

SAFETY FIRST

School safety becomes immediate priority among school districts and students

When the unimaginable happens, there is an indispensable need to explain what oftentimes has no answer. The violence inflicted upon Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School undoubtedly carries an underlying cause. Despite strong-willed opinions and heated disputes, no one knows exactly what could have prevented that day.

The answer is neither simple or definite, but is likely a combination of preventative and protective measures. There is no correct way to start, but one place to look is at the moment when the perpetrator begins, at the site of the attack: schools themselves.

On state and national levels, school safety has been a concern for decades, but its entanglements have transformed. In the 1990s, school safety primarily dealt with the discipline and rehabilitation of unruly students. In 1997, the Florida legislature passed a large school safety bill that centrally empowered teachers to discipline students.

Through the implementation of school safety hotlines and zero tolerance policies toward crime, drugs and weapon possession, all transgressions, no matter their austerity, were met with the same strict consequences.

As the years went on, certain incidents, such as when a child in Maryland was suspended for chewing his pop-tart into the shape of a gun, called into question whether or not strict measures were truly effective in shaping the youth of America — or if they simply instilled fear in them.

Such doubts led to yet another trend of thought toward school safety, where strict measures, such as zero tolerance, were now considered counterproductive through their supposed creation of a “pipeline to prison,” which is a metaphor that refers to the early criminalization of youth at the hands of stringent disciplinary rules.

In an effort to reduce the criminalization and ostracization of students, especially minority groups that have been proven to be disproportionately arrested, school safety took a more relaxed stance in Broward County. Under the leadership of Superintendent Robert Runcie, organizations such as the “Promise Program” were implemented to steer away from hotline and zero tolerance programs.

According to Broward’s Department of Diversity Prevention and Intervention website, the purpose of the Promise Program is to address “the behavior specific to the youth... [and] circumstances that serve as both strengths and challenges for the youth

resiliency and safeguard the student from entering the judicial system.”

Essentially, offenses that were once handled by law enforcement fell into the hands of school administrators, changing the dynamic of school safety once more. Whether or not the offenses of the shooter at MSD were handled in accordance to the Promise Program is still under investigation.

Opinions on how to tackle school safety have no doubt renewed themselves over the years, but there is now a grim transition in its meaning as a whole. “School safety” no longer refers to tranquility in the halls, but rather preventative measures to minimize mass shootings.

Perhaps these measures are too late in the case of MSD, but they serve as an example for schools around the country amid a cloud of demands for improvements in school infrastructure and protective strategies. Oren Alter, security expert and vice chancellor of security management at over 30 college campuses provides insight into the changing dynamic of school safety.

“It is important to note that the term ‘hardening of schools’ means different things to different people. The concept of effectiveness is more important to clarify. Cause and effect are very difficult to evaluate in the safety and security field since success is when nothing happens,” Alter said. “If nothing happens, how do you know what measures, if at all, contributed to the final result?”

When tragedies such as that of MSD are scrutinized, only the missteps are acknowledged at both the school level and beyond.

Some independent researchers, such as 19-year old Broward home school student Kenneth Preston, have unraveled a staggering \$104,325,821 that was granted towards school safety as part of a 2014 bond appropriation. Only a small fraction of that money, about \$5,584,512, has actually been spent. Whether the strategy behind these expenditures is frugality, neglect or corruption, has yet to be explained to the public.

“If the school safety money continues to be doled out at the current rate of 1.76 percent spent per year, Broward Public Schools will not see the entirety of that safety money for another 53 years,” Preston said in an investigative report of Broward County published on The Medium.

Even if MSD had the chance to implement enhanced safety measures, the specifics formulate a controversy of their own. Certain measures that may appear to be common sense on the surface carry innate limitations.



Redirected. Sophomore Amanda Manausa walks through the red gates, MSD’s single point of entry. The red gates are now the only way to enter campus. Photo by Rebecca Schneid



Checked Baggage. Assistant principal Jeff Morford checks freshman Mackenzie Alt’s drawstring bag. Following an incident where two knives were brought onto campus, Broward County officials mandated clear backpacks at MSD. “I think it just makes getting onto campus more difficult,” freshman Mackenzie Alt said. Photo by Rebecca Schneid



ID to Enter. Senior Lexi Udine displays her ID to campus security. IDs are now required to be visible in all Broward County middle and high schools as part of the county’s new school safety program. Photo by Rebecca Schneid

“From a pragmatic standpoint, it is very challenging to entirely eliminate the risk posed by a determined assailant who is not afraid to die,” Alter said. “School hardening is an important proactive measure; nevertheless, school hardening measures need to address clear objectives and be evaluated in realistic terms while understanding their limitations.”

Since the tragedy, MSD has served as a test school for the various security measures being explored by Broward County. These measures include limiting points of entry, IDs, automatic door locks and metal detectors, none of which assure definite safety.

