



School Safety Newsletter

Volume 5, Issue 8

March 2018

Balancing Politics With Public Schools

US News, February 22, 2018

<https://www.usnews.com/news/the-report/articles/2018-02-22/schools-weigh-consequences-for-students-protesting-gun-violence>

WHEN STUDENTS FROM Walter Johnson High School in Bethesda, Maryland, left school around 9:30 on February 21, 2018 morning to march on the U.S. Capitol with thousands of others to support school safety in the aftermath of the massacre at a Florida school where a former student shot and killed 17 children and adults, they knew the academic consequences they could face.

"Our principal basically said it was good for students to use their voice but she can't personally condone it, and it would count as an unexcused absence," says 15-year-old Kayla Kazemzaden, a sophomore at Walter Johnson. One teacher threatened to dock students 10 percent on an assignment if they didn't turn it in themselves during class.

Of course, there were ways around the unexcused absence, Kazemzaden and her classmates say. Like the teacher who told her students she'd "happily look the other way" as students left for the rally, and the administrators who work in the front office who told students dropping off early dismissal and absence slips, "We know you're going to the march, just write some other reason."

The school is also helping students organize a walk-out aligned with the Women's March's Youth EMPOWER group, which is rallying students to participate in a nation-wide walk-out from schools on March 14 – one month after last week's deadly mass shooting at Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School in Parkland, Florida.

Other school districts haven't been as supportive: The superintendent from Needville Independent School District, just outside Houston, Texas, threatened to suspend students for three days if they disrupt school or walk out in order to protest current gun laws.

"Life is all about choices and every choice has a consequence whether it be positive or negative," wrote superintendent Curtis Rhodes in a statement posted on the Needville High School Facebook page. "We will discipline no matter if it is one, fifty, or five hundred students involved. All will be suspended for 3 days and parent notes will not alleviate the discipline."

The immediate call for change to state and federal gun laws by students who survived the school shooting has placed school superintendents, principals and even teachers in a precarious position of supporting students' first amendment right to voice their opinions while not explicitly endorsing any political position, and also taking into account the very real state and local laws they're bound by.

"In this unfortunate time, superintendents are balancing their obligation to educate their students and support their community and students' first amendment rights with their professional and educational responsibility to consistently and equitably enforce state and local laws and policies, which can include attendance requirements and school participation," Noelle Ellerson Ng, associate executive director of policy and advocacy at AASA, the School Superintendents Association, says.

Part of that balance may be finding ways to support students. AASA, for example, is supporting the National Day of Action Against Gun Violence In Schools, set to take place April 20, the anniversary date of the shooting at Columbine High School.

The event, sponsored by the Network for Public Education, is being marketed this way: "After the slaughter of students and staff in Parkland, Florida, the time for action has never been more urgent. The politicians sit on their hands as our children and their teachers are murdered in their schools. We will be silent no more!"

*Protecting our
future through
information
sharing*

In This Issue

- Balancing Politics With Public Schools
- Next Monthly Webinar - April 4, 2018
- Musical.ly Is Struggling to Deal With Self-Harm Content
- Pediatrician Offers Perspective on What Might Be Influencing Our Nation's School Shootings
- Teens Inhale Cancer-Causing Chemicals in E-Cigarettes
- Media Coverage of Mass Shootings: Is It Part of the Problem

Balancing Politics With Public Schools (Continued)

But, as experts point out, that doesn't mean schools and districts that choose to participate in an event like the National Day of Action, have to go about it politically. They could, for example, sponsor a day for students to wear orange, a color that honors victims of gun violence, or organize events addressing tangential issues, bullying and other mental health crises.

"I think the school can support students, but they need to make sure and students need to recognize that their classmates may not agree wholeheartedly with that view and those who don't agree should have the option to opt out of any demonstration, and teachers need to be careful that students who have an alternate point of view aren't silenced," says Paula McAvoy, the program director for the Center for Ethics and Education at the University of Wisconsin-Madison.

"It's a delicate balancing act, but the schools' primary objective is a healthy school environment where students can disagree with one another and recognize that this is a particularly important moment," she says.

