



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 \$100 Winner

Lyedin Chase-Lessard

Gray New Gloucester High School, Gray, Maine

Untitled

When I read Dr. Michael North's words, "The thought of having armed guards and 'lockdown drills' never crossed our minds," I felt a chill. It's hard to imagine a world where schools felt completely safe, where children could focus only on learning and laughing. Today, however, lockdown drills are part of my routine. Last year, our school held one unexpectedly. The announcement came over the loudspeaker: "Lockdown drill - everyone to the nearest classroom." My heart raced as I slid under my desk, trying not to look out the window. I could hear whispers and see my classmates' eyes wide with worry. For a moment, it didn't feel like a drill. That day, I realized how fear has become a normal part of the school experience....

Dr. North's reflection reminds me how far we've strayed from what schools should be: spaces for curiosity, creativity, and friendship, not fear. My experience that day made me question why students have to practice surviving violence instead of exploring science experiments, writing stories, or playing soccer in peace. Lockdown drills, armed guards, and metal detectors may protect us in emergencies, but they also normalize the idea that children should expect danger at school. That normalization is heartbreaking.

This reality has shaped how I think about the role society plays in protecting young people. Gun violence is not inevitable - it is preventable. Countries like Great Britain, where Dr. North helped lead a successful campaign to ban civilian handguns, show that decisive action can save lives. Their example makes me believe that students should not have to accept fear as part of growing up. It motivates me to advocate for change, to participate in conversations about school safety, and to support initiatives that put prevention over reaction.

Untitled

Dr. North's words remind me that every life lost to gun violence is a story cut short. Thinking of Sophie, I feel the weight of what children should never have to face. My own lockdown drill was just a rehearsal, but for others, such events turn into tragedies. I want to help create a future where students can focus on reading, creating, and dreaming instead of surviving. Schools should be sanctuaries for growth and imagination, not places where fear is routine.

In remembering Sophie and all victims of gun violence, I understand that safety is a right, not a privilege. Dr. North's statement challenges me to envision what school should be - and to work so that no student's potential is stolen by fear.