

**MARCH  
FOR OUR  
LIVES** **KY**



**TEACH-IN**

**KENTUCKY CAPITOL ANNEX**

**MARCH 20<sup>TH</sup>, 2018**



**Kentucky  
Student  
Voice Team**

# AGENDA

Welcome

Breakout Activity: Introductions & Stories

Understanding School Culture & Violence

Activity: Student Voice Spectrum Line

School Safety Policy Proposals

Breakout Activity: Solutions

Break

Panel: Organizing & Amplifying

How To: Student Activism

How To: Meet With Legislators

*Please join us on the steps of the Capitol for the  
March For Our Lives KY Rally after the Teach-In*

# ABOUT US

The Student Voice Team consists of over one hundred self-selected youth from across Kentucky. We work to integrate students as research, policy, and advocacy partners in the efforts to improve our schools. We were founded in 2012 at the Prichard Committee. Our approach has focused on amplifying student stories, from our Student Voice Audits to our published book *Ready or Not: Stories from the Students Behind the Statistics*.

With our Student Voice Audits, we pioneered a peer-led evaluation of school climate, focusing on the opinions of students, teachers, administrators, and parents collected in surveys, roundtable discussions, and interviews. We completed our first Audit in 2015 in Clark County, and are currently working on Audits at Franklin-Simpson, Magoffin County, and Fern Creek High Schools.

In 2017, we published *Ready or Not*, a book that examined postsecondary transitions. With Gear Up Kentucky, we travelled across the state and interviewed students, teachers, and parents, about what it means to be college ready. With a diverse group of stories, *Ready or Not* describes the various challenges for students across Kentucky to make the transition to college.

# **MARCH FOR OUR LIVES KY PARTNERS**

Foundation for a Healthy Kentucky

JackBeNimble

League of Women Voters of Kentucky

LIFT Kentucky

National Alliance on Mental Illness Kentucky

Students Alliance for Mental Health Improvement and Action

Lexington March For Our Lives

Marshall County-West Kentucky March For Our Lives

# BEYOND GUNS

For many Kentucky high school students growing up with the memories of Heath, Columbine, Virginia Tech, and Sandy Hook, recent events have made it feel as though our schools are under siege.

And this was true even before the recent school shootings took the lives of two students at Marshall County High School in Benton, Kentucky and 17 at Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School in Parkland, Florida. Several months prior to these tragedies, the Student Voice Team conducted a school climate survey of 1552 students at three geographically-diverse Kentucky high schools. Of the students responding, 47% reported that they worry about violence at their school and 19% said that they do so frequently.

Since the Benton and Parkland shootings, many of us have been on edge with real gun confiscations, social media scares, and precautionary lockdowns. Sixteen-year old Bree Owen from Daviess County High School expressed a common sentiment: “I feel scared, but also frustrated,” she said. “Usually when we get threats, it’s written on walls or sent over texts then extended into rumors that make their way throughout everyone. It gets to the point where I don’t know what I should be scared about and what I shouldn’t.”

National conversations about school safety since Parkland have focused on what to do about weapons: how to “harden the target,” how to arm teachers, and how to reduce access to guns. As a response to mass school shootings, this may make sense. But while mass school shootings seem to be on the rise, they are rare: since 1996, there have been 16 multiple victim shootings in schools. And over the past 25 years, an average of 10 students per year out of over 50 million public school students in the United States have lost their lives to a school shooter. Contrast the scope with the Centers for Disease Control survey showing that over 20% of high school students report having been bullied on school property and nearly 8% report having been in a physical fight there.

These facts do not diminish the horrific experience students, families, and communities affected by school shootings endure. But they also suggest the conversation we are having about how to make students feel safer must get beyond guns.

We need to talk about school climate and the relationships students have to each other and to adults in school as well as the norms, goals, values and nature of education that make school a place where students from a wide range of backgrounds can love learning and feel safe, welcome, and loved themselves.

More specifically, while we do need to address inappropriate access to guns like the one used in Parkland and on our streets, in order to ensure schools that are conducive to learning at high levels, we must do much more. As Ron Avi Astor, a specialist in school violence from the University of Southern California explains, when it comes to school safety, we must also look at preventative care.

Astor's research shows that the students who bring guns to schools are the students who most frequently report being ostracized or bullied themselves. It also suggests that if we can address student marginalization sooner, we have a much better shot at stemming school violence later.

A preventative approach means we must consider such things as whether our discipline policies are constructive and rehabilitative and fairly administered. We must evaluate students' mental health so they can get the help they need and ensure that school counselors are better resourced and less overwhelmed by their caseloads. And we must build capacity in young people and adults to support each other socially and emotionally.

Rather than talking about hardening our schools, we should be talking about creating more compassionate ones.

