



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

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Plan A: The All-American Lockdown Drill

It happens three times a year.

“This is a Code Red drill. Students and staff, please move away from windows and doors, turn off the lights, and remain silent.”

I sit on the cold tile of the classroom, knees to chest, breathing quietly. My classmates are packed shoulder-to-shoulder like sardines. “If they wanted to, they could just shoot through the window,” someone whispers. Others discuss a test. A real shooting will never happen, I think. But we'd better practice just in case.

Suddenly, the static pops. A mechanical throat clears. “Thank you for your cooperation in this drill. The lockdown is now over. Please return to your regular schedule.”

We stand, let out a collective sigh, and return to our seats. Now it's time for Biology.

Every American student knows the Code Red drill. We're so used to it that it is hard to imagine school without it. It is as routine as lunch or recess. But for Dr. Michael North and other parents who lost their children in 1996 in the mass shooting at the Dunblane Primary School in Scotland, the idea of adopting lockdown drills as an appropriate response to the tragedy “never crossed our minds.”¹

In 1996, handguns were legal in Scotland. No one imagined the Dunblane massacre was possible until it happened. Dr. North's five year old daughter, Sophie, and fifteen of Sophie's classmates and their teacher were killed with handguns that the shooter legally owned. In response, thanks largely to the campaigning by Dr. North and other Dunblane parents, the British government completely banned civilian handgun ownership within two years. Rates of gun violence in Britain have subsequently been among the lowest in the world, and there have been no further school shootings. This

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raises the question: is it better to: A) have a well-rehearsed plan for the possibility of a gunman coming into a school; or B) ban the guns used in school shootings?

The data demonstrate without a doubt that our country's Plan A is failing and that it's past time to switch to Plan B.

According to a study posted on the World Population Review website, from 2009-2018 there were 266 school shootings in the United States while the country with the next highest number, Mexico, had eight.² The total number of school shootings in all the countries of the world other than the United States was 40. In other words, in 2026, 88% of all the school shootings in the entire world occurred in the United States. We pride ourselves in being first in things like the number of Olympic gold medals won by U.S. athletes, but we should be ashamed of our extraordinarily high number of school shootings.

We are told that these statistics are the price of the Second Amendment, but we often forget the text that precedes the "right to bear arms." Madison's intent was to empower a "well-regulated militia" for collective security, using muskets that took minutes to reload. He couldn't have imagined modern weapons capable of firing dozens of rounds per minute: tools perfect for mowing down school children and their teachers in their classrooms.

Many argue that guns protect us from tyranny. But what about the freedom from fear? The freedom to go to school without the fear of a gunman entering your school. What good does owning a gun do if you're sending your children to school where they're forced to practice drills to avoid the very real possibility of getting shot and killed?

In Great Britain, they didn't respond to tragedy by hiring guards or practicing drills. They responded by removing the guns entirely. In America, we have traded that peace of mind for a plan that just doesn't cut it. As I sit on the cold tile of my Biology classroom, "freedom" feels more like a prison. We shouldn't need to practice for the possibility of a gunman coming into our school, but that's what it's come to. We should have the right to focus on learning without the fear of getting shot.

My generation of youth has a choice. We can follow the example of Dr. North and do everything within our power to get our country to switch from Plan A to Plan B, or we can continue to practice sitting on the floor and waiting for the "all clear."

References

¹ Michael North, "Gun Control in Great Britain After the 1996 Dunblane Primary School Mass Shooting: A Model for the United States," Americans Against Gun Violence Annual Meeting, Sacramento, California, October 21, 2023, <https://aagunv.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/11/Dr.-Norths-Keynote-Address-w-Bills-intro.pdf>.

² "School Shootings by Country 2026," World Population Review, May 20, 2026, <https://worldpopulationreview.com/country-rankings/school-shootings-by-country>.