



School Safety Newsletter

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This Back-to-school PSA from Sandy Hook Promise is a Punch in the Gut

September 18, 2019, Washington Post

<https://www.washingtonpost.com/education/2019/09/18/this-back-to-school-psa-sandy-hook-promise-is-punch-gut/>

Content warning: The embedded video depicts scenes of school shootings and gun violence.

Familiar back-to-school supplies such as pencils, scissors and gym socks are recast as emergency survival tools in a devastating new public service announcement from the Sandy Hook Promise, an anti-violence nonprofit founded by the parents of victims of the Sandy Hook shootings in 2012.

In the PSA, “Back to School Essentials,” young students breezily show off their new school supplies before the tone veers into something much darker: A boy marveling over his new sneakers is running down the hallway not to dodge a hall monitor but a gunman. The ad reflects a grim reality for the network of survivors from the more than 228,000 students who have experienced a school shooting since the massacre at Columbine High School in 1999.

“Back to School” debuted on NBC during the Wednesday morning broadcast of the “Today” show alongside an interview with Sandy Hook Promise co-founder Nicole Hockley. Hockley’s 6-year-old son, Dylan, was among the 20 children and six adults who were killed in the December 2012 shooting at Sandy Hook Elementary School in Newtown, Conn.

“At the end, the girl with the phone gets me every time,” Hockley said on “Today,” referencing the ad’s final scene, where a young girl huddles in a bathroom stall to text her mom “I love you” as she hides from a gunman.

“We don’t want people to turn away from it, so pretending it doesn’t exist is not going to solve it,” Hockley said, explaining the group’s motivation for choosing an ad that even she admits is hard to watch.



The video is the latest installment of anti-violence PSAs the group releases each year. This year’s ad promotes “Know the Signs,” a campaign geared at teaching students and school staff how to recognize and intervene when someone shows warning signs of behavior that could lead to shootings or other forms of violence in schools.

The goal, as Hockley explained, is prevention; she wants people to understand how they can recognize troubling behavior and intervene to stop violence like school shootings before they happen. Other tactics have been more reactive: sales of bulletproof backpacks for kids have grown every year since 2016.

“I will never put a bulletproof backpack on my kid,” Hockley said on “Today.” “I think it sends totally the

*Protecting our
future through
information
sharing*

In This Issue

- This Back-to-school PSA from Sandy Hook Promise is a Punch in the Gut
- Parkland Dad Uncovers How District Enabled Deranged Student-turned-shooter
- Next Monthly Webinar - October 9, 2019
- String of Shootings at High School Football Games Continues with 2 Teens Injured in Philadelphia
- Ransomware Locks Rockford Public Schools’ Phones, Internet

This Back-to-school PSA from Sandy Hook Promise is a Punch in the Gut (Continued)

wrong message: He's not a soldier going off to war; he's a boy going off to math class."

Reactions to the campaign on social media were overwhelmingly positive in the hours after the PSA's debut. The campaign is expanding beyond print and digital to include radio and outdoor advertising, according to Adweek. The ad is expected to receive a signal boost from \$2 million in donated media placements from media organizations such as the AMC theater chain, Condé Nast and CNN, the New York Times reports. Democratic presidential candidates including Sen. Kamala D. Harris (Calif.), Andrew Yang, Mayor Pete Buttigieg of South Bend, Ind., and Montana Gov. Steve Bullock have shared the PSA with their Twitter followers.

Previous spots from the campaign have won advertising awards, with the 2016 PSA "Evan" being viewed more than 11 million times on YouTube.

Parkland Dad Uncovers How District Enabled Deranged Student-turned-shooter

September 8, 2019, New York Post

<https://nypost.com/2019/09/08/parkland-dad-massacre-was-avoidable-if-district-hadnt-enabled-deranged-student/>

After the deadly Feb. 14, 2018, mass shooting at Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School in Parkland, Fla., national media focused largely on a handful of student activists, leaving it to victims' parents to unravel why the slaughter happened. Andrew Pollack, whose daughter, Meadow, was one of the 17 killed, conducted his own investigation to uncover the roots of what he calls the most avoidable mass murder in American history. He and Max Eden are co-authors of "Why Meadow Died: The People and Policies that Created the Parkland Shooter and Endanger America's Students." This adapted excerpt, based on never-before-released educational records of the shooter, Nikolas Cruz, shows the Broward County school district knew full well about his obsession with guns and murder — and then let him practice shooting at school.

