



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

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The Cost of Preparedness

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

Dr. Michael North’s words are not nostalgia; they are an indictment.

They describe a society where children learn alongside rehearsing survival, a symbiotic relationship between education and procedural fear. In the United States, this is now so routine it is treated as normal. It is policy failure made visible by locked classroom doors.

After the 1996 Dunblane Primary School tragedy, Britain confronted a truth: access determines outcome. Within two years, civilian handgun ownership was effectively eliminated. The goal was reduction of risk and future capacity for repetition. Importantly, there was no implementation of armed teachers or drills. The aim was to prevent the weapon from entering the equation instead of training children to endure its consequences.

The U.S. response moved in the opposite direction: we have layered security upon trauma, turning children into participants in a contingency plan for their own potential harm. This creates a psychological environment defined by anticipation and apprehension.

Justice William O. Douglas, dissenting in *Adams v. Williams* (1972), wrote there was “no reason why all pistols should not be barred to everyone except the police.” At the time, people viewed the Second Amendment as being tied to militias rather than individual entitlement. Looking back, Douglas’s warning about a “powerful lobby” changing how we understand the Constitution feels more like a diagnosis than just a

theory. Now, the idea of a broad ban on guns is treated as legally impossible.

But the law does not live in isolation. The [majority opinion] in *District of Columbia v. Heller* (2008) reframed gun ownership as an individual right anchored in self-defense. This hardened the idea that pervasive firearm access is not merely permitted, but protected. Ultimately, policy became confined by this constitutional narrative.

Dr. North's statement forces a comparison. One society treats a tragedy as an initiation for restriction. The other has treated repeated tragedies as a condition requiring adaptation. Armed guards and lockdown drills aren't safety features: they are white flags. They are institutional declarations that we have given up on prevention.

The question is not whether violence can be completely eliminated, but what a society is willing to normalize. The U.S. chooses normalization of armed readiness within schools whilst Britain chose restriction of access outside them.

Justice is not frozen in precedent. The legal architecture of gun rights in America emerged from interpretation, and interpretation is most certainly open to revision. The world that Dr. North describes, where the idea of an armed guard isn't even considered, redefines what it means to be "free." It pushes that true liberty isn't found in being armed and ready to fight, but in the freedom to live without being threatened by that possibility. Real freedom shouldn't be measured by how close you are to a gun for "protection," but by how far away you are from the violence itself.