Fortunately, as student activists around the country are demonstrating in this moment, young people are ready to help lead the charge. Policymakers would be wise to heed our interest and energy and enlist us as full partners in finding solutions.

# SCHOOL SAFETY LEGISLATION

## **HB 538**

House Bill 538 requires a mental health screening for students before entering each level of school in conjunction with current immunization requirements.

## **HB 554**

House Bill 554 requires that local board of education adopts policies to establish emergency response teams at schools without security or resource officers. Members would be included in KRS 527.070, which allows school staff to carry firearms on school grounds if the local board of education allows it. HB 554 also requires the Kentucky State Police to develop a curriculum and requirements for certification of instructors in school safety.

## **HB 604**

House Bill 604 requires individual schools to employ at least one mental health professional for every 1,500 students in their school. In addition to this, HB 604 requires that the state assists school districts by providing a “toolkit” to provide schools with more proficiency trauma-informed approaches in schools, with this trauma-informed approach including a raising of awareness in a community, developing specific discipline policies, and “conducting assessments of school climate”.

## **SB 103**

Senate Bill 103 allows for schools to have a “school marshal” whom shall be exempt from the prohibition of firearms on school property, as long as this marshal has been verified by the local school board.

## **SB 162**

Senate Bill 162 allows teachers and other staff members at schools to be trained in a “safety response program” that would give school employees a chance to learn how to use “less-than-lethal” weapons effectively to protect their students.

## **SR 172 & HR 176**

Senate Resolution 172 and House Resolution 176 encourage the board of education or the board of trustees to allow teachers and other staff members at a school to carry firearms, given that these staff members are properly trained. Resolutions only express the opinion of the chamber and, when passed, do not become law.

## **HJR 190**

House Joint Resolution 190 directs the Commissioner of Education, with assistance of the Kentucky Center for School Safety, to conduct a survey to gather data on steps each school has taken to ensure students’ safety. Joint Resolutions express the opinion of both chambers and, when passed, do not become law.

# FIREARM LEGISLATION

## **HB 143**

House Bill 143 requires the creation of a School Safety and Crisis Line to provide for anonymous reporting of unsafe, violent, or criminal activities or threats of such activities. Additionally, the line can be used for reporting incidents of bullying, harassment, sexual abuse, and crisis intervention.

## **HB 210**

House Bill 210 allows people with valid concealed carry licenses to carry concealed weapons on public universities and colleges, buildings controlled by state and local governments excluding courtrooms and prisons, and in meetings of the General Assembly.

## **HB 387**

House Bill 387 would allow counties and consolidated city-county governments to regulate firearms when not regulated by the state or federal government.

## **HB 409 & 602**

House Bill 409 and House Bill 602 prohibit the sale or transfer of bump stock devices, trigger cranks, and other accessories designed to accelerate the rate of fire of a semi-automatic weapon.

## **HB 410**

House Bill 410 creates a publicly accessible database of offenders with convictions for deadly weapons offenses.

## **HB 412**

House Bill 412 mandates the reporting of lost or stolen firearms to local law enforcement and instructs the Kentucky State Police to create a system for sharing information about lost or stolen firearms. It prohibits people failing to report lost or stolen firearms three times from holding a concealed carry license.

## **HB 498**

House Bill 498 defines “assault weapon” and prohibits the sale of them to people under the age of 21 unless they are a member of the Armed Forces or a law enforcement officer.

## **HB 502**

House Bill 502 requires background checks for private firearm sales, reporting of theft of firearms and ammunition to law enforcement, and the safe storage of firearms. It also prohibits the manufacture, sale, or transfer of a bump stock. HB 502 additionally requires a judge, when issuing an order of protection, to consider prohibiting the person from possessing a firearm, and to demand the surrender of firearms when a defendant is found guilty by reason of insanity. The bill expands current bans on firearms in schools to include colleges and universities. It also requires the Kentucky State Police to create regulations for firearm licenses. Finally, HB 502 changes penalties and criminal definitions for gun-related offenses.

## **HB 544**

House Bill 544 allows people to petition the court for a one-year extreme risk protective order on a person believed to be of significant danger of causing personal injury to themselves or others by use of firearms. It requires the surrender of firearms if the order is issued.

## **SB 184 & HB 31**

Senate Bill 184 and House Bill 31 prohibit the unlawful storage of a firearm, including storage which allows a minor unsupervised access to a firearm.

# STUDENT ACTIVISM & ORGANIZING

The formal definition of “student voice” is “**supporting students as partners in their learning and school-decision making.**” However, that assistance often extends beyond the classroom to include any student-led activism to achieve a variety of goals. Below are a few tips on how to start or organize those movements.

## 1) DETERMINE A SPECIFIC GOAL

This shared outcome can be anything from integrating students into the conversation to a tangible policy change. Either way, before beginning to recruit allies, it is imperative to have an identifiable goal.