When staff at Westglades Middle School heard that Nikolas Cruz had committed the massacre at Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School, some couldn't believe it. The fact that he was a mass murderer wasn't what surprised them, but rather the fact that he had attended that school. "How is that possible?" one Westglades educator recalled thinking. "We did our jobs. It took forever, but we got him [to the specialized school] where he needed to go. We couldn't believe they ever let him into [Douglas]."

Westglades students and staff had never seen anyone like Nikolas Cruz. One student, Paige, recalled the time that she met Cruz. They were standing outside their classroom waiting for their teacher to open the door, and Cruz offered her a hug, which Paige accepted. Their teacher later pulled Paige aside and warned her, "Don't touch him. He just got caught jerking off."

If something frustrated Cruz, he would curse and threaten anyone nearby. He would hide behind corners and doors, jump out and scream at people, and then cackle at their fear. Sometimes, for no apparent reason, he would burst into maniacal laughter. Another student, Sarah, recalled a time when he threw his chair across a classroom. Later, she saw him sitting outside the classroom with his desk tied down.

Cruz's torture and killing of animals became a source of pride for him as he interacted with other students. One student, Devin, recalled that, although he tried to avoid Cruz, Cruz would approach him almost every day and ask, "Would you like to see videos of me skinning animals?" Devin always declined, but Cruz kept asking.

Cruz's records suggest that his reign of terror at Westglades Middle School began halfway through his seventh-grade year, in February of 2013. For the next calendar year, Cruz was suspended every other day. Why did the school allow him to remain enrolled despite his daily, deranged behavior for a full year? Not by negligence, but by policy.

Students with disabilities are supposed to be educated in the "least restrictive environment" possible, regardless of whether their disability is that they're dyslexic or a psychopath, and the paperwork requirements to send them to a specialized school can take many months.

Cruz's eighth-grade language arts teacher, Carrie Yon, kept diligent notes on his behavior for Cruz's "Functional Behavior Analysis":

Sept. 3: While reviewing [a] homophones worksheet, when another student mentioned the amendment that talks about 'the right to bear arms' Nick [sic] lit up when hearing the word that related to guns and shouted out "you mean like

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Parkland Dad Uncovers How District Enabled Deranged Student-turned-shooter (Continued)

guns!" he was overly excited thinking that we were going to talk about guns. Nick later used his pencil as a gun ... shooting around the classroom.

Sept. 4: Nick drew naked stick figures (showing body parts, sexual) and drew pictures of people shooting each other with guns.

Sept. 11: After discussing and lecturing about the Civil War in America Nick became fixated on the death and the assassination of Abraham Lincoln. He asked inappropriate questions and was making shooting actions with his pencil. Some questions he asked were "What did it sound like when Lincoln was shot? Did it go pop pop or pop pop pop really fast? Was there blood everywhere? After the war what did they do with all the bodies? Did people eat them?"

Sept. 16: When we began to read the Odyssey Nick paid partial attention (in-and-out) until we came up to the gruesome scene when the giant eats Odysseus' crew members, only then Nick was interested in the lesson and got my 100% attention.

Sept. 27: Another student also informed me (once Nick was escorted out of class) that Nick asks him all of the time "How am I still at this school?"

Oct. 1: When talking about figurative language and onomatopoeias, Nick shouted out "Like a gun shooting." Nick will find any excuse to bring up shooting guns or violence ... He got frustrated and said "I hate security, I hope they die." Then he stated to me, "F--k you." I called security to pick him up immediately.

