

Prayer, Silence Mark Parkland High School Shooting Anniversary

One year after the Valentine's Day massacre inside a Florida school, students and families leading a nationwide push for gun safety paused on Thursday to mark the anniversary of the deadliest U.S. high school shooting.

School buses brought only a handful of students to a shortened class day at Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School in Parkland, Florida, where a former student with an assault gun killed 17 people on Feb. 14, 2018.

A moment of silence and community service activities were scheduled for local schools, with the city of Parkland hosting an evening vigil at a park where a similar event the day after the shooting showcased angry grief and spurred calls for action.

"For some it is almost as if the incident occurred yesterday. It's raw and fresh for people," Broward County Public Schools Superintendent Robert Runcie told reporters outside the high school, which was guarded by a handful of police officers.

Sixteen-year-old Darian Williams decided in advance not attend classes and instead participate in a beach cleanup with friends. "Today is a time to rest up and recoup my mind," he said in a phone interview.

Students like Williams who did not want to attend school on Thursday were excused.

Some activists who seized the spotlight after the shooting to rally against gun violence expected to observe the day in private.

David Hogg has struggled with his grief while emerging as a prominent student activist who co-founded the March for Our Lives movement.

“We can’t move on from this, when it’s something that never should have happened,” he told reporters this week, saying he planned to spend the day quietly with family. “You can’t move on from your sister constantly crying, every day, because she doesn’t have her four best friends anymore.”

For parent Fred Guttenberg, the year since the shooting already has seen his first Father’s Day, birthday and other emotional milestones without his 14-year-old daughter, Jaime, who was killed in a school hallway.

On the one-year mark of Jaime’s death, he was going to visit her at the cemetery. In a social media post, he noted that one year ago he had sent two children to school – and only one came home.

“I am forever haunted by my memory of that morning, rushing my kids out the door rather than getting one last minute. Did I say I love you?” he said on Twitter.

Andrew Pollack, whose daughter, Meadow, was killed at the school, vowed on Twitter to keep fighting to prevent another such tragedy from occurring.

“Every day hurts the same as the first,” he said. {eo}

© 2019 Thomson Reuters. All rights reserved.