

# Staff Editorial

## The hunting ground: where the real predator is silence

On Thursday, Feb. 8, during an extended advisery period, while sophomores and juniors worked on course registration for the next school year, all seniors viewed “The Hunting Ground,” a documentary about the culture surrounding sexual assault on American college campuses. While this was not the first time that New Trier offered a showing of “The Hunting Ground” to students (during the 2016-17 school year, seniors were invited to view the documentary while underclassmen were taking standardized tests), this was the first time that the school mandated attendance.

Many students praised the efforts of the senior adviser chairs to play a more active role in the conversation about sexual assault. This year in particular, the topic has come to national attention as a result of the flood of allegations of sexual assault against famous actors, corporate executives, and powerful politicians, and the ensuing #MeToo movement. “The Hunting Ground” made clear to students, approximately 98 percent of whom are attending college next year, that the topic hits closer to home than some of us may realize.

However, this is where many students say the conversation came to a screeching halt. For 55 minutes, seniors sat and watched a disturbing documentary about sexual assault and the way that institutions all over the country rarely hold perpetrators accountable. We watched—many of us in horror—as the names of our dream schools were shown to be the most lenient on sexual offenders. We listened to the story of a Notre Dame football player who raped Lizzy Seeberg, who was then a freshman at St. Mary’s. We learned that Notre Dame allowed him to continue training and playing amidst the allegations, and that Seeberg committed suicide. We realized that despite the work of the filmmakers who directed and produced “The Hunting Ground,” and despite the advocacy of young women like the ones shown in the documentary, very little has changed.

Then, the bell rang, and we packed up our backpacks and walked out of the auditorium, and for many seniors, that was all that was said for the day.

There were mixed reviews from students who attended the panel held during first period following the viewing of the documentary. Most students who had conversations in advisery in the following days, as encouraged by the senior adviser chairs, recounted that they were uncomfortable and ineffective. Some argued that advisery was not the appropriate environment in which to have these conversations, while many others wished that their advisers had simply been better prepared to discuss such heavy topics.

There seemed to be a consensus among seniors that the documentary raised awareness and sent a powerful message about the culture surrounding sexual assault on college campuses. But the weak follow-up ended the conversation before it even began.

Female seniors felt as though all they had learned was that guys get away with assaulting girls. Not that this was news to most of them—as they have spent the year preparing for college, they have become all too familiar with the statistics. Male seniors felt as though they were excluded from any larger movement for substantial change in culture.

Overall, students left the auditorium desiring more—more discussion, more prevention, more action.

We do more by first and foremost, talking more. As of now, Kinetic Wellness for sophomores is the only place where all students are required to talk about topics related to sexual assault and domestic violence. There is arguably a need for a more developed curriculum for upperclassmen that lasts longer than one specially scheduled day. Maybe we work to create a standard sexual assault curriculum for adviseries.

Many also expressed a desire for students of all years to be involved in the conversation. The showing of “The Hunting Ground” to only seniors worked within a schedule that was created for all students but seniors to plan their schedules for the next school year. But sexual assault and party culture are not exclusive to those who are 18 and older. In fact, we argue that we deserve to be equipped with the knowledge and resources to protect ourselves and support our peers beginning freshman year. Especially as high school, we must acknowledge, is plagued by the same culture that colleges are.

## Don’t silence students; empower them

by Emily Abt

“Young people have helped lead all our great movements. How inspiring to see it again in so many smart, fearless students standing up for their right to be safe; marching and organizing to remake the world as it should be. We’ve been waiting for you. And we’ve got your backs.”

Eight days after the mass-shooting at Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School in Parkland, Florida, former president Barack Obama tweeted the above message, publically denoting his support for student walkouts against gun violence.

Following the Parkland shooting on Feb. 14, hundreds of students across the country have arranged walkouts to protest gun violence, advocate for gun control, and give voice to the 17 students and staff members silenced by our government’s failure to pass adequate gun control policy.

Through various social media outlets, “come to action” movements have begun to spread. CNN created the hashtag #yesCNN as a platform for people to share photos and stories of their student walkouts.

A debate is surfacing, as some school administrations are threatening to punish students for participating in these peaceful protests.

The Needville Independent School District in Texas threatened a three-day suspension for all students engaging in a walkout. “Life is all about choices, and every choice has a consequence whether it be positive or negative. We will discipline no matter if it is one, fifty,

or five hundred students involved. All will be suspended for 3 days and parent notes will not alleviate the discipline,” Superintendent Curtis Rhodes posted on the Needville High School Facebook page. “A school is a place to learn and grow educationally, emotionally and morally. A disruption of the school will not be tolerated,” he said.

