vegas
Read: “Another school shooting, another cruel reminder to parents”
AND
“After Las Vegas attack, a damaged body and soul”

Parent who is a member of the League of Women’s Voters
Read: “You can do something about guns. In the voting booth.”

State legislator who represents the district where a mass shooting took place
Read: “Fla. Lawmakers pass gun-control bill”
Conduct an Interview: Your School’s Police on Weapons and Dangerous Articles

1. Review your school system’s student conduct policy on possession, use or sale and purchase of firearms on school property. Summarize the policy in one to two sentences.

2. Prepare to conduct an interview of a school official regarding student rights and responsibilities regarding school policy on firearms, weapons and dangerous articles.
   - Selection of and invitation to guest speaker
   - Write questions and organize the order in which the first five to seven questions will be asked.
   - Practice asking questions. Be prepared to pose a follow-up question.
   - Set-up and check podium, microphone, recording equipment

3. After the guest speaker has given opening remarks, questions might include:
   - Do principals have discretion in handling individual student situations?
   - Do school policies vary from elementary- to high school-age students?
   - What items are considered weapons or dangerous articles?
   - Will an elementary-age student who brings a knife, unloaded gun or bow and arrow to show and tell be punished?
   - May a student bring a knife to cut apples and other lunch foods? May teachers bring these items?
   - Does the type of firearm or weapon influence the punishment?
   - How does the school handle rifle team, Jr. ROTC and other school-sponsored clubs or extra-curricular activity regarding weapons on school ground?
   - What procedure is required to bring period weapons to a history class for Revolutionary War, Civil War or other era re-enactment or report?
   - What should students do if they think a classmate needs emotional or mental help?
   - What should students do if a classmate says he is going to “get” other students or teachers?
   - If a classmate has written about killing people in poems and stories since middle school, should you tell her English teacher or pay no attention?
   - Should parents who have guns in their homes be required to inform a school authority? Register information with the local police department?

Decide which of the above questions you might use. Revise to be applicable to your school’s situation. Write additional questions.

4. Conduct the interview, taking notes while listening to all the responses.

5. Write an explanatory article, newscast or special investigative report to inform other students about the policy and practice in your school regarding weapons and other dangerous articles on and off school grounds.