Interestingly, research done for a forthcoming book by Meira Levinson, professor of education at Harvard University's Graduate School of Education, showed that by and large, students think their schools should be neutral on political issues and not get involved in things like students-led walk-outs, whereas a number of the adults she and her research team polled were far more supportive of districts offering students more support for such activities.

"I think that it's really important for schools to be clear with students and themselves and parents and community members that students have the right to engage in civic and political actions," she says. "Schools can help students do that without violating partisanship."

That's just the push and pull at the heart of the current debate, which has garnered an array of responses from school superintendents, administrators and principals around the country.

Superintendent of Miami-Dade public schools Alberto Carvahlo, for example, dove head first into the gun control debate this week.

"We must bring common sense to gun legislation across this nation," he tweeted. "It is beyond comprehension how we, as a society, have determined that an 18 year old is not old enough to purchase alcohol, but can legally purchase a semi-automatic rifle, along with ammunition and magazines."

He took to his personal Facebook page to post an even longer plea: "I invite people of good will to join our advocacy efforts supporting students and employees. We must make improvements across the board for school security and safety, and continue enhancing communication with parents and the community."

Robert Runcie, superintendent of Broward County schools, of which Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School is part, has been making similar calls since the day the shooting occurred.

"Some of the dialogue I've heard recently is about arming teachers," he said Wednesday evening during a town hall event hosted by CNN that took place just hours after the president signaled he'd support conceal carry for educators. "We don't need to put guns in the hands of teachers. You know what we need? We need to arm our teachers with more money in their pocket."

Levinson says that it's always a risk when a school or a district lends support to students that it will be misperceived as support for the issue that students are arguing for

"And sometimes that may be that that's what's going on," she says. "But it's not always, or even not usually, what's going on. Schools are pretty good at trying to not direct students toward a political stance, but instead developing their capacity as citizens."

It seems that no matter the tack school districts or individual schools plan to take when it comes to supporting or punishing students for taking action, the students themselves are undeterred and are willing to accept the consequences.

In addition to the March 14 National School Walkout and the April 20 National Day of Action, students are also organizing the March for Our Lives slated for March 24.

Their efforts have been bolstered by celebrities like George Clooney and Oprah Winfrey, who've each pledged \$500,000 to support the march. The higher education community even signaled their support for the students' continued action, telling them not to worry about how any punishments related to their involvement in rallies and protests.

"Dear Students," Jon Boeckenstedt, the associate vice president of enrollment management and marketing at DePaul University in Chicago, Illinois, started a tweet Wednesday. "If you participate in protests against gun violence and incur school discipline for walking out, you can rest assured you can report it to DePaul and we won't hold it against you."

The move prompted similar pledges from college and university presidents, deans and admissions officers around the country, including at Smith College in Massachusetts, Trinity College in Connecticut, the University of Southern California and others.

Monthly Webinars!

First Wednesday of Every Month

at 10 am

(Except January, July, and August).

Next Webinars

Wednesday, April 4, 2018

Each webinar has a round table discussion at the end. Questions are always welcome!

To participate, you must be a vetted member. For more information please email schoolsafety@isp.state.il.us

Balancing Politics With Public Schools (Continued)

"One thing that's really incredible about this moment is how student led it is," Justin Reich, assistant professor at Massachusetts Institute of Technology and executive director of MIT's Teaching Systems Lab, says. "I hope adults who are communicating with students can respect the student leadership and can be advisors and listeners and help facilitate some of this type of communication while ultimately letting students lead."

Musical.ly Is Struggling to Deal With Self-Harm Content

The app, popular with teens, banned search on tags like #proana and #mutilation after BuzzFeed asked why you could search for them on its platform.

Buzz Feed News, March 10, 2018

https://www.buzzfeed.com/katienotopoulos/musically-blocked-tags-related-to-self-harm-and-eating?utm_term=.muyLkP4kW#.tloLoZYoQ

Musical.ly, the lip-synching app that is wildly popular with younger users, is struggling to catch up to other teen-friendly social apps like Instagram or Tumblr in how it moderates and filters certain types of dangerous content. After people criticized the app this week for allowing users to search for hashtags related to self-harm or eating disorders, like #cutting or #proana, Musical.ly blocked some of these search terms.