Oct. 15: Spoke to his mother ... We discussed that he should not be playing violent video games and that he should be put in a different school that can help with his behavior and emotional issues. We also discussed his obsession with guns/violence. She stated that he is interested in buying a BB gun from Walmart and was asking his mom, repeatedly, if he could get the gun, promising that he would "just shoot at trees."

Oct. 17: Nick began reading the last couple of pages out to the students, intentionally trying to ruin the book for everyone else. I asked him to stop and he told me that he dislikes the book and then he stated, "I like guns" can we talk about that. Then he continued to read the book out loud again.

On Oct. 24, Assistant Principal Antonio Lindsay came to class to observe Cruz. As soon as Lindsay left the room, Cruz yelled, "Yes, now I can talk!" He continued to be disruptive, and Yon said, "I know that you can behave. I have seen you. You're a good kid." Cruz shouted, "I'm a bad kid! I want to kill!"

Yon provided her opinion for the "Functional Behavioral Analysis": "I feel strongly that Nikolas is a danger to the students and faculty at this school. I do not feel that he understands the difference between his violent video games and reality. He is constantly showing aggressive behavior and poor judgment. His drawing in class show violent acts (people shooting at each other) or creepy sexual pictures (dogs with large penises) ... I would like to see him sent to a facility that is more prepared and has the proper setting to deal with this type of child."

On Sept. 13, 2013, Lindsay emailed teachers to inform them that if Cruz "needs to leave the class to use the restroom, go to the clinic, or any other reason please notify the front office and wait for a security escort. Under no circumstances should Nikolas [sic] be allowed to leave a supervised setting without an escort."

In October, Lindsay sent a follow-up email informing teachers that moving forward, "Cruz will be 'shadowed' by his mother when he chooses to run/walk out of class in 'his attempts' of avoiding getting into trouble." Teachers were advised to call security in secret by sending a student to the office on another pretext.

On Nov. 4, after two months of gathering "data" for Cruz's "Functional Behavior Assessment," teachers were sent his "Positive Behavior Intervention Plan." The plan included helpful tips, like:

If Nikolas destroys property at a lower level,

- Calmly let him know he has not followed one of the expectations. Remind him what he is working for.
- Prompt him to use a cool down pass and walk away to diffuse [sic] the situation.

If Nikolas engages in major disruption/property destruction:

- Let Nikolas know, "you're getting too loud. I need for you to get back into control by using a cool down pass or calming down at your desk. If you get back into control, you can stay in class. If you continue, I'll need for you leave [sic]."
- Walk away and do not pay attention to his behavior.
- Do not argue with Nikolas or engage with him.
- When class is over, Nikolas needs to go to his next class and behavior plan should re-set with able to [sic] earn reward breaks again.

Parkland Dad Uncovers How District Enabled Deranged Student-turned-shooter (Continued)

Teachers were required to implement this plan for at least six weeks until Cruz could become eligible for further evaluation. In late November, Cruz attempted to commit suicide at school by running into oncoming traffic. But that did not accelerate the process.

School administrators classified the incident as “minor disruption,” and Cruz remained enrolled at Westglades for another three months. As Yon’s records show, even Cruz couldn’t understand why they kept him there for so long.

Cruz enrolled in Cross Creek, a specialized school serving 150 students in grades K-12, in February of 2014. For the first semester, his behavior remained much the same. Dr. Nyrma Ortiz, a psychiatrist who consults with Cross Creek, noted, “He goes to YouTube to research wars, military material, and terrorist topics. Wears military related items before he goes to school. Parent stated that all of these ideas are related to his excessive gaming.” When prompted to describe a perfect summer, Cruz wrote, “Buying some type of gun and shooting at targets that I set up with large amounts of ammo just for fun for hours.”

