

Recent events raise issues, concerns over school safety

By Molly Archer
editor-in-chief

As the number of school shootings and threats against school safety increases, America's students have begun to stand up and fight for their own safety.

Over 135 thousand students have lived through school shootings since Columbine according to thetrace.org. As this number continues to rise, schools try to find ways to keep their students safe.

"I think [the number of school shootings] is out of control," Sergeant Mario Weekley said. "Anytime somebody takes a gun, comes to school and shoots a whole bunch of kids, [they have] something mentally going on, so I think that plays a big part in it, but somebody needs to do something to try and help get it under control."

Everytownresearch.org defines a school shooting as "any time a firearm discharges a live round inside a school building or on a school campus or grounds." According to the organization, 21 schools in the United States have experienced a shooting that fits this definition.

"I'm really worried [about school shootings] because there are some people that have a lot of issues," junior Mercy Guzman said. "I honestly do think that it could happen here. Just because we're in Oxford doesn't mean that it can't happen."

One of the organizers of Oxford's March for Our Lives Movement junior Anna Claire Franklin believes that without more stringent gun laws, students aren't able to feel safe in their school environment.

"I don't think anybody can feel safe at school until we have stricter gun legislation," Franklin said. "Nobody in Parkland thought that their school was going to be next. Nobody in Maryland thought their school was going to be either. Nobody is safe until we can actually have concrete legislation."

The March for Our Lives was held on March 24 in front of City Hall on the Oxford Square. Franklin stated that the protestors walked around the square twice in order to call attention to the lack of restrictions and requirements for purchasing firearms in America.

"We've become desensitized to the cycle of gun violence, so we're trying to end that," Franklin said. "We're trying to step up and use our voices and tell these legislators that we are not going away, and it might be their time right now, but it will be our time and we will get the changes that we want done. It's just a fact."

While some of the focus has been on gun owners, OHS school resource officer Zach Anderson believes that students also have a role in contributing to school safety by taking it seriously.

"I think the biggest thing is that [students] understand that it involves you, and that it needs to be taken seriously when we do the [lockdown] drills," Anderson said. "Just take five minutes and honor it; be serious because if it ever does happen, I want [students] to understand what to do and understand why we're doing what we do."

House Bill 1279 requires all schools in the US to conduct emergency drills once a month, including lock down drills, but not all students think they would know what to do in the event of a real lock down.

"I feel like we have lock down drills, but nothing could match the actual experience of it, and I personally don't know what I would do," Franklin said. "I can safely say that despite the number of lockdown drills we've had, I can't tell you what my reaction would be because nobody should ever have to be in that situation, and it's a shame that people do have to be."

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention states that the percentage of students who carried a gun decreased from 8 percent to five percent from 1993 to 1999 but hasn't changed significantly from 1999 to 2007 because of federal and state laws ensuring that schools are gun-free zones.

"I don't think a kid should be in fear of going to school. I don't think that you should even have to think about that; unfortunately, we do," Anderson said. "I think Oxford, overall, is a safe school. It's been voted a safe school, but that doesn't mean we let our guard down. If anything, we should continue doing more of what we're doing and still look for better ways to do it."

According to soe.syr.edu, one in every eight students has been reported bringing a weapon to school. Along with those students, around three million index crimes happen on or near school campuses every year, which breaks down to one crime occurring every six seconds while schools are in session.

"It's sad that the world we live in now, we have to almost lock our school down like a jail. School shouldn't be that way, but it's just the world we live in now," Weekley said. "I am proud of these kids. I never would have thought in a million years to see this many kids feel so strongly about a situation, and I'm proud of [them] wanting to protest and get better gun laws in place to make school safer. I totally understand that, and I'm surprised that [students] are stepping out and doing what [they] need to do to get things done. The future is very bright."

Franklin states that she and others involved in the marches are participating in the protests in order to make a change and fight for their safety.

"The Parkland students lost their opportunity to be a child the day they saw 17 of their classmates murdered in front of them. They're not children anymore. They lost their right to a childhood," Franklin said. "So, this isn't a movement of children; this is a movement of human beings with a real fear for their safety. Adults trying to fight for the second amendment seem to be really scared of teenagers armed with only the first."

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