

“The American elite don’t care about the children”: US teachers and students respond to Texas school shooting

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On Tuesday, 19 elementary students and two teachers were killed and 17 others injured after 18-year-old gunman Salvador Rolando Ramos opened fire on an entire classroom at Robb Elementary School in Uvalde, Texas. While many details have not yet been released, what is clear is that unimaginable horror unfolded in the classroom where the majority of deaths occurred. The death toll continued to rise through Tuesday night as authorities had to use the DNA of parents to identify their slain children. The shooting has shocked the globe. Many parents across the country decided to keep their children home from school the following day.

Tuesday’s school shooting is yet another horrifying instance of mass violence, which has become evermore commonplace in US schools. On November 30, 2021, Ethan Crumbley, 15, opened fire on his classmates at Oxford High in the Detroit metro area of Michigan, killing four and wounding seven others. On February 14, 2018, Nikolas Cruz, 19, gunned down 17 people at Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School in Parkland, Florida. In December 14, 2012, 20 elementary school children and six adults were killed at Sandy Hook Elementary in Newtown, Connecticut, by gunman Adam Lanza, 20.

In the past five months alone there have been 27 school shootings in the US. According to the Gun Violence Archive, there has been at least one mass shooting nearly every day since the start of the year.

Teachers and students spoke with the *World Socialist Web Site* to express their anger and sorrow over the latest school massacre.

A teacher in Florida said, “I’m barely grappling with this right now. I work at a school in Parkland. After the Oxford High School shooting in Michigan last year, I was getting major anxiety about going back to my own campus, recalling too easily what happened on our turf back on February 14, 2018. These events are less than three years apart.

“One of my colleagues actually thought it would be comforting to say to me, ‘Don’t worry about it, we already had our shooting. It’d be like lightning striking in the same place twice if it happened again.’ There is nothing okay about this country’s relationship with guns when we are all just waiting for our turn to be a school shooting town, to mourn our own children, to counsel the forever-traumatized survivors. It doesn’t make me feel better that it’s not our children being killed this time. They are

someone’s children. Even the slain teacher is someone’s child. None of these people should be dead. This is all wrong. Horrible and wrong. The answer to ‘How many times must we grieve?’ cannot simply be ‘stop grieving them.’”

A teacher in Indiana expressed anger at the overall lack of safety in schools. “I’ve come to the realization today that I’m no longer going to comply with my school’s lockdown/evacuation drills. Why should I? The doors to my room were installed in the 50s, each with a 2x3 window of thin glass that’s been warped by time. My administration refuses to keep outside doors closed when it’s hot out since we have no AC and anyone has access to the building. We practice our escape routes and meet-up points, which just ensures [that] our future gunman will know when and where to shoot. Two years ago, our school board purchased for us these cheap plastic hooks we could use to tie a rope to that’s attached to our door knobs and a can of wasp spray.

“I’m done with this theater-acting administration that makes us go through to ‘prepare’ for school shootings. ... It doesn’t make them or myself any safer. It’s meant to make idiots feel like our school is safe when it’s the furthest thing from it. They can fire me.

“No one actually cares about school safety. DeWine in Ohio just earmarked \$4.8 million for school safety ... which equals about \$1,300 per building in the state, which is likely just going to be funneled to another useless PD [professional development] that will do nothing to actually protect us.”

It is worth recalling the 2019 active shooter drill at a school in White County, Indiana, during which several teachers were shot “execution style” with plastic pellets, itself an expression of the extreme level of violence in American society.

A middle school science teacher in California said, “I don’t think people are being provided realistic alternatives to the violence and increased militarization that are being presented to them. The popular discourse ends up being between ‘more militarization’ or ‘even more militarization.’ [Texas Senator] Ted Cruz says we need police officers in schools, and they need to be armed and trained. Others are saying that teachers need to have guns too. All this is escalation and reactionary solutions with no real dissection of the root issues of the problem.

“The problem is not that cops, teachers and kids don’t know how to kill someone. The problem is not that schools don’t have

metal detectors. The problem is that we live in a country that doesn't care about children because they don't perform any labor and don't make any money they can spend. The American elite don't care about the vulnerable, least of all, children. This is why school budgets keep getting cut and afterschool programs and places for them to collect and commune are disappearing.