One method of determining a feasible outcome is the SMART goals criteria:

- **S**pecific - goals should clearly define what you hope to achieve
- **M**easurable - goals should have the backing of evidence to showcase completion
- **A**chievable - goals should stretch the status quo, however they must also be accessible. Integrating student voices is radical alone before beginning to add goals on top.
- **R**elevant - goals should pertain to a recognized issue
- **T**imely - goals should have a timeframe that generates both a sense of urgency and accountability

## **2) ENGAGE INTERESTED STUDENTS**

Students may be interested in joining your cause, but they cannot do so unless they are aware of the presence of an organization. Social media is a fantastic medium to engage students, but it is important to remember to vigilantly stay active on all platforms. Other ways to attract students include: canvassing, public announcements, and partnering with other organizations. The core of all of these suggestions is conversation, anywhere. Coffee shops, cafeterias, and libraries are just a few examples of great places to spark a conversation; we've found them to be the best way to inform others.

## **3) DISCOVER ADULT ALLIES**

The notion of student voice is built upon relationships. This is especially important when first establishing a youth movement, but collaboration is important throughout the process. Student voice is a relatively new phenomenon, making securing adult allies even more critical to achieving a seat at the table. Furthermore, adults possess a valuable perspective to inform that should not be overlooked as student voice gains momentum.

## **4) RAISE PUBLIC AWARENESS**

Publicity is imperative to create momentum for any movement. Student leaders have a unique advantage, an appeal to media due to their age. Writing op-eds, letters to the editor, and utilizing social media are all ways to advertise your movement. Again, recruiting and support cannot occur unless people are aware of a movement.

## **5) LOBBY FOR CHANGE**

Advocating for change is the only way to achieve it. There are a number of ways to go about this. We touched on talking to legislators in our presentation, one of the best ways to achieve a policy related change. Those three key components are: finding a legislator to support your cause, contacting them, and creating a partnership to facilitate discussion. Numerous other avenues are also available, and some have been more or less effective historically. These approaches include: petitions, boycotting, protests, sit-ins, and other forms of demonstrations. Whatever form of advocacy your cause employs, always keep the initial goal set at the forefront to achieve true change.

# ADULT ALLIES & STUDENT ACTIVISM

The formal definition of “student voice” is “supporting students as partners in their learning and school-decision making.” However, that assistance often extends beyond the classroom to include any student-led activism to achieve a variety of goals. Below are a few tips on how to best facilitate an effective movement, without overstepping paramount leadership of students.

## **1) AMPLIFY, ELEVATE, AND INTEGRATE STUDENT VOICES, NOT YOUR OWN**

Create spaces in which youth can offer their opinions and ideas, make suggestions, and know they will be respected and heard when they do so. Student voice is not yet an integrated aspect of policy conversations: Your job is to empower students, to give them a “seat at the table,” not to take credit for their response.

## **2) HAVE CONFIDENCE IN THE CAPABILITY OF STUDENT LEADERS**

Students are said to be the leaders of tomorrow; provide them with those experiences today. Your role as an adult ally is to foster a relationship of mutual respect despite age differences. This means you must guide, not direct or control. Adult allies must have and instill enough confidence in their student leaders to allow them to test their ideas and try new things even at the risk of not always succeeding.

### **3) UNDERSTAND THAT YOUTH MOVEMENTS PRODUCE BOTH UNIQUE CHALLENGES AND SOLUTIONS**

Be open to new ways of meeting, working, and communicating. Students often face additional challenges in organizing related to access to resources, transportation, and time. However, they also utilize technology to develop creative solutions in ways that may not be familiar or comfortable for adults.

### **4) MODEL THE PROPER SUPPORT OF STUDENT VOICE TO OTHER ALLIES**

The movement to empower youth voices will die without an audience. Organize with other adult allies to create a community supportive of student voice. This can come through direct, in-person aid; sharing on social media; and leading conversations that foster assistance. Advertising yourself as a proponent of student voice integration is the best way to recruit more adults.

### **5) FOCUS ON SUPPORTING A SUSTAINED DEMOCRATIC PROCESS IN ADDITION TO A SPECIFIC OUTCOME**

Giving students a voice is about aiding them to develop the skills and leadership to effect change. Your job is to help guide the process rather than determine the outcome. This includes assisting students to respect and protect a democratic, inclusive process among themselves as ensuring they have a seat at the table. Student concerns for specific issues may come and go; student voice must be a constant presence.



[ksvt.org](http://ksvt.org)

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This work was created by the Kentucky Student Voice Team while part of the Prichard Committee. The Prichard Committee is an independent, nonpartisan citizens' advocacy group working to improve education for Kentuckians of all ages.