ESSAY TOPIC: Why is it important to speak about sexual assault?

Your Task: Carefully read each of the three texts provided. Then, using evidence from at least THREE of the sources provided, write a well-developed argument (essay) that answers the essay topic question.

Clearly establish your claim [argument / main point] in your introduction paragraph. In the body paragraphs, use specific and relevant evidence from at least THREE of the sources to develop your argument. Do not simply summarize each text.

GUIDELINES:
Be sure to:
- Establish your claim regarding the essay topic, i.e. write a clear thesis.
- Use specific, relevant, and sufficient evidence from at least three of the texts to develop your argument.
- Identify the source that you reference by text name or number and line number(s).
- Organize your ideas in a cohesive and coherent manner.
- Maintain a formal style of writing.
- Follow the conventions of standard written English.

Texts:
Text 1 -- statistics from the Department of Justice and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention
Text 2 -- excerpt from “How Parents Talk to Children about Consent” by Neal Conan
Text 3 -- “To Prevent Sexual Assaults, Schools and Parents Start Early” by Tovia Smith
Text 4 – Images from The New York Times
Text 5 -- Speak by Laurie Halse Anderson
Information about Rape in the United States

Text 1- Statistics from the Department of Justice
and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention

MELINDA IS NOT ALONE.

• 1 in 6 American women will be the victim of an attempted or completed rape. In the U.S., a rape is reported every five minutes. Experts estimate that only 16% of all rapes are ever reported to police.
• Nearly half of rape and sexual assault victims are girls under the age of 18.
• Girls between the ages of 16 and 19 are 4 times more likely than the general population to be victims of rape, attempted rape, or sexual assault.
• Most teenagers who are raped or sexually assaulted are attacked by someone they know.
• 17.7 million American women have been victims of attempted or completed rape.

MEN AND BOYS CAN BE SEXUALLY ASSAULTED, TOO.

• 1 out of every 33 American men will be the victim of an attempted or completed rape.
• In 2003, ten percent of rape victims were male.

VICTIMS OF SEXUAL ASSAULT ARE:

• 3 times more likely to suffer from depression.
• 6 times more likely to suffer from post-traumatic stress disorder.
• 13 times more likely to abuse alcohol.
• 26 times more likely to abuse drugs.
• 4 times more likely to contemplate suicide.

Statistics from studies by the Department of Justice and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention

Text 2- excerpt from the radio program “Talk of the Nation” with host Neal Conan,
Episode titled “How Parents Talk to Children about Consent” aired 4/11/13

In late 2011, four teenage boys at a party allegedly raped a 15-year-old girl in Nova Scotia. A picture of the incident circulated among classmates and then went viral. In a Facebook post, the girl's mother said she'd been shunned by her friends, bullied and called a slut. She moved, transferred schools, made new friends, started therapy, but a week ago Rehtaeh Parsons hanged herself. Her family took her off life support this past Sunday.

In a note, Rehtaeh Parsons wrote: In the end, we will remember not the words of our enemies but the silence of our friends. Her parents also blame school authorities and the RCMP, the Canadian equivalent to the FBI, which dropped the investigation, citing what it called a lack of evidence.

Cases like this and the ongoing investigation in Steubenville, Ohio, prompt many questions, among them, along with biology: Do parents tell their sons and daughters about sexual assault and the meaning of consent?
If colleges are a hunting ground, as they’ve been called, for sexual predators, advocates say that high schools are the breeding ground — and that any solution must start there. They say efforts at college are too little, too late.

The push for earlier intervention is coming from a wide range of voices, including student survivors, law enforcement officials — and New England Patriots owner Bob Kraft.

"I have a couple granddaughters in college, and, y'know, I'm just thinking, holy mackerel — let's get to the root of it," Kraft told an audience of hundreds of high school students and teachers at Gillette Stadium in Massachusetts.

With a half-million dollars — and his team's star power — Kraft has teamed up with Massachusetts Attorney General Maura Healey to launch Game Change: The Patriots Anti-Violence Partnership. In its first year, some 90 Massachusetts high schools have been trained to run a dating violence prevention program called Mentors in Violence Prevention (MVP).

"It's about respect and listening," Kraft said in his speech. "We have to make this cool."

Many students were starstruck by Kraft and the big-name players who were helping to boost the program.

"You talk about cool, yeah, that's as cool as it gets," gushed Danny Ryan, a junior at Lincoln Sudbury High School.

MVP teaches teens about healthy relationships, how to spot risky ones, and how to intervene to help another student out of a jam. Recent Lincoln Sudbury grad Otto Zaccardo says the training has already enabled him to do that for a friend.

"That could have been the next situation," he says. "But it was stopped and taken care of ... and, in her words, changed this young woman's life and just made all the difference."

Getting Started Early

High-profile cases of sexual assault — from elite prep schools to public middle and high schools — have underscored the problem in younger grades. Close to 100 elementary and secondary schools are now being investigated for their alleged mishandling of sexual assault allegations — 2.5 times the number a year ago.