The app first launched as a lip-synching platform where young people do their best covers of popular tunes. Musical.ly has several homegrown stars, and social media influencers from YouTube and Instagram also use the platform. More recently, it's expanded beyond just lip-synching to include comedy videos, pranks, and other short-form video genres reminiscent of Vine.

This week, a scathing Medium post titled "Porn is not the worst thing on Musical.ly" went viral. A writer named Anastasia Basil screened the app to see if it would be suitable for her 10-year-old daughter, but she was shocked by what she saw. Other parents were also concerned.

Musical.ly is for ages 13-plus, and its rating in the app stores for both iPhone and Android is 12-plus, which means it requires parental controls to download. At sign-up, it asks your birthdate to make sure you're eligible (the app doesn't store user age data). But it's clear that the app is popular with children younger than the age limit.

Basil's post was a broad, alarmist take on the dangers of the internet, but it pointed out a specific issue: On Musical.ly, it was easy to search for hashtags like #proana, #cutting, #selfhate, and others.

There were more than 1,300 results when I searched the app on Wednesday afternoon for the tag #proana, and more than 1,500 for #mutilation.

After BuzzFeed News reached out to Musical.ly for comment, it blocked the ability to search those keywords on Friday morning. Musical.ly confirmed to BuzzFeed News it had just recently blocked the terms #proana and #mutilation, as well as several others mentioned in the Medium article. It said its process for banning terms from search is always evolving.

But for an app that is primarily aimed at children, moderating conversations about #proana or #cutting seems obvious. The app launched in 2014 and has 60 million monthly active users. Other teen-friendly apps like Instagram and Tumblr have been scrutinized for these same issues, and those apps started dealing with it from an engineering perspective long ago. Tumblr began banning content that promoted eating disorders in 2012, and Instagram rolled out its policy on the topic 11 days after Facebook bought it. If you search "self-harm" or "eating disorder" tags on Instagram, you get a pop-up with a warning steering you to support resources. On Tumblr, the search doesn't work at all.

For Tumblr and Instagram, dealing with this has never been as simple as just banning search terms. For one, as soon as obvious terms like #proana or #thinspo are banned, an endless stream of slightly tweaked variations pop up. Also, people looking for help and support with eating disorders use these terms to find a positive community. Eating disorder recovery communities are very active on social platforms, and they can help people looking to talk to peers. And simply talking about harmful things isn't the same as advocating for them.

As of Friday afternoon, the tag #anorexia is still searchable on Musical.ly. Many search results for the term are about recovery and support, rather than promoting eating disorders. Several were lip syncs of spoken word recordings from poet Blythe Baird, who talks about overcoming an eating disorder. These can be empowering, a way for young people to express something about themselves using someone else's words.

Currently, Musical.ly hasn't fully blocked search for those terms, only removed them from the search bar feature. For example, if you search #depression, which isn't blocked, and look through a handful of results, you'll find posts that are also tagged with terms like #selfharm or #suicide. By clicking on the #selfharm tag from one of these posts — or a post that someone you follow posted — you'll be shown all the other posts with the tag.

Musical.ly Is Struggling to Deal With Self-Harm Content

(Continued)

Looking through some of the videos in the tags that were tagged #ihatemyself, #selfharm, or even #suicide, they seemed to be mostly teens lip-synching to sad music. It's hard to say whether this is promotion of self-harm, or just providing an outlet for teens by letting them sing along to sad songs.

Musical.ly told BuzzFeed News it is exploring the option of adding a feature like the Instagram pop-up warning for self-harm content sometime later this year.

Pediatrician Offers Perspective on What Might Be Influencing Our Nation's School Shootings

KEPR, March 9, 2018

<http://keprtv.com/news/local/pediatrician-offers-perspective-on-what-might-be-influencing-our-nations-school-shootings>

TRI-CITIES, Wash. – The rash of school shootings has people questioning, what is happening with teenage boys?

