



Written by [Michael Tennant](#) on May 16, 2018

School Shooter Nikolas Cruz Benefited From Lax School Discipline

New information about the history of confessed school shooter Nikolas Cruz (shown) indicates that lax school disciplinary standards prevented Cruz, 19, from being brought to the attention of the justice system before his Valentine's Day shooting spree at Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School in Parkland, Florida, that left 17 dead.



According to the [Washington Times](#), "Cruz committed 58 infractions from 2012-17 at Westglades Middle School and Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School, even though he was enrolled in 2015 at another school, Cross Creek, for students with emotional and behavioral disorders." Each time, the punishment was mild and roughly the same.

"After trashing a middle-school bathroom in 2013, Mr. Cruz received a three-day referral to a newly created diversion program called Promise designed to help kids who had committed misdemeanors avoid arrest and stay out of the 'school-to-prison pipeline,'" the paper reported.

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Cruz never showed up for the program, which meant that he should have been brought before a judge, "yet there is no record that it ever happened, based on what the [Broward School District] has released," the *Times* wrote.

"There's possible negligence here if no one ever followed up," Timothy Sternberg, a former assistant principal who helped run Promise from 2014 to 2017, told the newspaper.

Of course, there's also the possibility, however remote, that the district hasn't released the records that would show appropriate follow-up had occurred. As the [South Florida Sun Sentinel](#) reported May 11, "The district has tried to keep information from the public and put out untrue and misleading statements."

The paper elaborated:

The district is fighting in court against the release of school surveillance video. It flatly refused to issue any records regarding the shooting to the news media, in a possible violation of the state's open-records law. Superintendent Robert Runcie has blocked critics, including parents, from his Twitter account. More than two months after the shooting, a Broward Sheriff's detective told a state commission on school safety that he was still waiting for the district to provide all of Cruz's disciplinary records.



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The worst came last week, when Runcie acknowledged that his forceful denials that Cruz had been involved in the Promise program ... were wrong. The district had repeatedly dismissed as “fake news” suggestions that Cruz was in the program.

Had Cruz been brought before a judge for failing to appear at Promise, he would have been given the option of attending the program or possibly facing criminal charges, Sternberg said. Even if Cruz had refused to go to Promise, he would at least have had some involvement with law enforcement, which could have led to his arrest. A criminal record would have made Cruz’s purchase of the gun he used in his shooting spree illegal, which could have deterred him or forced him to use a less-effective weapon.

Unfortunately, the district’s lax attitude toward Cruz’s misbehavior seems to be standard operating procedure since the founding of Promise, which was a response to criticism from civil-rights groups and the Obama administration that schools were disproportionately punishing black students. “Now,” wrote the [Sun Sentinel](#), “many teachers and parents say Broward has created a culture in which teachers are expressly told or subtly pressured not to send students to the administration for punishment so a school’s image is not tarnished.”

Then again, even if the school had referred Cruz to law enforcement, there’s no guarantee his murderous designs would have been thwarted. The Broward Sheriff’s Office seemed to feel no need to take any serious action against Cruz despite dozens of incidents that had been brought to their attention, not least of which was an Instagram video Cruz posted in early February saying he was planning to shoot up the school.

Knowing what we know now, it’s not hard to figure out why the sheriff’s office and the school district have both been less than forthcoming about the details of the shooting and their prior dealings with Cruz, but this furtiveness only heightens suspicions that they have something bigger to hide. Still, it’s safe to say that while Cruz bears the ultimate responsibility for his actions, government institutions charged with the safety of school students also have a lot to answer for.

Photo of Nikolas Cruz: AP Images



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