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Front Page

SOLIDARITY WITH FLORIDA VICTIMS

At walkouts, calls for solutions to violence



Hundreds of students walked out of Dwight Morrow High School last week in solidarity with the victims of the Parkland, Florida school shooting.

STAFF REPORT NORTHERN VALLEY PRESS

Local high schools joined a widely reported 1 million students nationwide who walked out on March 14 in solidarity with Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School in Parkland, Florida, where a gunman murdered 14 students and three staff members on Feb. 14.

Fueling the mass grassroots action is frustration

that the federal government has not implemented many arguably common sense gun control measures nearly 19 years after the mass murder of 12 students and a faculty member at Columbine High School in Colorado, and more than five years after 20 children and six staff members were killed at Sandy Hook Elementary School in Connecticut.

The frustration comes even as school districts



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FROM PAGE 1

have used staff and time resources creating exacting emergency action plans, coordinated with local police, outlining protocol for all variety of imaginable danger, and conducting routine lockdown and active-shooter drills.

At Pascack Hills High School in Montvale, the tragedy hit particularly close to home: among the victims at Stoneman Douglas was 14-year-old Alyssa Alhadeff, a former resident of Woodcliff Lake.

"Teenagers must be prepared to turn helplessness into hope, vulnerability into strength and disaster into change. We can no longer settle for thoughts and prayers while our lives and futures are on the line," said Sean Sheikowitz, a Pascack Hills sophomore.

"Every day the news brings awareness to yet another school shooting. It's unsettling to think that the next one can just as easily be us. This is no longer about politics, this is about our safety. Fight back and ensure this will never happen again," he said.

At Dwight Morrow High School in Englewood, in a dramatic conclusion to the walk out, students loudly chanted the theme, "Enough is enough! Enough is enough! Enough is enough!"

Students also accused politicians of pandering to National Rifle Association lobbyists.

"We are here today to say that our senators and our congressmen and our president must do better to protect our lives. Our safe-

ty is worth more than the money that the NRA gives them," said Eiman Raus, a student at the Englewood protest.

Student activism is expected to continue in the coming days. A "March for Our Lives" protest is set for Saturday, March 24, centered on Washington, D.C. but taking place in towns and cities across the nation and around the world.

"To me, the shooting in Parkland was just another reminder of the gun issue that we have in this country. There are too many instances of students losing their lives at the hands of disgruntled people with access to firearms," said Alexis Oliver, a senior in the Information Systems Academy and another leader of the walk out in Englewood.

"It's frustrating that this keeps happening, and it's clear that something has to change," Oliver said.

At Cresskill and Tenafly high schools, students also participated in the walk outs.

"We, the students of [Tenafly High School], no longer feel safe in our schools," said Romi Azulay, who emailed Northern Valley Press. "We have seen school shootings, which are a unique phenomenon in the United States, go on for far too long. Too many innocent lives have been lost; so as we mourn their deaths and remember their lives, we are also standing up as a school and saying that we want to see change."

—Tom Clancey, Michael Olohan,
Hillary Vidars and John Snyder
contributed to this article.