

Opinion

Engaged students make their case

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Spurred by the outspoken students at Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School in Parkland, Florida, where 17 people were murdered by a troubled former student wielding an assault rifle, high school kids across the nation demonstrated their support for stronger gun laws by staging a 17-minute walkout Wednesday. Bucks and Montgomery county students were among them. They made us proud.

Despite school officials' concerns about safety and parents' worries about disciplinary repercussions, the very organized protest occurred without any injuries or troubles that we're aware of. In fact, most schools accommodated the demonstration, secured police oversight and waived any form of punishment.

Said Centennial School District Superintendent David Baugh, "Schools are the places that are under assault and students are driving the conversation. I think it's vital that adults help support and guide them."

Maybe, maybe not. While we understand Baugh's desire to support students exercising their right to free expression, which after all is a learning experience, part of what makes a protest a protest is an element of defiance. Essentially, there's a risk involved in protesting and there should be. It's what makes the act attention worthy and, more importantly, meaningful for the participants.

That argument was made by columnist J.D. Mullane, based on personal experience, in Thursday's newspaper. It also was made quite cogently in a Courier Times Guest Opinion on Wednesday by Amy Strouse, who is a member of Bucks County Women's Advocacy Coalition, a Middletown Township supervisor and the mother of three young children.

"This is how we build angry kids into determined adults, empowered to raise their voices when they see injustice — no matter what," she wrote. We couldn't agree more.

Strouse continued, "Just ask the civil rights marchers, if anyone provided a cushion for them when they marched for what they knew was right. They risked being ostracized from their families, beatings, prison, even death. That consequence is what made their

protest worth admiring, it is what made others join their cause, and is what made the nation's leaders finally sit up and take notice — and make a change.”

Taking notice they are, as the House of Representatives on Wednesday — the day of the walkout — approved a bill to improve school safety. The measure authorizes \$500 million over 10 years for grants to improve training and coordination between schools and local law enforcement and to help identify signs of potential violence before they occur.

It's not the kind of gun legislation students and millions of others are calling for, but it's something. But it won't mean much if legislators — state and federal — don't deliver on tougher gun laws. To that end, we call on our lawmakers and the candidates who want their jobs to let voters here know exactly what they support, if anything. And we invite them to tell all of us in space we'll provide on this page.

Along that line, William Tennent High School junior Joshua Rodriguez, who was among protesting students there, called the walkout a good start. “By things like today, hopefully people will get a better idea of how we feel and maybe we can help stop all the crazy things that are happening.”

We hope so, too.



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