"I do see many young people pretty demoralized. By everything. The threat of violence and death is constantly around them, and they see that, and it terrifies them. There seems to be a pervasive sense of helplessness among them. That is what they see—that they are small and incapable compared to the violence they could incur."

The California teacher also made a connection between the lack of safety in schools and the refusal of government officials to take any serious measures to protect the lives and health of children and educators during the pandemic. All mitigations, including mask mandates, have been lifted, and only a small percentage of students are being tested in his district. "The lackluster care for safety in schools from violence is mirrored in the lackluster care for safety in schools from COVID. The elite don't care about the safety of kids whether it be from violence or COVID, they just care about the money they can make off them."

A special education teacher in central Washington state spoke to the immense challenges school violence places on her students. "We were just discussing how we would be able to get away [if there was an active shooter on campus]. The truth is, we wouldn't be able to. We couldn't even ensure that some of our students knew that they would need to be quiet. We're also in 'overload,' which means that if we were able to get away, we may not be able to keep them all together with us if one decided to 'elope' or run away.

"My students have varied responses to lockdowns and active shooter drills. Some are unfazed and are able to stay calm and follow directions. Others cannot handle the sound of an alarm and will cover their ears until we can get them ear protection. Some of our sensitive students will begin to show signs of intense fear and anxiety and may sob or self-harm. Some other students attempt to flee.

"We do our absolute best to make them feel safe, but it is extremely stressful for all of us. The biggest challenge are the students who harm others when [things] are escalated. I have been bitten many times simply because I am trying to help them self-soothe."

The Washington teacher also spoke on the impact of the pandemic, saying, "Unfortunately the pandemic and poor working conditions have driven away a lot of the best educators. This was my first and my last year working at a school. My monthly take home is around \$1,000. While other individuals may be paid more (I chose to have the max taken out for retirement), it simply isn't keeping up with the cost of living.

"I mentioned we are in overload currently, and that is entirely due to the educator shortage. There aren't enough teachers, paras, specialists, etc. even to comply with local laws. We are quite literally overwhelmed. Now, multiply that for SPED (Special Education) programs. I could talk all day about the many issues I have, but it usually falls on deaf ears. I have only seen a general

apathy towards our situation."

Morgan, a high school junior in Virginia, said, "As heartbreaking as it is, it's really just not that surprising. The government decided a long time ago that kids dying as a symptom of their gun lobbying is perfectly fine with them. They could've changed all of this after Sandy Hook, prevented other elementary schools and schools as a whole, but they didn't for a reason. There have been 27 school shootings this year, if they actually cared about us they'd do something.

"I think the US government has the exact same attitude about the COVID pandemic as they do about school shootings. People dying as a result of negligence simply because the government decided our labor was more important than our lives."

James, a student at Appalachian State University in North Carolina, said, "What happened at Robb Elementary School was a tragedy, and it hasn't even been two weeks since Buffalo. Yet Biden, the Democrats, and the whole political establishment offer us only empty Bible verses and thoughts and prayers.

"Yes, what happened on Tuesday was irrational and unimaginable, but we need to look around us. The system that these people defend works solely through irrationality and violence. I am 21 now, and I have not known a single time in my life when the US was not at war. They are the ones who are using Ukrainians as cannon fodder in their proxy war against Russia which they stoked and prepared for years upon years. They are the ones who have leveled entire civilizations to dust over the past 25 years in the Middle East, and they are the ones who have decided to allow over 1 million people to die from COVID so that the rich could accumulate even more profits from their stock portfolios.

"Uvalde, Texas, as well, is the location of a Customs and Border Protection site, where immigrants fleeing violence caused by US intervention in Latin America are treated like animals. To stop school shootings we need to think of the bigger picture and get to the root of the problem. The capitalist system is irrational, outdated and based upon brutality and violence. It is there we must look to understand the basis of what happened in Uvalde, and it is to the emerging militant struggles of the working class that we must look to do away with all forms of capitalist violence."



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