“The investment in bullet resistant windows and doors is significant; however, it doesn’t solve open spaces, athletic fields, areas of assembly and more,” Alter said. “Bullet resistant windows significantly limit emergency exits and escape routes. In case of a fire, bullet resistant doors and windows can slow down first responders.”

Singular changes in school safety have already been proven ineffective by the multitude of mass shootings in the United States, for no two massacres are ever the same. The practice of lockdown drills since Sandy Hook were ineffective at MSD through the code red system.

“School hardening should be looked upon as a component in an entire strategy. The idea is creating multiple layers. Each

layer is better supervised, harder to access and better designed to detect anomalies,” Alter said. “However, you must then start questioning the trade off between school safety, the school culture and the willingness of children, employees and parents to be subjected to such stringent and intrusive security measures.”

Students have already expressed clear frustration with their new school environment. A survey of 186 MSD students found that 63 percent expressed strong discontent towards clear backpacks, but 69 percent are in favor of increased security.

School safety reform indubitably calls for the reconstruction of the American learning environment, which is now tainted by unwarranted threats. Yet, even if these measures save a single life, their costs are well worth consideration.

The products of this heart wrenching, complex tragedy is an infinite number of possibilities a broken community is left to contemplate. Proponents of school safety maintain that had the juvenile offenses of the shooter been properly handled or had the school’s infrastructure been more resilient by whatever means, there may have been one less fallen Eagle. The possibilities are limitless, but the end goal is all the same: to make sure no innocent child is killed, ever again. Story by Hannah Kapoor

MESSAGE TO MSD ACTIVISTS

There is more to it than just gun control

On Feb.14, the unimaginable happened to me. I would never have thought that my beautiful sister would be hunted down in a school that was known to be the safest in Broward County. There have been many emotions stirring in my heart: anger, confusion and probably the worst, sadness. I will never get to see my incredibly smart sister graduate and get her diploma. I will never get to see my sister marry the man that I, as an overprotective brother, would have made sure treated her like who she was: a princess.

Meadow had a smile that could light up a town with no power. She breathed life into situations that may have been perceived as dark. But, I’ve been using these emotions that fly like fireworks inside of me to fuel my passion for activism and to fight for every school to have increased school safety measures.

As an alumnus of Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School, I’d like to start off writing this as a letter to the current student body. Although I may not agree

100 percent on what all of you fight for, you all are using your voice and standing for something you believe in and are fighting for what we all want: change.

This should not be about getting a quick ride to fame or taking advantage of a tragedy for our own personal gain and letting it get to our heads. Seventeen lives were taken from our community, and we will not sit here and scream about who is right and who is wrong. Don’t let people take advantage of you through this time of sorrow and mourning.

I’m new to the world of activism, and I can tell you with 100 percent certainty from first-hand experience that there are people out to get you and manipulate your emotions and ideas. Stay strong and keep your minds bright.

But, there is something else that I urge you all who are fighting for change right now to keep in mind: keeping our schools secure. Few of the things we hope to achieve, as simple as keeping the doors locked, could have prevented the disgusting monster from killing my sister and your teachers and classmates.

My father recently announced his new organization, Americans for Children’s Lives and School Safety. Within

this organization, we abide by an eight-point plan, which can be read in depth on AmericansForClass.org. I’d like to share with you just a basic idea of what we need to see happen.

We focus on securing the perimeter of the school campus by installing strategically placed cameras to provide a better eye on possible intruders. We’d also need to protect the interior of the school if an intruder somehow slips through the cracks, where, an armed and highly trained staff member can stop the potential attacker. Another thing that some people need to focus on is increasing mental health services.

No sane person would want to maliciously carry out a mass attack. Taking a look at the recent tragedy at the Waffle House, where the shooter claimed Taylor Swift was stalking him, I think it’s safe to say that the people who carry out these violent crimes need serious help. We need to provide the training and resources necessary for schools to provide proper mental health services for their students.

One more thing I’d like to share is putting in place a “school safety hotline” of sorts. If you see something,

say something. Don’t ignore a post on Instagram that may come off as a joke about shooting up a school. Trust your gut and tell someone right away. With a hotline that is solely meant for that purpose, I guarantee that with combined safety measures you will not have to fear someone attacking you during school. No student or teacher should ever feel that way.

I want you all to realize that this is not about politics. This is about keeping us and future generations safe in the learning environment. You all keep fighting for change, but please be mindful of all opinions. Love you all and keep fighting for the 17. Guest Editorial by Hunter Pollack.

Pollack is an MSD Class of 2014 alumnus and a current student at Florida State University. His sister, senior Meadow Pollack, was one of the victims of the tragedy on Feb. 14 at MSD. Pollack and his father have been actively lobbying state and national legislators to advocate for school safety, becoming an integral proponent for the Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School Public Safety Act. His family’s mission is to accomplish school safety reform through Meadow’s Movement, a nonprofit organization in Meadow’s honor.