

A Student's Perspective on the National School Walk-Out

"No More," "This is what democracy looks like" and "Enough is enough;" those were the chants heard at the student-run march to end gun violence at the RI State House on March 14.

At 12:45pm students from high schools all over the state walked or drove to the state house in quite a tear-jerking sight as a line of high schoolers marched with their fist in the air holding up signs that read everything from "Stop NRA" to more gut wrenching ones asking, "Am I next?"

Thousands of students came out to show support for the victims of the deadly shooting that took place in Parkland, Florida, last month. The point of the march was to call attention to the gun violence that has been terrorizing our nation's schools for the past decade, while also calling out congress for not actively doing anything to stop it.

Annie Rogers, a junior at Lasalle Academy, participated in the march. "I'm here because I don't think anybody should be scared to go to school and I really don't appreciate the amount of lives that have been lost due to needless gun violence." So far, just in 2018 alone there have been more than 14 shootings at schools, most ending in casualties. Young learners are taking notice.

Before the march, there was a nationwide school walk-out at 10am. Many schools, such as Seekonk High School, made preparations for the walk-out in advance, hosting sign-making sessions after school. Others, such as The Met High School, took the approach of standing in solidarity silently for the 17 minutes the walkout went on. Schools like East Providence High School had a chanting battle as half of the student body held up signs demanding gun control, the other half held up signs suggesting that it is not the answer.

Dorian Woods, a Junior at East Providence High School who was one student in charge of her own school's walk-out, said that the protesters on the side disagreeing with gun control are free to their own opinion, but that it was a bit disrespectful. "Of course everyone has a right to their own opinion. However, the walk-outs for gun control were nationwide and I feel like this time it was actually disrespectful for them to disrupt the movement." Woods also said that they were missing the point. While their signs indicated that the majority of them believed mental illness is the biggest culprit in school shootings, "He [Cruz] probably would not have killed 17 people if he went into that school with a knife. All the protests are saying is that we need gun reform in order to change things in the future." After the walk-out, Woods attended the march to further show her support and call for change.

Another student from Lasalle Academy, senior Jack Kineke, is marching because according to him, it makes us one step closer to change. "I want to make sure what happened in Parkland doesn't happen anywhere else," he said. In the past, peaceful protests such as this one have caught attention all over the world and have made a difference. For instance, the women's march in protest of Donald Trump's sometimes derogatory and sexist comments about females and the Black Lives Matter marches in protest of the unfair treatment of black people in the US have made people wake up and see that what's happening is not okay, and that's what can happen with this march as well.

While the majority of those who participated were students, there were people who attended who were

not, such as Annie Gjelsvik. "I'm marching because my 12-year-old daughter is here and I'm supporting her," she said. Not only is Annie showing support for her daughter, she is also showing support for every other student who came out and credits them for all they are doing. "The students are leading this because they know that what's happening in the United States is wrong and we need to follow their lead."

Students aren't going to keep blindly accepting what's happening, and this march made that even more evident. Most teenagers, get a bad rap for only caring about what hashtag to add in their Instagram caption. That truly is not the case. We care so much that not even the snowstorm that hit RI with 12 inches the night before could stop us from marching. We are the ones who when not seeing change, make it. We are the ones who spread empowerment in each other. We are the ones who will end this unnecessary bloodshed that has been plaguing our country for far too long.

This generation expects change and is willing to smear lines that have long ago been drawn to get it. Today we marched, tomorrow congress delivers.