

Bullying, Belonging, Gun Violence & Safety

Essay Contest Recognition Brunch After Action Report



About the PEGLLLab

The Public Engagement in Governance: Looking, Listening, and Learning Laboratory (PEGLLLab) seeks to engineer change by expanding policymaking conversations to include not only those who create, administer, and implement policies, but those who live and are affected by them. We partner with municipalities and organizations to broaden the definition of public safety and to keep ourselves and our communities safe, whole, and thriving.

At the PEGLLLab, we create situations and environments that facilitate looking, listening, and learning using our signature approach that harnesses the power of academic research, community engagement, and public service. We are intentional in utilizing equitable, inclusive, and participatory approaches in doing so. We assist communities to better understand and ultimately address or mitigate the deeply divisive issues that they face. Our objective is to align governing or public institutions with the expectations that the public has for them.

We realize that there will not be uniformity in lived experiences, ideologies, and outlooks, but we seek to help participants to appreciate the common ground that they do share. This is important as it unifies participants and communities, and allows for the centering of unity as a focal concept. Unity isn't sameness but the ability to leverage distinctiveness across communities in pursuit of a shared purpose to accomplish a communal or mutual goal and to arrive at a collective destination.

About the Contest

The Bullying, Belonging, Gun Violence, and Safety Essay Contest sponsored by the Charlottesville Alumni Chapter of Kappa Alpha Psi was a solutions-oriented one. It allowed students to (1) acknowledge their perceptions of the problem relative to bullying, belonging, feeling insecure or unsafe, and gun violence - and (2) most importantly propose a solution that addressed their focal topic or topics.

Participants were middle and high school students affiliated with MOCHA/WOCHA, 100 Black Men of Central Virginia, and the Carol Adams Foundation. A \$100 cash award was given to the best essay for the male and female winner across the two communities from the middle and high school divisions (total of \$1000). Winners from across the communities and divisions also received a congratulatory letter from US Senator Mark Warner.

Certificates of recognition and meal gift cards were given to all participants who submitted an essay. The contest was held on June 4th, 2023 at Mt. Zion First African Baptist Church in Charlottesville, Virginia.

REPORT SNAPSHOT

01

About the Contest

02

Gun Violence Statistics

03

An Overview of the Essays

04

Sponsors

05

Supporters

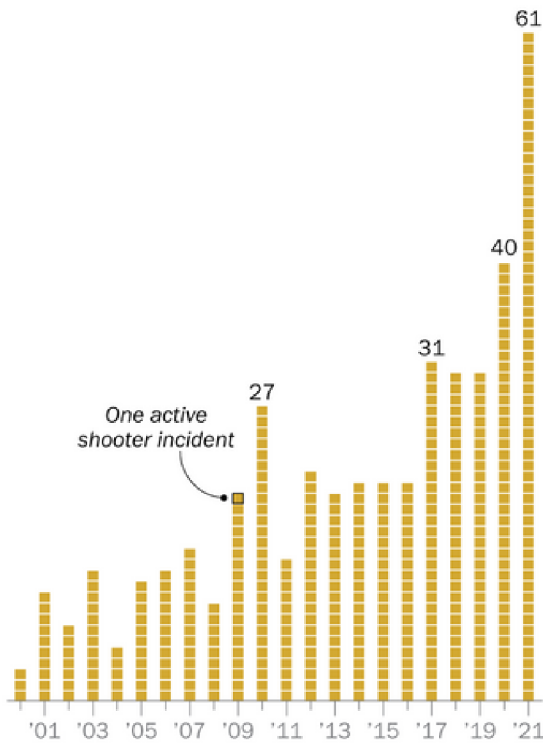
06

Bios of Authors

Gun Violence Statistics

Active shooter incidents have become more common in U.S. in recent years

Number of active shooter incidents, by year



The FBI found an increase in active shooter incidents between 2000 and 2021. There were three such incidents in 2000. By 2021, that figure had increased to 61.

It's important to note that the FBI's statistics do not capture the details on all gun murders in the U.S. each year. The FBI's data is based on information voluntarily submitted by police departments around the country, and not all agencies participate or provide complete information each year.

