



Speak Out Now

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There Is Hope When We Stand Up For Ourselves

In response to the brutal murders of 17 people at a high school in Parkland, Florida, the whole community responded in shock and outrage. The students took the lead, saying that they were going to make sure that such a tragedy never happened in another school. They organized memorials and rallies and spoke out on social media, to the press and on TV. They took their anger and concerns to the Florida state capitol and demanded that the governor and legislature take action.

They called for a walkout on March 14 to involve others. And students in 3000 high schools across the U.S. participated. They are calling for a national march, *A March For Our Lives*, in Washington D.C. on March 24 as well as marches across the U.S. to focus attention on the lack of student safety.

They have been open about their disappointment with the response from politicians both in Florida and in Congress. It took the Florida legislature a month to pass some minimal legislation. And Congress has done nothing. Trump sounded supportive right after the shooting and then backed off under pressure from the NRA. He has proposed arming teachers to solve a societal problem of violence of epic proportions. What a sick joke!

This has not stopped them. The students who have responded to this situation do not seem discouraged. They have the confidence that they should be able to change the way this society is run. They have the expectation of a different and better future for themselves and others. And they have the determination and energy to stand up for themselves and reach out to others.

These students are not alone. People across the country are tired of facing uncertain futures and there are signs that more people may be ready to stand up to themselves.

In February teachers and school staff in West Virginia organized themselves, 37,000 strong, and went on strike for 9 days. West Virginia is ranked 48th among the 50 states in spending on teacher and

staff salaries. And many working in the schools have to choose between buying food, or getting healthcare, on their current salaries. Many were forced to work two jobs just to survive. They had no choice but to fight even though the politicians and union officials said there wasn't money for a raise.

The union officials didn't organize this strike - it was the teachers and staff through a facebook page and grass roots committees. They understood the hardship that the strike would pose for parents and students. They made efforts to organize childcare and tried to provide food for students, many of whom are poor, and depend on school lunches as their main food for the day. After nine days they won a 5% raise and pushed to extend the raise to all state workers, not just those working in education.

Now teachers in Arizona, Kentucky and Oklahoma and other states are looking at the West Virginia example, and beginning to organize to make similar fights.

The mobilization of high school students and those working in education in West Virginia provide a breath of fresh air in a time of cynicism and despair. Most people feel that they have to just look after themselves or hope that someone in a position of authority will do something for them.

We can't wait for the politicians, union officials or anyone else, to solve our problems. In fact, most of the time, they are part of the problem. The high school students in Parkland and the West Virginia teachers and school staff have shown us that. They have shown, as we have seen many times in our history, that when ordinary people are angry, determined and decided, we can do extraordinary things. When we stand up, organize and have confidence in ourselves suddenly, what didn't seem possible yesterday is possible today.

*Join us on Saturday, March 24 at 10 AM
at Oscar Grant Plaza (Civic Center) in
Oakland for the March For Our Lives*