Dr. Henry Berman, clinical professor of pediatrics at the University of Washington School of Medicine, wrote "Teens and their Doctors: The Story of the Development of Adolescent Medicine" (2017) and has a great historical perspective. He trained with pioneers in the field of adolescent medicine and has been seeing patients since the 1970s.

Dr. Berman said violence at schools has left people wondering if boys are dealing with more anger and depression than teens of the past. After reviewing his data over the past five decades, he said indeed, times are changing and influencing teen boys of today. "Adolescents are the same, but their ability to cope in the country are not the same," Berman said.

He said the challenges of all teens are: becoming independent of their parents, making friends, and learning skills to be successful in a job. However, the domain of job skills has changed rapidly. With just a fraction of blue-collar and manufacturing jobs as existed a generation ago, teen boys have fewer options now.

"They find themselves lost, they can't get a good job just out of high school, but they don't really want to go to college," Berman said. "I'm not saying that leads to violence, but I'm saying that leads to a vulnerability." A vulnerability that he said leads to them having trouble dealing with change and challenges. Berman said about half of the teen boys he has counseled in Seattle said they wanted to work in the video-game industry.

"We know that one out of 100 or 1,000 of those will actually be able to do that," Berman said. "So they don't really have a realistic sense of what to do when they get out of high school and they're lost—and I think that's different from what it was even 30 years ago as I see this data."

In comparison, Dr. Berman noted that girls are now thriving in a more gender-neutral society, and he perceives a more negative pattern emerging among boys trying to find their place. "I see boys and girls in my practice, and the girls tend to—even if they have anxiety or depression—be more focused," he said. "They're ready to move forward and the anxiety and depression is something they learn to overcome."

In the United States, Berman said, there are about 10 million boys ages 15 to 19. "A high percentage of school shooters, like 80 percent, have depression," he noted. Dr. Berman estimates 20 percent of teen boys in the US are prone to depression or mental illness, meaning 2 million are vulnerable. However, of those, only three to four become school shooters. "So, we can't really say that if they have depression they're more likely to be school shooters, but we can't really say you could predict that," he explained.

Berman said about 12 years ago, video games started normalizing shooting and made it seem like entertainment. Then came greater availability of guns. Plus, he points the explosion of social media, as well as the media's emphasis on school shooters rather than the victims.

Disillusioned young people may be drawn to stories of the Columbine and other school shootings, Berman said, and details about how a killing took place can give others ideas. "There's a concept that goes all the way back to 1774," Berman said. "There's a lot of relation between suicide contagion and school shooting." That repercussion occurred in 1774 after the publication of Goethe's novel, "The Sorrows of Young Werther." In the book, Werther dresses in yellow pants and a blue jacket when he kills himself with a pistol after being rejected by the woman he loves.

Shortly after its publication, young men dressed in yellow pants and blue jackets and killed themselves in the same way. Afterward, the book was banned in some countries. The "Werther effect" is used sometimes to describe copycat suicides. "So if you ever had a doubt whether there could be such a thing as, we'll call a copycat, I think that is the most dramatic," Berman said.

Overall, he sees teen boys as being more lost than teens of the past. "It's not that boys are different, it's that the world is different," he said. "And the confused, depressed angry ones have a different way to express that now." With the Parkland, Florida shooting, however, he notes a promising new trend. He said it's the first time the media is putting more emphasis on the victims and their anger.



Emma Sadleir ✓
@EmmaSadleir



In the last week, 3 of our talks have been to grade 4 to grade 7 girls. Every single one of them with a smartphone (which is just about all of them) are on [musical.ly](#). It's not nearly as innocent an app as it seems medium.com/@anastasiabasi...

7:03 AM - Mar 8, 2018



Porn Is Not the Worst Thing on Musical.ly – Anastasia Basil – ...