Shortly before summer break, Ortiz and Cruz’s therapist Rona Kelly took the extremely unusual step of writing to his private psychiatrist:

“Dear Dr. Negin,

“We are witting [sic] you with his mother’s consent, to inform you of some of the behavioral problems he continues to display at home and school. Nikolas continues to present with extreme mood liability. He is usually very irritable and reactive. In school he displays oppositional and defiant behaviors and has become verbally aggressive in the classroom. He seems to be paranoid and places the blame on others for his behavioral problems. He has a preoccupation with guns and the military and perseverates on this topic inappropriately. At home, he continues to be aggressive and destructive with minimal provocation. For instance, he destroyed his television after loosing [sic] a video game that he was playing. Nikolas has a hatchet that he uses to chop up a dead tree in his backyard. Mom has not been able to locate that hatchet as of lately [sic]. When upset he punches holes in the walls and has used sharp tools to cut up the upholstery on the furniture and carve holes in the walls of the bathroom. Per recent information shared in school he dreams of killing others and [being] covered in blood. He has been assessed for the need of hospitalization in school and by the YES team from Henderson Behavioral Health ... We would like you to be aware of the current concerns since you will see him for medication management during the summer and may need to re-assess his respond [sic] to the current medications. In our opinion his response to medications has been limited at best.”

The next fall, Kelly called Cruz’s mom and “shared concerns with parent about obsession with guns/military and his poor anger control. He continues to deploy aggressive behaviors at home. Parent was advised against getting him a gun (pellet) or [shooting] classes for his birthday. Parent advised to restrict access to any weapons.”

When Cruz’s teachers were asked what he was interested in or enjoyed, almost every single one mentioned guns, the military, or war.

But from October onwards, Cruz appears to have calmed down for a few months, and that was enough to earn him a ticket to Marjory Stoneman Douglas. In April, he told Ortiz that he wanted to enroll in the high school Junior Reserve Officer Training Core program.

Ortiz recorded, “interested in [J]ROTC? — not advised ... Discussed the safety of others/himself.”

But the next month, every member of Cruz’s “Child Study Team” recommended that he be mainstreamed for two class periods a day at the beginning of the 2015-16 school year: for one class to be determined and JROTC.

Nikolas Cruz couldn’t possibly have made himself any clearer. Broward schools staff knew exactly who and what he was. Yet they not only allowed him to enroll in Marjory Stoneman Douglas, they literally gave him an air gun, shaped like an AR-15, and let him practice shooting.

This may sound astonishing. But it was all according to policy. The official review of Nikolas Cruz’s educational history registered no objections to anything you just read.

Excerpted from “Why Meadow Died: The People and Policies That Created The Parkland Shooter and Endanger America’s Students” (Post Hill Press), out Tuesday.

String of Shootings at High School Football Games Continues with 2 Teens Injured in Philadelphia

September 21, 2019, ABC News

<https://abcnews.go.com/US/string-shootings-high-school-football-games-continues-teens/story?id=65764590>

For at least the fifth week in a row, a shooting has taken place during a high school football game.

Two teens injured in Philadelphia are the latest victims in a string of shootings that have taken place at or near high school football games across the country. A 15-year-old and a 14-year-old were shot Friday night during a football game at Philadelphia's Simon Gratz High School, according to

String of Shootings at High School Football Games Continues with 2 Teens Injured in Philadelphia (Continued)

Philadelphia ABC station WPVI. The sound of the gunshots sent people running across the field as the P.A. announcer called on spectators to evacuate. "Security, could you please clear the stadium," the announcer said as spectators sprinted across the field. "Everybody out." It was not immediately clear if the shots rang out inside or outside the stadium, but police said multiple shell casings were found outside, according to reports. The shooting halted the game in the second quarter. Police said no arrests have been made, and a weapon has not been recovered. "People at the stadium, both the security, the police officers, and those that were present, are all trying to be helpful, but I think it was just such mayhem when the shooting rang out that nobody saw anyone with a gun," acting Philadelphia Police Commissioner Christine Coulter told WPVI.

The incident comes a week after two people were shot when gunfire erupted during a youth football game in Fort Worth, Texas, on Sept. 14. After some parents at the game got into a dispute, the shooter opened fire from a small hill overlooking the field, police said. A woman was struck in the leg and a girl was grazed in the back. Police arrested Chanita Holly, 39, for making a terroristic threat after witnesses reported hearing her say, "We're gonna spray this [expletive]" during the argument. Police said they believed Holly placed a call to her son, who later came to the scene to carry out the shooting.

