



Student Pledge Against Gun Violence

The Cedar Rapids Police Department, Marion Police Department, Linn County Sheriff's Office, and the United States Attorney's Office for the Northern District of Iowa invite you to participate in the area's first annual Student Pledge Against Gun Violence (the "Student Pledge").

The Student Pledge initiative began in 1996 with support from a unanimous United States Senate resolution and a Presidential Proclamation, both of which called for a Day of National Concern and a nationwide effort to distribute the Student Pledge. The National Day of Concern this year is Wednesday, October 21, 2015.

The Student Pledge is a non-partisan pledge that recognizes the role that young people can have, through their own individual decisions, in reducing gun violence. When students sign the pledge, they make the following promises:

1. I will never bring a gun to school;
2. I will never use a gun to settle a personal problem or dispute; and
3. I will use my influence with my friends to keep them from using guns to settle disputes.

While the actual pledge is itself important, its effectiveness increases when it is combined with other activities that engage young people in thinking about, and discussing the impact of gun violence. The Student Pledge initiative encourages schools to surround the pledge with classroom or school-wide activities focusing on gun violence and the role students can play in stopping violence. Examples of activities that other schools have used to raise awareness are described within this informational packet.

What Does Participation Involve?

There are a number of different ways that a school can participate. In general, participating schools are encouraged to consider the following:

1. Host an assembly or other event on the Day of National Concern (October 21), or in the days leading up to the Day of National Concern. Students can recite the pledge in unison at the event. Guest speakers will be available October 19-21, so that each school can choose the date that works best for its schedule.
2. Participate in an "awareness activity" in the day or week leading up to the pledge. This can be something as simple as posting gun violence statistics in the hallway or cafeteria or hosting a school-wide essay or art contest. A list of suggested awareness activities is below, although schools are encouraged to develop their own creative ideas for how to raise awareness and promote the pledge.

Potential Awareness Activities

Sponsor a school-wide poster contest and/or a writing contest, where students create a poster or draft an essay or poem addressing the issue of gun violence.

Focus history lessons on individuals who had their lives shortened by gun violence.

Have students write stories about "the rest of their lives" for figures whose lives were cut short by gun violence. For instance, students may choose to write about Martin Luther King, Jr., John F. Kennedy, Abraham Lincoln, John Lennon, Mahatma Gandhi, or other famous figures, imagining what they might have been able to accomplish had their lives not been cut short by gun violence. This is a great history and writing project.

Have one student each day read a gun violence statistic over the intercom during school announcements, and/or post statistics throughout the school.

Invite students to create a public service announcement for television or radio about the Student Pledge and the Day of National Concern, and gun violence. The PSA can be played at the assembly, or potentially aired on local television or radio stations.

Assign the student council, or another group of students, with the task of coordinating and planning the awareness activity in support of the Student Pledge. The Cedar Rapids Police Department and the U.S. Attorney's Office can work directly with these student groups and their faculty advisor.

Sponsor a contest for a Student Pledge cheer, and have the cheer squad lead the winning cheer at a school sporting event or assembly.

In music class, invite students to compose a catchy song, rap, or "jingle" that includes the SPEAK-UP phone number (1-866-SPEAK-UP). SPEAK-UP is a national hot-line that students can call to make anonymous reports about suspected violent threats in schools.

Use the School Pledge as an opportunity to provide student and/or faculty training on the response to an active shooter or other emergency.

School administrators, teachers and students can share their involvement and successes by sending a tweet with a photo and include @StudentPledge for everyone around the nation to see our community's involvement and commitment to make Cedar Rapids a safer place to live.

Why You Should Participate

While your school undoubtedly faces many scheduling demands, creating a small amount of time to participate in the School Pledge is important in light of the increasing amount of gun violence involving young people both locally and nationally. The primary purpose of the pledge is to reduce gun violence and create a safer environment for our schools and our community. While the pledge itself will not solve the issue of gun violence, it is an important step towards opening up discussion of the issue and providing students with a feeling of empowerment. If participation in the Student Pledge will result in even just one less shooting or one less victim, then it is a success.

What educators and students have said about their past participation in the Student Pledge:

"This day was certainly the high point in my career. Students were deeply affected by this day and have written personal notes to the speakers telling them that their lives were changed because of their messages. My colleagues . . . all share in this feeling and are committed to continue this kind of work. We would like to know if you have a date for next year's pledge."

-Middle School Guidance Counsel, New York

"I am one of the students in your district that recently received your pledge. I would just like to tell you that I think you're doing a great job trying to influence kids to stay violence free and to stay away from weapons. I thank you soooo much for trying to make not just my school but all of the other schools in the district to be a better and safer place for kids to be."

-Megan, student

"Our main purpose for taking the pledge and inviting (ATF agent) Mr. Townsend was to enlighten our students to the consequences of gun violence and drug abuse."

-Middle and High School Principal, South Carolina

"Our whole thrust is to get the children to be responsible for their own safety. We're saying even to the youngest children, we must be responsible enough to make good decisions concerning safety. We used examples, such as, you would never run into a busy intersection, or cross a road without looking both ways. Well, it's the same thing with gun safety."

-Elementary Principal, Connecticut

"I would understand that there are lots of teachers and students who would say, 'Gimme a break. This is not going to stop kids from coming to school with guns.' But wasn't it nice to do something? This could be the kickoff for further activity."

-High School Guidance Counselor, Virginia

"You start somewhere and you hope to build."

-High School Principal, Virginia

How to Participate

Registering to participate is easy. Simply go to <http://www.justice.gov/usao-ndia> to sign up. Unless your middle school and high school will be holding a joint assembly, a separate form should be submitted for each individual school. In order for us to make guest speaker arrangements, please submit the registration form at your earliest convenience, or at least by September 21, 2015.

Contact Information

Please do not hesitate to contact either of the below individuals with any questions, or if the Cedar Rapids Police Department and/or U.S. Attorney's Office can be of any assistance to you in the School Pledge program.

Sergeant Mark Andries
Cedar Rapids Police Department
(319) 286-5438
m.andries@cedar-rapids.org

Justin Lightfoot
U.S. Attorney's Office
(319) 363-6333
justin.lightfoot@usdoj.gov