My daughter is ten. She wants me to download the Musical.ly app on my phone so she can make funny lip-sync videos. Everyone has it, [medium.com](#)

♥ 22 💬 21 people are talking about this

Teens Inhale Cancer-Causing Chemicals in E-Cigarettes

NBC News, March 6, 2018

<https://www.nbcnews.com/health/health-news/teen-inhale-cancer-causing-chemicals-e-cigarettes-n853611>



Smoking e-cigarettes delivers cancer-causing chemicals that get into the body — and popular fruity flavors appear to be the worst, researchers reported Monday. They said teenagers who try vaping may be poisoning themselves with many of the same chemicals that make traditional cigarettes so deadly.

Tests on teenagers show that those who smoke tobacco-based cigarettes as well have the highest levels of these chemicals in their bodies, but those who vape e-cigarettes also have higher levels of the cancer-causing chemicals than nonsmokers do, the team at the University of California, San Francisco, found.

“The presence of harmful ingredients in e-cigarette vapor has been established; we can now say that these chemicals are found in the body of human adolescents who use these products,” they wrote in their report, published in the journal *Pediatrics*.

E-cigarettes use a device that delivers fluid laced with nicotine and flavors, creating a smoke-like haze.

They’re promoted as a safer way to use tobacco — e-cigarette use is called vaping — and as a way to quit smoking. But public health groups, the surgeon general's office, and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention worry about evidence that vaping can get teens addicted to nicotine, and will lead them to smoking cigarettes.

Many studies support the theory that kids who vape are more likely to go on to use other tobacco products, but there hasn’t been much hard evidence about how directly dangerous e-cigarettes are.

Monday’s study shows vaping delivers harmful chemicals and potentially harmful chemicals. The chemicals are not listed on the ingredients of the vape liquid. They’re found under the catch-all description of “flavorings”, the researchers said.

Dr. Mark Rubinstein, of UCSF’s Division of Adolescent Medicine, and colleagues tested 67 teenagers who vape and compared them to 16 teens who both vape and smoke tobacco cigarettes and to 20 teens who do not use either type of cigarette.

They tested their urine and saliva and asked questions about cigarette use. Those who used both types of cigarette had significantly higher levels of dangerous chemicals, including acrylonitrile, acrolein, propylene oxide, acrylamide and crotonaldehyde, the team reported. And those who used only e-cigarettes had much higher levels than those who used neither product. “Among our e-cigarette-only participants, the use of fruit-flavored products produced significantly higher levels of the metabolites of acrylonitrile,” they wrote.

Glycerin and other flavorings in both tobacco and e-cigarettes can react with one another or break down into the potentially harmful chemicals. “Acrylonitrile is a highly poisonous compound used widely in the manufacture of plastics, adhesives and synthetic rubber,” the National Center for Biotechnology Information says on its website. Acrolein “is toxic to humans following inhalation, oral or dermal exposure,” the Environmental Protection Agency says. Some studies show it can play a part in bringing about lung cancer, although the EPA says there is not enough data to show whether it causes cancer in people. Propylene oxide and crotonaldehyde are probable carcinogens, the EPA says, while acrylamide’s role in causing cancer is more controversial.

Other teams have found other potentially cancer-causing chemicals in e-cigarette vapor, including diacetyl, the chemical blamed for causing “Popcorn lung” in workers at microwave popcorn packaging plants.

Teens are vaping more often than they are smoking cigarettes, the CDC says. The latest report on teen smoking shows 20 percent of high school students have used at least one tobacco product recently — mostly e-cigarettes. In 2016, 11 percent of high school students had used an e-cigarette in the past 30 days at the time of the survey — the CDC’s definition of current use.

"Teenagers need to be warned that the vapor produced by e-cigarettes is not harmless water vapor, but actually contains some of the same toxic chemicals found in smoke from traditional cigarettes," Rubinstein said in a statement. "Teenagers should be inhaling air, not products with toxins in them."