Rhodes’ statement has gone viral, gaining attention from many members of the Twitter community. “#CurtisRhodes should be ashamed of himself. Suspend the whole damn school you a\*\*hole! At least your students will be safe for those 3 days off. Can you make that same promise the other 177? #yesCNN” tweeted Kyle Rainey by the pen name @clubkyle.

I fail to see how exercising one’s right to free speech qualifies as a “disruption of the school.” The purpose of school is to provide us with the education needed to excel when we turn 18 and are released into the “real world.”

If we students are denied our right to peaceful protest, the “real world” my generation will face will be one plagued by catastrophic gun violence.

The hypocrisy communicated by these schools is a disservice to everyone in the community. Our generation is standing up to address an issue that current politicians have failed to undertake, and yet the acknowledgment they receive is public ostracism followed by disciplinary action.

Despite the number of districts dissociating their schools from the walkouts, multiple schools have embraced the movement,

encouraging youth to take part in the call to action, including many high schools across the Chicagoland area.

As stated in the Chicago Tribune, the administration and students of York High School have worked together to plan a get-out-to-vote drive and organize their plan to join the national walkouts. Drew McGuire, the assistant principal of activities, emphasized the importance of students communicating with administrators about addressing current issues.

“You guys are the generation that is going to make some sort of change if change is going to happen,” McGuire said. “We want to support you in that, but we also want to make sure you’re safe.”

Oak Park-River Forest High School also showed their support, assisting thousands of students in a walkout Feb. 21. “They have a right to peacefully protest. Our goal is to ensure that they are kept safe in the process,” Principal Nathaniel Rouse told school faculty and staff in an email early Wednesday.

Schools claiming that the protests are “disruptive” can learn from schools such as Oak Park. Supporting the walkout allowed security staff, school administrators and police officers to be available on the scene to monitor the rally.

Everyone deserves to feel safe and protected at school. The members of Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School lost that privilege when an assault rifle killed 14 students and three staff members on school property.

Hear Parkland students’ cry for action, and allow our nation’s students the right to join the movement.

## Let the walkout be a walkout

by Ezra Wallach

Dear Student Alliance and the New Trier administration, on behalf of myself as well as many of my peers, I ask you to please do less.

Student Alliance and others are planning the Mar. 14 walkout as a safe and seamless demonstration. This may take the form of a morning announcement or a free period for the duration of the walkout. The specifics have yet to be determined. While I appreciate that the school is backing the cause, in my opinion, both of these ideas ruin the natural spirit of a walkout.

A walkout is meant to be an act of protest shown by leaving and walking out of a place where you are supposed to be. In this case, school. Walkouts are not promoted by the place that you are planning to walk out of.

The website for the nation-wide walkout (created by The Women’s March’s Youth EMPOWER group) pledges “to protest Congress’ inaction in response to the gun violence plaguing our schools and neighborhoods.”

On Mar. 14, students shouldn’t just think and reflect. Students who will walk out want an effective display of their views and motives, not just another moment for thoughts and prayers. By disrupting the status

quo, we can bring attention to our cause and spark action.

The potential of the walkout at New Trier is diminished when it is talked about on the morning announcements. A planned schedule that the administration created does not disrupt anything.

There’s no need for the school to organize a guest speaker, or to ensure no consequences for truancy. Those not participating shouldn’t be allowed to just hang out rather than attend class.

Our students shouldn’t be safe because Student Alliance organized an agreement with the school administration. They should be safe because they have the power of one another. That should be enough.

According to the American Civil Liberties Union, because “the law requires students to go to school, schools can typically discipline students for missing class, even if they’re doing so to participate in a protest or otherwise express themselves.”

ACLU adds that free speech in schools is okay until it disrupts the functioning of the school. Thousands of students walking out of the school would easily disrupt the functioning of school. Thousands of truancies, however, would also likely be too many to mark.

But, we should never have been

concerned about whether or not we would be punished by the school. Rather, the focus should have been on how the continuous loss of lives can be attributed to the lack of policy to decrease gun violence.

I hope that Student Alliance and all who are planning this event understand my concerns. I also hope that they acknowledge that these beliefs are not from a minority. Students want the walkout to be an impactful demonstration.

We don’t want you to do something else. We just want you to stop doing too much. It really can just be a walkout. Please, just let the walkout be a walkout.

We should never have gotten to this point. Assault rifles that have been used for mass murders like the ones in Orlando and Parkland are killing machines. Yet, they are legal in 43 states.

97 percent of the U.S. population supports federal universal background checks, but we still don’t have them. These laws will not solve all gun violence in America, but what we have in place just isn’t cutting it.

It shouldn’t take students walking out of school to effect real change on common sense gun laws, and it sure should not have taken another school shooting for our government to act.

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