The record 48,830 total gun deaths in 2021 reflect a 23% increase since 2019, before the onset of the coronavirus pandemic. Gun murders, in particular, have climbed sharply during the pandemic, increasing 45% between 2019 and 2021, while the number of gun suicides rose 10% during that span. The overall increase in U.S. gun deaths since the beginning of the pandemic includes an especially stark rise in such fatalities among children and teens under the age of 18. Gun deaths among children and teens rose 50% in just two years, from 1,732 in 2019 to 2,590 in 2021. Currently, guns are the leading cause of death for US children and teens.

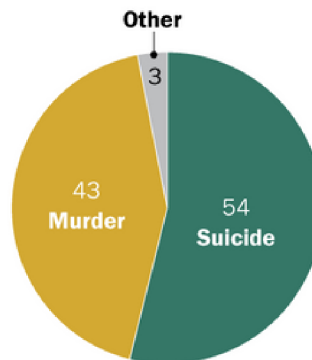
U.S. saw record numbers of gun suicides and gun murders in 2021

Gun suicides and gun murders in U.S.



Suicides accounted for more than half of U.S. gun deaths in 2021

% of U.S. gun deaths, by type



An Overview of the Essays

The collection of essay descriptions highlighted several common concerns shared by the students. The primary issues discussed included bullying, gun violence, school safety, mental health, and the need for improved communication and understanding among students and with adults. Across the essays, the students expressed a deep sense of urgency and the need for immediate action to address these pressing concerns.

Regarding gun violence, the students noted its prevalence, particularly in the United States, and the devastating impact it has on communities. They emphasized the need for stricter gun control measures, including comprehensive background checks, limitations on gun types, and addressing illegal drug use and impulsive gun purchases. Mental health plays a significant role, and the students suggested increased access to mental health resources and advocated a root cause analysis approach to understand and address the underlying causes of violence.

Bullying emerged as another major issue, with its detrimental effects on both the victims and perpetrators. The students proposed comprehensive anti-bullying policies, awareness campaigns, education programs, and counseling services in schools to address this issue. They stressed the importance of fostering empathy, respect, and open dialogue among students and authority figures to combat bullying effectively.

School safety was a recurring concern, and the students suggested various measures to enhance security.

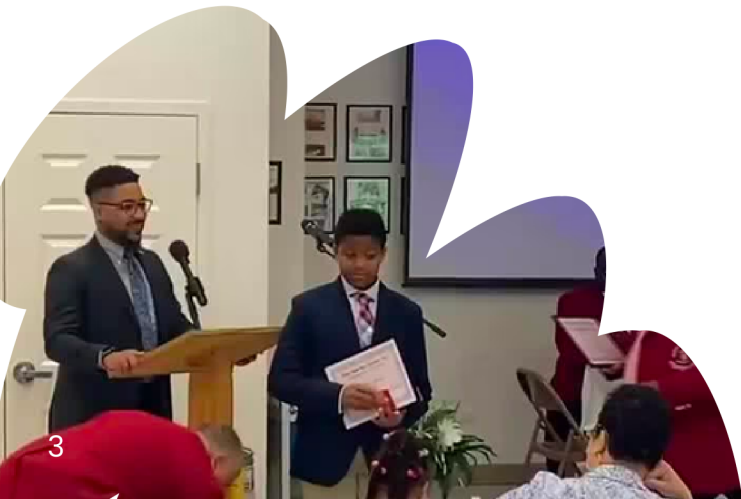
These included implementing active shooter drills, increasing the presence of security personnel, utilizing advanced technologies like metal detectors and surveillance systems, and strengthening school security technology. They also emphasized the role of teachers and peers as outlets for students to express themselves and seek support.

The students also stressed the significance of mental health in education. They advocated for increased funding for school counseling services, training educators in mental health awareness, and promoting open dialogue to reduce the stigma surrounding mental health issues. They highlighted the need to address the underlying causes of mental health problems and the exigency to create a supportive environment for students.

Common themes across the essays included the need for education and awareness, stricter regulations and policies, improved access to mental health resources, fostering empathy and respect, and strengthening communication channels among students, parents, and educators. The students collectively recognized the complexity of these issues and the importance of addressing them comprehensively.

In short, the students expressed concerns about bullying, gun violence, school safety, mental health, and the need for improved communication. They proposed solutions that involve education, awareness campaigns, stricter regulations, improved access to mental health resources, and fostering empathy and respect. Their recommendations highlighted the urgency of addressing issues to create safer and more inclusive learning environments for students.