Media Coverage of Mass Shootings: Is It Part of the Problem

UnDark, March 8, 2018

<https://undark.org/2018/03/08/media-coverage-of-mass-shootings-misses-the-mark-for-decades/>

When it comes to coverage of mass shootings in the United States, the media can be fickle. School shootings like the one in Florida last month, for example, are more likely to get attention — and tend to garner more sustained attention — than shootings that occur in other places like businesses, malls, and coffee shops, even though the latter are more common. A high death toll is an even better predictor of coverage, of course — but so too are the use of more than one gun, attacks linked to ideological extremism, and those perpetrated by people of Middle Eastern descent. This holds true even though simple handguns are more frequently the weapon of choice, most shooters are white, and ideological motivations are uncommon.

Such are some of the findings in a new study that examined mass shootings in the U.S. over the last 50 years, and the researchers reach a sobering conclusion: “This work finds the media is distorting the reality of mass public shootings,” write the study’s co-authors.

This is particularly worrying because people get most of their information about crime from the news media. Biased or sensational coverage of mass shootings could provoke panicked and misplaced public responses to these incidents, including unnecessary, excessive, or ineffective policies and legislation, says co-author Jason Silva, a doctoral student at John Jay College of Criminal Justice. The distortions can also lead to legislative responses to mass shootings that fail to address the most common characteristics of rampage attacks — specifically, that they are committed predominantly by middle-aged white men using handguns in business settings, Silva says.

Instead, prevention efforts could focus on training people, especially in workplaces, to spot early warning signs that someone might resort to gun violence, wrote Silva and his co-author, criminologist Joel Capellan, at Rowan University, in their study published last month in the *International Journal of Comparative and Applied Criminal Justice*.

To assess the mismatch between actual events and news coverage, the researchers first used eight search engines to identify a total of 314 mass public shootings — that is, those in which perpetrators killed or tried to kill four or more victims, using a firearm — between 1966 and 2016. The idea was to capture events with shooters who intended to kill as many people as possible, whether they succeeded or not. And unlike many past studies on this topic, incidents motivated by terrorism or extremist violence were included. Then, Proquest’s New York Times Historical Database was used to identify which events were directly covered or mentioned, and the number of articles and words about them or mentioning them, in the print edition of the newspaper during the same period.

The researchers focused on The New York Times because they considered it a reliable indicator of the newsworthiness and importance of current events in the nation’s media. A total of 72 percent of all mass public shootings in the U.S. during the 50-year period studied were covered by The Times, the researchers found.

The recent shooting at Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School in Parkland, Florida has received an enormous amount of media coverage so far because it took place in a school and involved a younger shooter, Silva says. Shootings by younger perpetrators are more likely to receive coverage than those committed by older perpetrators, the new research shows. And the Parkland attack took many victims, although not as many as the 2016 Orlando nightclub shooting (49 killed, 58 wounded), or last year’s massacre in Las Vegas (58 killed, 851 injured).

One hopeful difference in the most recent attack is that media covering the Parkland shooting have given more prominence to the victims and survivors than is typical of past incidents, Silva says. “This could suggest a new direction in the coverage focused more on victims and less on offenders,” he adds.

That’s something that movements like “Don’t Name Them” and “No Notoriety” have begun lobbying for, and they are not alone. In an essay published last year, two criminologists — Adam Lankford of the University of Alabama, and Eric Madfis of the University of Washington, Tacoma — suggested that the media needs to do some real soul-searching in how it covers shootings in America.

“Prior research has shown that many mass shooters have explicitly admitted they want fame and have directly reached out to media organizations to get it,” the researchers noted. “These fame-seeking offenders are particularly dangerous because they kill and wound significantly more victims than other active shooters, they often compete for attention by attempting to maximize victim fatalities, and they can inspire contagion and copycat effects.

“However, if the media changes how they cover mass shooters,” they added, “they may be able to deny many offenders the attention they seek and deter some future perpetrators from attacking.”

School Safety Newsletter

Statewide Terrorism &
Intelligence Center
2200 S. Dirksen Parkway
Springfield, IL 62703
Phone: 217-558-2661
E-Mail:
Schoolsafety@isp.state.il.us

Mia Ray Langheim
School Intelligence
Officer

