

# ‘A HORRIFIC DAY’

- 17 slaughtered, 16 injured in Parkland; gunman arrested
- Former student’s social media posts ‘very disturbing’
- Some anguished parents still can’t get ahold of their children



Students are released from a lockdown Wednesday outside Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School in Parkland. Victims included students and adults, with 12 shot dead inside the school, two outside, one in the street, and two dying at the hospital. (John McCall/staff photographer)

**By David Fleshler, Aric Chokey, Lisa J. Huriash and Linda Trischitta**

The deadliest school shooting since Sandy Hook erupted Wednesday as authorities say a 19-year-old man with a troubled past and an AR-15 rifle stalked the halls of Parkland’s Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School.

Expelled from the school over disciplinary problems, Nikolas Cruz is accused of squeezing off shot after shot as students took cover under desks, fire alarms blared and

teachers barricaded classrooms. By the time it was over, 17 people were dead or dying, and 16 were wounded.

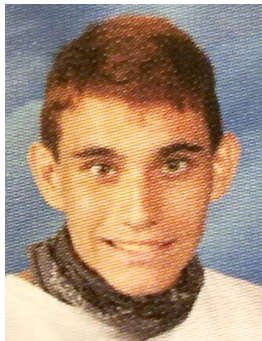
Anguished relatives and friends were keeping vigils into the night Wednesday for teenagers still missing.

“Find her alive!” Vicki Alhadeff said about her granddaughter, Alyssa Alhadeff, 15. “We know she’s missing. We can’t find her. The phone was tracked to the school.”

Alyssa is one of several teenagers who were not answering their cellphones after the mass shooting at the school where 3,208 high school students are enrolled.

Worried friends are posting the missing kids’ names and photos on Twitter and Facebook.

Gathered in Coral Springs was the Pollack family, awaiting word from Meadow Pollack, 18.



Nikolás Cruz

Meadow’s father, Andrew Pollack, said: “She would have picked up her phone by now. No one knows where she is. We’re all sick over this and just praying.”

At a family reunification center set up at the Fort Lauderdale Marriott Coral Springs Hotel, Golf Club & Convention Center, Rabbi Avraham Friedman of Chabad Coral Springs was with parents who “are in agony.”

“The not knowing is worse to an extent, because there is so much agony,” Friedman said.

Cruz was arrested off campus and taken to Broward Sheriff’s Office headquarters in Fort Lauderdale. Although some students described Cruz as a normal teenager, others and some of his neighbors called him strange, troubled and depressed.

A firearms enthusiast whose adoptive mother died last November, Cruz talked about shooting lizards, squirrels and frogs, said Trevor Hart, who knew him from Spanish class and said he seemed “a little off.” Police were called to his house numerous times, said a former neighbor, Shelby Speno, and he was seen shooting at a neighbor’s chickens.

“He wore a hoodie and always had his head down,” said Janine Kartiganer, a former neighbor. “He looked depressed.”

Panicked parents streamed to this affluent section of northwest Broward County on Wednesday afternoon, as news helicopters broadcast the incident live, police officers crouched behind cars with guns drawn and students congregated on streets, many crying, hugging and calling friends and family.

In a blurry Snapchat video from inside the school, a man yelled, “Oh, my God,” as the pop-pop, pop-pop of gunshots rang out and students screamed.



Hands raised, students are evacuated from the school by police. Officers from multiple agencies and SWAT team members responded to reports of an active shooter on campus about 2:40 p.m. (Mike Stocker/staff photographer)

Broward Sheriff Scott Israel said 17 people were killed, including students and adults, with two shot outside the school, one in the street, 12 inside the school and two dying at the hospital. Five of the victims remain unidentified, he said. This was the worst school shooting since 26 children and adults were shot to death at Sandy Hook Elementary School in Connecticut in 2012.

Investigators have begun analyzing Cruz's social media accounts, which the sheriff said contained material that was "very, very disturbing."

