

Education Week

Student Activists, Teachers Unions Plan Youth Summit on Gun Violence

By [Evie Blad](#) on August 29, 2018 8:27 PM



A group of students from communities affected by gun violence will team up with two national teachers' unions and gun control advocacy organizations to [hold a youth summit](#) in Washington, D.C.

[Students for Change](#) was founded by students from a Parkland, Fla., school where 17 people died in a February shooting. It seeks to incorporate the viewpoints of youths from around the country who may have experienced other forms of gun violence.

The summit will bring together about 100 students from around the country at Washington's Dunbar High School Oct. 20-21, where they will listen to guest speakers, discuss issues related to guns and gun rights, and create a "Students Bill of Rights" that outlines their concerns related to issues like mental health, community and school safety, illegal guns, and preventing gun violence, organizers said in a call with reporters Wednesday. Organizers hope the document, and a corresponding "action plan," will help coordinate student engagement efforts around the country.

"If we can get our students ... to properly converse with one another and have logical conversations, I believe we can make some change," said Jack Macleod, co-founder of Students For Change and a student at Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School in Parkland.

Students for change formed after Parkland students began to discuss their concerns with peers on social media following the shooting, the summit's website says. They formed an advisory panel that includes Stoneman Douglas teacher Melissa Falkowski; Columbine High School shooting survivor Jami Amo, who has helped coordinate pen pal relationships [between Parkland and Columbine survivors](#); and Abbey Clements, who taught [at Sandy Hook Elementary School](#) in Newtown, Conn., during a 2012 shooting there.

Seeing students speak up about gun issues has helped energize people who stepped into the debate after the Newtown shooting, Clements said.

"Their unique and powerful voice gives me hope," she said.

The unions—the National Education Association and the American Federation of Teachers—will help cover costs for students to attend the summit. The AFT also plans to make lesson plans about guns available through its Share My Lesson site, providing materials for teachers to use after lockdown drills or on days when there is a large shooting in another part of the country.

The summit comes as the unions and other education groups have protested discussions by U.S. Secretary of Education Betsy DeVos about possibly allowing schools **to use federal funds to buy guns and train school staff to use them**. That funding source, provided through the Every Student Succeeds Act, is intended to fund classroom materials, student supports, and staff like school counselors that could help prevent future violence, said Lily Eskelsen García, president of the National Education Association.

"Instead of buying books and technology we will be buying guns and we would be arming teachers, which is beyond absurd," she said.

The summit also follows a season of student activism after the Parkland shooting. Some other Stoneman Douglas students toured the country this summer to encourage young people to register to vote and to vote in upcoming mid-term elections.

Other organizations helping to coordinate the summit include Everytown for Gun Safety and Students Demand Action, Guns Down, Giffords, and the Brady Campaign.

Photo: Protesters rally during the March For Our Lives event in Fort Worth, Texas, on March 14. A separate group of Parkland students have formed an organization called Students for Change, which plans a youth summit in Washington, D.C. --Max Faulkner/Star-Telegram via AP

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