



Americans Against Gun Violence  
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2023 National High School Essay Contest \$1000 Award Winner

A Student Attending High School in Texas

(Other Identifying Information Withheld at Student's Request)

### **Firearms Are Not Freedom**

“Lockdown, lockdown. Lock all doors and close all blinds.” These were the words we heard from the intercom. It was our monthly drill. As a senior, our grade had gotten accustomed to these drills since kindergarten. It also meant that we understood why such lockdown drills had become normalized in our schooling system. For us, it was a drill, but for many kids everyday it was a fight for their survival.

Schools should be a place where kids learn things like science. Instead, we have to learn things like how to shelter in place. This phenomenon is unique to American schooling. The rate of gun-related deaths in the United States is 10 times higher than the average rate in other developed countries. The rate of gun-related homicides for high school age youth is 82 times higher. This means our schools are unequivocally unsafe for our children and youth to attend. School shootings are far too common to the point where many have been desensitized to reading about such shootings.

Children, including me, have to regularly practice lockdown drills in school because of how frequently shootings occur. This takes time away from school work where we should focus on learning. It also takes a toll on our mental health from the stress we endure about the possibility of a real shooting occurring. Once the drill is over we are left distracted from the procedure we had just performed and expected to hop back into our schoolwork as though we did not just practice for something serious.

Sometimes we wonder if such drills are even helpful to begin with. After all many students are still harmed in a shooting even after schools go into lockdown mode.

The United States has some of the most lenient laws regarding firearms in the developed world. We, the students, pay the price for this. In eleven states people can carry concealed handguns without a need for a license. In 30 other states,

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authorities have little control over refusing a permit for concealed carry. These laws exist under the presumption that firearms keep us safe. Ask any of us in school and we don't feel any safer. If they did keep us safe we wouldn't be performing active shooter drills to begin with.

If our government was more serious about protecting our children than protecting the interests of the gun lobby, we would be passing laws similar to those of other developed countries. These laws have been shown to protect their children from gun violence. In Great Britain, handguns have been banned since 1996 after the Dunblane Primary School massacre. The result is that Britain now has safer schools for students to attend. There hasn't been even a single school shooting since the handgun ban went into effect. Comparatively, there were 51 school shootings in the United States last year alone, and the overall rate of gun-related deaths in our country is more than 70 times the rate for our British counterparts.

Instead of preparing for lockdown drills in schools, we high school students should be pushing lawmakers to enact stringent gun control laws comparable to the laws in Britain and other developed countries. This is a big ask, but this is because gun violence is an even bigger problem. With the adoption of stringent gun control laws, the normalization of gun violence in America can finally be brought to an end, and our schools can be made safe for all our children.