The day before the Texas shooting, three teenagers were shot Sept. 13 after a high school football game in Newport News, Virginia. The shooting occurred at the end of a game at John B. Todd Stadium, police said. A 14-year-old victim was found shot in the stadium's parking lot, and two 19-year-olds were found on a street near the stadium. The victims were hospitalized with non-life-threatening injuries, police said. "I thought it had to do with the two rival schools," a fan at the game told TV station WTKR. Authorities said that an investigation was underway and that they would beef up patrols at future games at the stadium.

One week before that, a man was fatally shot Sept. 6 during a high school football game near Pittsburgh. Dameian Williams, 48, of Jeannette, Pennsylvania, was shot during a verbal altercation outside Jeannette High School's McKee Stadium. The field and the stadium were evacuated with four minutes left in the game, Jeannette's athletic director told Pittsburgh ABC affiliate WTAE. Williams was pronounced dead after being taken to a hospital. A suspect identified as 40-year-old Greg Harper, of Jeannette, told police that Williams struck him twice in the head, which knocked him to the ground, and he then shot Williams once in the torso. Harper was arrested on homicide and reckless endangerment charges, according to WTAE. In the aftermath of the shooting, Jeannette City School District Superintendent Matthew Jones called for increased police presence at the school, WTAE reported.

Another shooting incident took place on the same night at a high school football game across the state. Police said shots were fired after a football game at Morrisville High School in Bucks County, Pennsylvania. Authorities told WPVI that a shooter in a car after the game fired three shots into another car. A girl suffered what was described as a "scratch" to her leg in the incident, according to reports. No suspects were identified and no arrests were made in the aftermath of the incident.

A week prior, on Aug. 31, police said 10 people were shot following a high school football game in Mobile, Alabama. The victims in the shooting ranged in age from 15 to 18. They were rushed to area hospitals, officials said. Deangelo Parnell, 17, was arrested and charged with nine counts of attempted murder, Mobile Police Department spokesman Laderrick Dubose told ABC News. Mobile Police Chief Lawrence Battiste admonished young people for "bringing their beefs that they have with each other in their neighborhoods" into public settings and "putting people in harm's way." The incident "may have been a directed threat at one or two individuals and other people just happened to fall prey to their carelessness," Battiste said.

A week before that, on Aug. 24, police responded to reports of a gunshot during a football game at Parkway North High School near St. Louis, Missouri. Authorities said they believed the gunshot was fired when a series of fights broke out outside the school. Witnesses said a panic started after someone yelled "he has a gun," according to TV station KMOV. "Somebody pulled out their gun and then everybody started running because everybody got scared and didn't know what to do," one student told the station. The game, part of a multi-school jamboree, was canceled following the incident. The school superintendent announced that counseling would be providing to students on the Monday following the shooting.

Ransomware Locks Rockford Public Schools' Phones, Internet

September 9, 2019, The San Diego Union-Tribune

<https://www.sandiegouniontribune.com/news/sns-bc-il--cyber-attack-rockford-20190909-story.html>

School leaders may spend \$376,300 on information technology security upgrades in the wake of a ransomware attack that has left Rockford Public Schools without internet or access to student records for days. The upgrades include multiyear renewals of firewall and antivirus protection as well as backup software and an additional layer of IT security the district has been lacking — IT security awareness training for employees. Board members meet Tuesday to consider approval of the expenses. "Public entities are being attacked with ransomware, malware and malicious computer viruses at a staggering rate," board documents state. "It is imperative that IT security remains a top priority and focus for Rockford Public Schools now and every year going forward. IT security awareness training is the most critical component of their initiative to mitigate threat opportunities."

