



Americans Against Gun Violence  
7862 Winding Way #151  
Fair Oaks, CA 95628  
(916) 668-4160  
aagunv.org / info@aagunv.org

## **2026 National High School Essay Contest \$1,000 Winner**

Zachary DelPrato

Penncrest High School, Media, Pennsylvania

### *Ripping Off the Band-Aid*

"Guns don't kill people. People kill people."

Every American has heard this gun lobby mantra each and every time there is a new, gun-related, national tragedy. By its nature, it implies that in terms of legislation, there is essentially nothing to be done as the guns are not the problem; the people are. Therefore, following this logic, if any action is to be taken, it must focus on the people, not the guns. Video game culture and mental health have become common diversions from the main issue of easy access to guns. And even when guns enter the conversation, proposed solutions such as partial gun bans, better background checks, and stricter age restrictions are as far as the conversation goes. Schools, which find themselves handicapped by a dangerous gun culture, resort to reflex responses such as armed guards (and in some cases, armed teachers), metal detectors, and mandatory lockdown drills that inevitably traumatize children but have no proven value.

As a student of the lockdown drill era, I have blindly accepted these measures as unavoidable and necessary. After reading a speech, though, by Dr. Michael North, who lost his five year old daughter, Sophie, in the 1996 Dunblane Primary School massacre in Scotland, and who subsequently helped lead the successful campaign to completely ban handguns in Britain, I now feel that my acquiescence to the status quo has been not only misguided, but, in a word, complacent.

In his keynote speech at the annual dinner of Americans Against Gun Violence in 2023, Dr. North described how he and other grieving Dunblane parents considered what they should do to help prevent another tragedy like the mass shooting that took the lives of their own children. Dr. North said:

"The thought of having armed guards and 'lockdown drills' never crossed our minds."

Reading this statement prompted me to think more deeply about the response to the threat of school shootings in our own country – a response that has become so routine that it seems normal for many American students. I now see that our response is not normal, or effective. The statistics shared in Dr. North's speech are proof. The Dunblane massacre was committed with handguns. Britain already had a complete ban on what we

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refer to as “assault rifles” at the time of the Dunblane shooting. Since the handgun ban went into effect in Britain, there hasn’t been even a single other school shooting, and the rate of gun related homicides in Britain is 1/100<sup>th</sup> the rate in the United States.

Similarly, we can look to many other countries - Australia and New Zealand, for example - to see that the effectiveness of the gun ban in Great Britain is not a one-off, but rather a replicable and effective strategy. Armed guards and lockdown drills are measures that we, as Americans, have taken for granted because the alternative (a complete ban on large classes of firearms) seems impossible. Ultimately, our country’s minimalist strategies are band-aids on bullet wounds, not effective solutions.

"There is no way to peace. Peace is the way."

As a Quaker, this is a saying that I have heard throughout my life. Reading Dr. North’s speech, these words echoed in the back of mind, slowly asserting their quiet power as I contemplated the topic of this essay. Peace is not merely a state of being. Peace is a choice, and it requires action. Guns cannot act. People can act. By remaining committed to a complete ban on civilian handgun ownership, not accepting compromises or concessions, and staying focused on the fact that without access to the handguns he used, the Dunblane shooter could not have committed the massacre, Dr. North and the other Dunblane parents were successful in their legislative pursuits.

Americans need to come to terms with the reality that lip service after a tragedy is not enough and that we are responsible for ensuring the safety of our country’s children. Dr. North concluded his speech by stating, “Britain and other countries have shown through their actions, and not just their words, that they love their children more than their guns.” Do we?