Cruz was taken into custody off campus without incident, he said. Wearing a red shirt, black pants and black boots, Cruz was placed on a gurney. At 4:47 p.m. he was wheeled into Broward Health North hospital in Deerfield Beach. Later he was taken from the hospital to BSO headquarters.

"People are still undergoing surgery," Israel said. "We just pray for this city, pray for this school, the parents, the folks that lost their lives. It's a horrific, horrific day."

Among those shot was the school's athletic director, Chris Hixon, according to the school's assistant athletic director, Marilyn Rule. No information was immediately available on his condition.

Sixteen people were being treated at hospitals. Seven victims were being treated at Broward Health Medical Center in Fort Lauderdale, Dr. Benny Menendez told reporters. Two were in critical condition and five were stable. Nine were taken to Broward Health North Medical Center, where three were in critical condition.

“We do drills and when this happens we’re ready,” Menendez said. “We practice for this.”

The school, located in an well-off, low-crime neighborhood near the Everglades, will be closed for the rest of the week.

FBI agents were on the scene interviewing students asking for anyone who saw the shooter.

*“Kids were running out full of blood. Kids were falling in the grass.”*

Derval Walton, parent

“You’re OK!” one student said as she cried and hugged her friend who had just come out. “You’re safe now, don’t worry.”

Samuel Dykes, a freshman, was on the third floor of the school when he said he heard gunshots and saw several bodies in a classroom.

SWAT told the class to keep their eyes forward as they exited the school, he said.

Around dismissal time at 2:40 p.m., staff and students heard what sounded like gunfire and enacted a “Code Red” lockdown, according to the Broward School District.

“It’s a horrific situation,” Broward County Superintendent Robert Runcie said. “It’s just a horrible day for us.”

Students were streaming down Pine Island Road at 3:30, some of them crying, some talking on cellphones.

Meghan Walton’s mascara was running as she walked down Pine Island Road with her mother, Derval Walton. She was waiting in the car line to pick her 15-year-old freshman daughter up when she got the ominous text from her: “Code Red.”

“Kids were running out full of blood,” Derval Walton said. “Kids were falling in the grass.”

Hannah Siren, 14, was in math class on the third floor.

“The people next door to us must have not locked their door,” she said, breaking into tears. “They all got shot.”

How many?

“10 or ... 7”

President Trump tweeted: “My prayers and condolences to the families of the victims of the terrible Florida shooting. No child, teacher or anyone else should ever feel unsafe in an American school.”

Deputy White House Press Secretary Lindsay Walters said: “We are monitoring the situation. Our thoughts and prayers are with those affected.”

Gov. Rick Scott announced plans to come to Broward County immediately. He spoke on the phone with Israel, Runcie and Florida Department of Law Enforcement Commissioner Rick Swearingen, according to the governor’s office. He ordered flags on all state buildings to be set at half-staff in “remembrance of the victims of the senseless violence committed at Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School in Parkland, Florida.”

All Broward school district athletic events were canceled for the night.

Jay Golden, of Parkland, has a daughter Rachel who was at the school when the first sign of problem came. Rachel, a senior, texted him that there was a Code Red, a shooting, and she didn’t know if it was real or a drill.

At 3 p.m. she still hadn’t been evacuated from the 900 building, but told her father she was safe with 40 other students and a teacher.

“She was crying, she’s scared,” he said. “She’s been texting back and forth. She’s OK at the moment.”

“I’m freaking out,” her father said. “This is crazy, this stuff shouldn’t be going on in these schools. People are crazy. I don’t know what goes on through these people’s minds these days, it’s a scary thing. It’s one of those things - you don’t want to put a metal protector and treat them like prisoners but they have to figure something out. You put your kids in school and it’s supposed to be a safe place and this stuff happens all the time.”

The FBI is asking anyone with information to call 800-Call-FBI.

*Correspondent Gary Curreri and staff writers Susannah Bryan, Anne Geggis, Skyler Swisher and Scott Travis contributed to this report.*