We greatly appreciate the turnout by elected and appointed officials, aspirants for public office, youth development representatives, local and regional public safety professionals, and lay persons young and old from across our region. We also are appreciative of the news coverage provided by NBC29.



Sponsors



MT. ZION FIRST AFRICAN
Baptist Church CHARLOTTESVILLE, VA



UVA[®]Health

DIVERSITY & COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

PEGLab

Supporters



Barracks Road- Store Lead James Dean



Division for Diversity,
Equity, and Inclusion



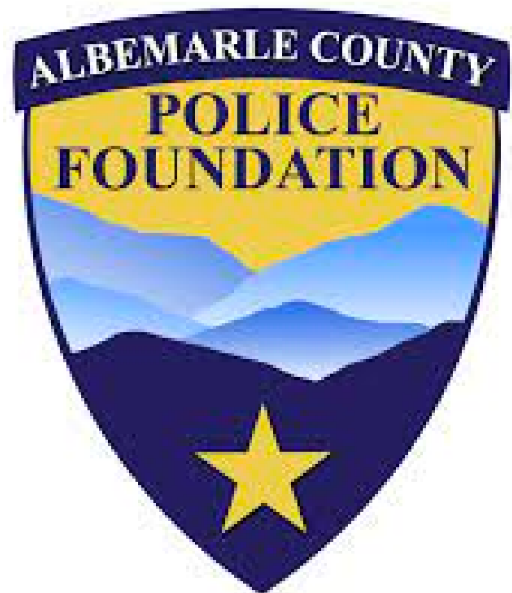
CHARLOTTESVILLE Police Foundation

M · O · C · H · A

MEN OF COLOR, HONOR AND AMBITION

W · O · C · H · A

WOMEN OF COLOR, HONOR AND AMBITION



Author Biographies



BRIAN N. WILLIAMS

Brian N. Williams is an Associate Professor of Public Policy within the Batten School of Leadership and Public Policy at the University of Virginia, the Founder and Director of the Public Engagement in Governance Looking, Listening & Learning Laboratory (PEGLLLab), a faculty affiliate of Improving Police-Adolescent Relationships Through Training (IMPART) Collaborative, Co-Editor-in Chief of the *Journal of Social Equity and Public Administration*, a Fellow of the National Academy of Public Administration and serves on the Criminal Justice Section Executive Board for the American Society of Public Administration. He is a scholar committed to community-engaged, practitioner-oriented action research who examines the interplay between demographic diversity, public safety, and public governance.



MATTHEW HUNTER

Matthew Hunter is a third year at the University of Virginia College of Arts & Sciences majoring in Psychology and minoring in Data Science. Committed to enhancing the lives of those on grounds and in the Charlottesville community, he serves as Co-Vice President of the Black Economic Empowerment Society (BEEs), a student-led organization committed to reimagining the world of entrepreneurship for Black students and increasing financial literacy within the Black community. As a member of UVA's Men's soccer team, he volunteers with the ACE program (Athletes Committed to Education) which connects student-athlete mentors to local elementary schools; allowing them to engage their community and act as a positive role model for young students.



LIDYA NIGUSE

Lidya Niguse is a third year Government major and Leadership and Public Policy minor student at the University of Virginia. She is involved in the Ethiopian-Eritrean Student Association, serves as a Meriwether Lewis Institute Fellow, and engages with the Charlottesville, VA community as a mentor with the Starr Hill program. She has been a Research Assistant in the Lab since her first year. With career interests in law and political analysis, Lidya engages political theory and poverty, mental health and international relations crises in her work.



SEBASTIAN SINGH

Sebastian Singh is a second year Master of Public Policy Candidate at the University of Virginia's Frank Batten School of Leadership and Public Policy. He holds a Bachelor of Arts in Economics from the University of Virginia as well. He is especially interested in the intersection of the two disciplines-- Economics and Public Policy--and the implications for future policy aimed at improving social equity. Sebastian has been working with Dr. Williams for over two years now. Ultimately, he hopes to channel his interests into a career in public service, focused on improving communities by generating meaningful social change.

Bullying, Belonging, Gun Violence & Safety

Essay Contest Recognition Brunch After Action Report



UVA STRONG

1 ★ 15 ★ 41

PEGLab

© 2023