Ransomware Locks Rockford Public Schools' Phones, Internet (Continued)

In this most recent attack, Rockford Public Schools experienced trouble with its phone and internet services Friday morning. A regular school day was held, and classes resumed Monday despite ongoing districtwide outages and concerns from some parents that the outages could put children in danger. "Communication was a big concern," said Kelli McDorman, the parent of three RPS students. "What if a school goes on lockdown? Will the tornado drills (alarm system) work?" McDorman said she allowed her kids to go to school Monday after she sought input from other mothers, relatives and her children, ages 3, 14 and 17. Dozens of people took to social media over the weekend raising similar concerns, speculating on the cause of the attack and wondering if parents and employees should be worried about identity theft.

'This is a challenge' - The district's website is down. Emails are not working. Student attendance is being taken by hand. Staff has been ordered to not use any district-issued computers or laptops or other systems like Google Drive and Google Classroom until further notice. Measures of Academic Progress testing scheduled for Monday has been postponed, officials said. Students use computers to complete MAP tests, which are taken in grades kindergarten through 12th grade. "Parents need to understand that this is a challenge, and the district is going to do everything possible to keep our information and our children safe," said board president Ken Scrivano. "We can make emergency calls. Our buildings are secure. Our locks are functioning. ... We strongly believed that we need to keep our schools open and provide an education for our kids."

"We can call all of the schools," said Mel Gilfillan, president of Rockford teachers union. "There are cell phones in all of the administrators' hands. There are walkie talkies in school staff hands. Of course, we want to make sure all of our teachers and students and staff are safe in the buildings, and I do feel everybody is safe." Teachers have had to make significant changes to lesson plans that involved the use of computers and other technology such as Smart Boards, Gilfillan said, which have replaced chalk boards in almost all classrooms. "What this has done is really shown us that teachers have to think on their feet and have to adapt," he said. "They do the best they can at a minute's notice because every day something different can happen in the classroom. ... It's kind of been like going back in time."

'A big worry' - Ransomware is a type of malicious software, also known as malware, that is designed to deny access to systems or data until a ransom is paid. It often is spread through infected emails and websites. Outages are expected to continue throughout the week. The district has not released any information on who is responsible for the attack, how it happened or any terms of ransom. Officials said the matter is under investigation. They would not share information about the ongoing probe. Teachers — as well as some parents on social media — have raised concerns about teacher and student personal information such as Social Security numbers and whether hackers gained access to that kind of information during this attack. "It's a big worry, but we can't say," Gilfillan said. "We haven't been clued in on that." Scrivano said the district's telecommunications systems were shut down quickly — "as soon as they realized what was going on" — and he believes that may have protected personal information. "We don't believe that information went anywhere," Scrivano said. "To date, that is what we know, but it's important to remember that this is an ongoing investigation, and we are getting another update tomorrow." Some of the district's expenses related to the ransomware attack should be covered by insurance, Scrivano said.

'A huge problem' - More than 4,000 ransomware attacks have occurred daily since Jan. 1, 2016, according to the FBI. That's a 300% increase from the approximately 1,000 daily attacks in 2015. Rockford Public Schools, which serves roughly 28,000 students in 47 schools, is one of dozens of government bodies and school districts across the country that have reported such attacks in the past year. The district would not confirm whether it's working with local, state or federal law enforcement agencies as part of its investigation. It's hired a computer forensics firm, CDW, to work with its information technology team to restore access.

"Our No. 1 priority is the safety of our students and staff. This includes protecting staff and students' data and information," the district said in statement Monday afternoon. "We are working to get a complete picture of this incident and understand any impact to our data. We will provide additional updates and information when they're available. "All RPS 205 schools and offices will remain open during the outage. We have shared plans for the week with our principals, and we are working hard to ensure this outage has minimal impact on our students and their education." RPS had another ransomware attack on July 24, according to the district's executive director of technology Jason Barthel. Barthel told school board members last month that a ransomware attack caused an email archiving system to fail. The district purchased a new email archiving system for about \$45,000.

"This is getting to be a huge problem," board member Mike Connor said during the August meeting. "Everybody should expect that we're going to have more of these. There is no one and done when it comes to security and particularly when it comes to hacking or anything like that kind of activity." Scrivano said the July attack is not related to the most recent attack. "That is what I'm being told," he said. "That they are totally separate issues."

School Safety Newsletter

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