



Americans Against Gun Violence  
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## **2026 National High School Essay Contest \$1,000 Winner**

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### *Never Again...Right?*

Dr. Michael North lost his five year old daughter, Sophie, in a mass shooting in 1996 at the elementary school in Dunblane, Scotland, in which 15 other students and their teacher were also killed. Britain already had a ban on civilian ownership of AR-15 style rifles, but the Dunblane shooter used a handgun that he legally owned to commit the massacre. Following the Dunblane shooting, Dr. North helped lead a successful campaign to completely ban civilian handgun ownership in Britain within two years.

Americans Against Gun Violence invited Dr. North to be the keynote speaker at their 2023 annual dinner. During his speech, Dr. North said that when he and the other Dunblane parents were trying to decide what they should do to prevent another school shooting like the Dunblane massacre, "The idea of having armed guards and 'lockdown drills' never crossed our minds." When I read those words, I felt ashamed of our own country.

After the Dunblane shooting in 1996, the U.K. didn't argue for years or pretend nothing could be done. They banned handguns. They listened to the families who lost their kids. And as Dr. North said in his speech, in the 27 years since the handgun ban went into effect, there hasn't been even one other school shooting. That's what happens when a country actually cares enough about its children to take definitive action to protect them.

But here in the U.S., we grow up doing lockdown drills like it's just another school activity. Almost every kid I know has done them since we were little. Dr. North said he was "appalled" that American kids have to live like this. The United States of America loves calling itself the "Greatest Country of All Time," but we can't even keep children safe in a classroom.

Never Again...Right?

And then there's Uvalde, Texas. A shooter walked into Robb Elementary School on May 24, 2022, with an AR15-style rifle and started shooting students and teachers. Police arrived minutes afterward but waited over an hour to go into the classroom where the shooter was holed up while students inside were dying of gunshot wounds and calling for help. Nineteen students and two teachers were killed and 18 others were injured. The parents of one of the students who was killed said their child's body and face were so mutilated that they couldn't identify her until they recognized her shoes.

It's been three years since the Uvalde massacre, but I still think about that all the time. That shooting made me realize how embarrassing and weak our gun laws are. Why is any regular person allowed to buy a weapon that can do that kind of damage to children? Why has nothing changed since Uvalde? Or Marjory Stoneman Douglas? Or Sandy Hook. Or Columbine? We've been having school shootings for decades.

Dr. North talked about how the Dunblane shooter "held the guns legally." That scares me because it's literally the same thing here. People buy guns legally, and then kids end up dead. He also said, "The fewer guns there are in a country the lower the level of gun violence." Britain proved that. But in the United States, the people claim they need to have all those dangerous weapons for "protection." Politicians argue and nothing changes. It's like we just accept this now.

Should the U.S. have laws like Great Britain? After reading Dr. North's speech and thinking about Uvalde, I don't even know how anyone could say no. What are we waiting for? Another school shooting? Another parent identifying their dead child by their shoes? How many times does this have to happen before someone finally decides that kids matter more than guns?

Young people can help change this. We can vote, speak up, and stop acting like hiding from bullets is just part of being a student. The families in Dunblane didn't stay quiet, and their voices changed their whole country for the better. We deserve that same kind of change here. It's long overdue.

Dr. North ended his speech by saying that the British people showed through their actions and not just their words that they loved their children more than their guns, and that he hoped that our country would soon do the same. I hope so too. Because right now, it feels like we say "never again" after every shooting...but we don't act like we really mean it.