St. Mary's County students 'walk out' against gun violence

Posted by [Joy Shrum-Reporter](#) On 03/15/2018

Great Mills, MD- On Wednesday, March 14, students across the nation joined together to protest gun violence following the mass shooting at Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School in Parkland, FL.

From Maine to California, it's estimated nearly a million students participated in the 17 minute walkout—17 minutes to honor the 17 people who were killed on Feb. 14 in Parkland. Some schools stood in silence, others read the names of the victims and others used the time to voice their concerns about violence in schools.

In St. Mary's County, students from all three high schools; Leonardtown, Chopticon and Great Mills, participated in the National School Walkout. Students who wanted to participate at Leonardtown High School walked the track outside of school; students at Chopticon gathered around the flagpole; students at Great Mills gathered outside the front of the school.

While the walkout was not a school sponsored event, St. Mary's County School officials said they would not restrict the student's First Amendment rights. "We're very proud of our students today," said Dr. Jeffrey Maher, chief strategic officer.

At Great Mills High School, students gathered and talked about ending gun violence and reflected on the 17 lives lost in Parkland. Several students held signs calling for the end to the violence, others took the opportunity to have their voices heard and called for more safety in schools.

A freshman, who asked to not be identified, said she participated in the walkout because children shouldn't be in fear of going to school. "I've been talking about it with my parents and we believe that kids shouldn't be afraid to go to school." She went on to say it wasn't about gun control, it's about stopping gun violence.

Principal Jake Heibel joined the students outside of school to watch over the protest. "I'm encouraged that our kids are stepping up to the plate and I support our kids." Heibel also said he believes students are paying closer attention to what's going on around them and are more aware of threats and the power of social media.

For those who were being disruptive during the walkout, student leaders demanded they show respect for those who lost their lives and reminded them why they were participating in the walkout.

Later in the day, Chopticon High School hosted a different spin on the day of protest. Students held a "kindness" rally inside the school gymnasium where they encouraged everyone to show kindness, compassion and, most importantly, inclusion.

This event mirrored other movements throughout the country asking kids to not walk out but to walk up. The idea is to walk up to those who are bullied and offer words of support. Walk up to those who are often excluded as ask them to join you. Walk up to someone and just be nice.

The student walkout protest sparked many mixed emotions from adults across the country and right here in Southern Maryland. Some adults applauded the students for being a part of something bigger than themselves, others called it a joke believing the students used the protest as a reason to leave class.

Whether students walked out in protest, walked up in support, or chose to not participate, yesterday's movement was one of the largest student-led waves of activism America has ever seen---and it's not over yet.

On March 24, the nationwide March for Our Lives, will hold rallies in Washington, D.C. and in cities across the country. The march will be led by survivors of the Parkland shooting.

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