

Students walk out of school to protest gun violence

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STAFF WRITERS

Hundreds of Hermiston High School students walked out of class March 14 in solidarity with peers across the nation and in protest of the violence that has increasingly affected schools.

At 10 a.m., more than 300 students at the school left their classes to participate in a 17-minute walkout. The 17 minutes signified one minute for each of the people killed in a shooting in Parkland, Florida one month prior.

They filed out of the school and onto Kennison Field, where some stood quietly while others chanted their support for gun control and school safety.

"Protect our children, not our guns!" A small group of students started chanting at the back of the crowd. The message quickly spread.

Nayeli Martinez, a senior who had started the chant, said a lot of students had been feeling intimidated by a conservative point of view, but now they were ready to speak up.

"We're going to respect people who feel the opposite way," she said. "I have a feeling a few of us will take action, and let our voices be heard."

Hermiston High School's Associated Student Body had provided postcards and information for how to contact state, local and federal representatives, of which Martinez said some of the students would likely take advantage.

Jada Rome, a ninth grader at Hermiston High School, said participating in the walkout was really important to her.

"They don't have a voice," she said. "The lives of the children lost, they no



Hermiston sophomore Hannah Weber takes video on her phone during a walkout March 14 at Hermiston High School.



Hermiston High School student walk out of their classrooms and down a hall a little after 10 a.m. on March 14 during a gun violence protest in Hermiston.

longer have a voice. We're the voice for them."

Jeremy Simon, a sophomore, stood quietly during the protest. He said he participated because he wanted to pay tribute to the Parkland victims.

Simon said he felt more needed to be done for all students.

"We should help out people," he said. "The Parkland

shooter was a bully victim."

He said he felt Hermiston's school culture has improved, with the signs recently put up around campus and the Helping Hands program.

"There's always more that can be done," he said. "If a kid looks sad or lonely, talk to him and be his friend."

Reed and Rian Middleton participated in the walkout,

standing quietly in the front of the group of students.

"I don't feel like much action has been taken," Reed Middleton said. "It's a great way for us teens to be able to speak out. Our opinions matter, and we should be able to have a say in the schools."

Principal Tom Spoo and a few administrators and teachers stood outside supervising the students, who filed back into the school at 10:17 a.m.

Spoo said he did not have any comments about the protest.

"We support the kids' right to have a voice," he said.

The night before students walked out of schools around the country in protest of school violence, Alondra Cadenas got out her markers and started making signs.

"On Valentine's Day in Florida all these kids died because they thought they were safe at school," the fifth-grader wrote before carefully copying down the names of all 17 people — including 14

children — who died in the Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School shooting.

A second sign said "Hey adults! It's time to stop school shootings." But no one was there to help her hold it. Although one of her friends had planned to join her, in the end Alondra was the only student to walk out of Sunset Elementary School last week.

"I stood out there so maybe the adults would notice and do something about gun violence," she said.

She grabbed her phone and posters out of her backpack when 10 a.m. came and headed outside. When she was stopped by a teacher she thought she might be sent back to class, but she says the teacher merely redirected her toward the front door instead of the back so that the office staff could keep an eye on her while she stood outside with her sign, using her phone as a timer. Three different adults noticed her in front of the school and asked her about her protest.

"It felt good," she said.

Alondra's mother Norma Regalado said she was proud of her daughter for being brave enough to walk out all by herself. She said she had discussed the Florida shooting and news of the planned protest with her children (her son Saul Cadenas, a freshman at HHS, also participated) but in the end it was up to them whether they wanted to participate.

She said she thought it was unfair for adults sitting safely at home to say all of the kids participating just wanted to get out of class.

"I think most kids are aware of that, that someone could just walk in and start shooting them," she said, noting that's not something she worried about when she was that age.

Alondra said she didn't have specific laws she was hoping got passed as a result of the walkout, but she hoped the adults did.

"I hope that gun violence ends and stuff and the adults might notice," she said.



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