



Americans Against Gun Violence  
7862 Winding Way #151  
Fair Oaks, CA 95814  
(916) 668-4160  
aagunv.org / info@aagunv.org

## **Announcement of our 2026 National High School Essay Contest**

**Open to All U.S. High School Students**

**With at least \$15,000 in Total Scholarship Awards**

- ***Essay Topic***

- To enter the 2026 Americans Against Gun Violence National High School Essay Contest, students must submit an original essay of 500 words or fewer describing their thoughts about the following statement by Dr. Michael North, who lost his daughter, Sophie, in the 1996 mass shooting at the elementary school in Dunblane, Scotland, and who subsequently helped lead the successful campaign to completely ban civilian handgun ownership in Great Britain:

**The thought of having armed guards and “lockdown drills”  
never crossed our minds.**

- The above quotation is an excerpt from Dr. North’s keynote address at the 2023 Americans Against Gun Violence fall dinner. Students are encouraged to read the [full text of Dr. North’s keynote address](#), which is posted on the Americans Against Gun Violence website,<sup>1</sup> in order to better understand the full context of the essay contest prompt. Other aspects of the prompt that students may wish to address in their essays include:
  - How does the British response to the Dunblane Primary School mass shooting compare with the approach taken by the United States to mass shootings, including shootings on school campuses?
  - What are your own feelings about having armed guards and lockdown drills on U.S. school campuses?
  - Should the United States adopt gun control laws comparable to those in Great Britain? If not, why not? And if so, what are the obstacles to adopting comparable laws, and how can we overcome those obstacles?
  - What effect does the threat of school shootings and other forms of gun violence have on you and other U.S. children and youth, and what role do you think that you and other young people in our country can play in helping to stop our country’s epidemic of gun violence?

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<sup>1</sup> Dr. North’s full keynote address can be viewed at: <https://aagunv.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/11/Dr.-Norths-Keynote-Address-w-Bills-intro.pdf>

- **Contest Eligibility and Rules**
  - Contestants must be current high school students attending school in the United States or its territories, or students who entered high school on track to graduate in 2026 but who graduated early.
  - Americans Against Gun Violence Board members, employees, and paid consultants and their first and second degree relatives are not eligible to enter the contest.
  - Students are encouraged to access information posted on the Americans Against Gun Violence website, including, but not limited to, information on the [Facts and FAQ's](#) and [Links to Other Resources](#) pages, among other resource materials, and to discuss the essay topic with teachers, parents, friends, and other mentors; but students must write their essays themselves, in their own words.
  - Essays that are judged to be largely or entirely computer-generated (*aka*, "AI") will not be considered for scholarship awards.
  - Students who are under the age of 18 must have the consent of a parent or legal guardian to enter the contest.
  - **To enter the contest, students must submit their essays and demographic information via the online entry system link posted on the [High School Essay Contest page](#) of the [Americans Against Gun Violence website](#).**
  - Essays may include a title and footnotes, but these elements are not required. (If they are included, titles and footnotes don't count toward the 500 word limit.)
  - Only one essay will be considered per student. If a student submits more than one essay, the most recent submission will be the one that is considered.
  - The deadline to enter the contest is 11:59 PM in the student's own time zone on Saturday, April 18, 2026. Late entries will not be accepted unless the delay is caused by a malfunction of the Americans Against Gun Violence online entry system.
- **Selection of Contest Winners**
  - A minimum of twelve contest winners will be selected from the essays submitted.
  - The Americans Against Gun Violence Board of Directors will establish a panel of reviewers to choose contest winners based on the accuracy, originality, clarity, cohesiveness, and overall impact of the essays.
  - Essay reviewers will be blinded to all student identifying information.
  - Contest winners will be notified by email by Monday, May 18, 2026.
  - At the time that students are notified that they've been chosen as contest winners, they'll also be sent a signature form via email that includes the following elements:
    - A statement that the essay submitted is the student's own original work
    - A statement signed by a parent or legal guardian, if the student is under age 18, confirming that the parent or guardian approves of the student's participation in the essay contest
    - A statement by a school official confirming that the contestant is a high school student in good standing or that the student entered high school on track to graduate in 2026 but graduated early

## 2026 Americans Against Gun Violence National High School Essay Contest Rules

- In order to receive a scholarship award, students must return the signed signature forms within 30 days of being notified that they have been chosen as contest winners.
- **Scholarship Awards (Total of at least \$15,000)**
  - Scholarship awards will be sent to essay contest winners with the understanding that the awards are to be used to pay for future qualified expenses that lead to a college degree or a professional certification in a recognized occupation, in accordance with IRS guidelines for non-taxable scholarships.
  - Scholarship awards will be sent in the form of a check by U.S. mail to the home address listed on the student winner's entry form within five business days of receipt of the winner's completed signature form.
    - The first place winner will be sent a check for a \$3,000 scholarship award; second place a \$2,500 award; and third place a \$2,000 award.
    - The fourth through tenth ranked winners will each be sent \$1,000 awards, and the 11<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> ranked winners will each be sent \$250 awards.
  - **If any of the students chosen as one of the top 12 winners don't submit their completed signature forms within 30 days of being notified, their awards may be divided among other student winners.**
  - Americans Against Gun Violence reserves the option of also offering additional scholarship awards on top of those described above if judges feel that there are more than 12 deserving contest entrants. (In most past years, additional scholarships have been awarded, including a total of \$20,600 in 2025 distributed among 33 student winners.)
- **Publication of Essays and Release of Students' Names and High School Affiliations**
  - By entering the contest, students agree to allow Americans Against Gun Violence to publish their essays in part or in whole in any manner that the Board of Directors deems to be appropriate, but without the students' names, high school affiliations, or other identifying information.
  - Signature forms sent to contest winners will include an optional section that students may complete if they wish to have their names and/or their high school affiliations published along with their essays. Americans Against Gun Violence will not publish students' names and/or high school affiliations or release any other student identifying or contact information without the written consent of the student, and, if the student is under 18 years of age, the written consent of a parent or guardian.
- **Summary of Essay Contest Timeline**
  - The deadline for entering the contest is 11:59 PM in the student's own time zone on Saturday, April 18, 2026.
  - The students selected as winners will be notified by Monday, May 18, 2026.
  - Scholarship award checks will be mailed to the winners within five business days of receipt of their completed signature forms.

For additional information or questions, please email [essaycontest@aagunv.org](mailto:essaycontest@aagunv.org) or call (916) 668-4160.