Zaccardo says attitudes need to be adjusted when kids are young.

"It starts to be part of your culture," he says. "So by the time you get to college, it's second nature, it's already hardwired into our brain."

"Absolutely, college is just way too late," says Paul Schewe, a professor at the University of Illinois, Chicago who studies violence prevention.
Even within high school, he says, programs are less effective each passing year. What works well on ninth-graders, for example, has only one-third the impact on 12th-graders.

"It just makes sense when kids go through puberty, that's when their ideas about sex and beliefs and behaviors are forming, so that's really a critical period," Schewe says.

The conversation really should start even younger, he says.

Indeed, Kate Rohdenburg, who runs a violence prevention program for a group called WISE in Vermont and New Hampshire, says even 5- and 6-year-olds can be taught basic principles of boundaries and autonomy.

"Of course, we're not saying the word 'autonomous' to kindergartners," she explains. "But we talk about who here likes hugs, and some kids raise their hand and some don't. Well, how are we supposed to know if this person wants a hug when they're feeling sad or not? And kindergartners will tell you that you should ask them."

**Educating Everyone**

A growing number of states are now mandating some sort of education around sexual assault in public schools. Nine passed new laws in the past year and a half, bringing the total to about 25. Nationally, a law encourages it — but does not mandate.

"I would like it to move more over into 'you have to do it,' " says the law's co-sponsor, Tim Kaine, a Virginia senator and the Democratic vice-presidential nominee. "Look, there's traditional skittishness about sex ed in the K-12 system."

Kevin Fox, a former Massachusetts high school counselor, says he was forced to resign after criticizing his school's handling of sexual assault allegations.

"I think schools, in dealing with situations like this, are probably where colleges were 10 to 15 years ago," Fox says.

He argues that high schools are not only missing the best window of opportunity to curb the problem, but by failing to act, they are actually exacerbating it.

"I think these kids go off to college and [they say], 'You know, I got away with it once, I can get away with it again,' " Fox says. "It's a classic dynamic that occurs."

**Don't Blame The Victim**

As long as the problem persists, some schools say one of the most important and effective approach to prevention is to train girls in self-defense.

Many advocates bristle at the female focus, saying that putting the onus on women to fend off an attack is a kind of victim blaming. But in Watertown, Mass., where self-defense is one of three different programs in place, school superintendent Jean Fitzgerald says the approach must be part of the solution.

"We're trying to make sure that the girls don't become a victim," Fitzgerald says. "We're not blaming the victims, and there's nothing wrong with teaching someone how to keep yourself safe."
"It's a challenging question, because I'm a parent also," concedes Debra Robbin from the violence prevention group Jane Doe Inc.

While policymakers, Robbin says, can't send girls the message that it's on them to stop sexual assault — whether by fighting back, drinking less or anything else — she says ultimately the answer is different for parents.

"A public health strategy looks at who is perpetrating, and that's really where our efforts need to be," Robbin says. "But what you're gonna tell your child is a different thing. Of course we want to say those things."

And increasingly, parents are. Regardless of how much schools address the issue, more parents are taking it upon themselves to keep their sons and daughters from becoming victims or perpetrators.

Parents In The Conversation
Some parents say they're no longer just stammering through the birds and the bees. Rather, they're struggling through much more fraught and nuanced conversations about sexual assault.

"I don't want my son to be one of those guys, and I don't want my daughter to be one of those victims, so I'll do what I have to do," says Kasie Hudson of Frederick County, Va.

Hudson is disappointed that her kids' public school doesn't tackle the issue of sexual assault at all.

Only about half of states require some sort of sexual assault prevention education — and most that do usually steer clear of some of the thorniest issues, like what counts as consent.

"I think it's kind of a cop-out to just say, well, parents should be handling this," Hudson says. "But I guess I'm going to need to do this myself."

Hudson says that she improvised a bit, and then got some help from videos she found online. Like one that tells teens to imagine that instead of asking about consent for sex, they're asking about a cup of tea.

"You say, 'Hey, would you like a cup of tea?' " the video begins. And if the person offers an enthusiastic "Yeah!" then bring it, the video explains. If not, then don't.

The video, produced by Blue Seat Studios, continues through several other scenarios, like what to do if someone wavers about having tea, or — somewhat absurdly — if you're offering tea to someone who's unconscious.

"You should just put the tea down," the video implores. "Unconscious people don't want tea!"

"It was cute and funny, and my 13-year-old son thoroughly enjoyed it," Hudson says.

Hudson wondered how big of an impression the video actually made but was heartened when, about a year later, they were talking about the Stanford swimmer who sexually assaulted a woman who'd passed out after a party.
"And my son goes, 'If the person is passed out, they don't want tea!' I knew it had sunken in," Hudson recalls.

**Teaching Reflex**
That's a tricky one for many parents to navigate. No one wants to suggest that where their daughter's going, or what she might be wearing or drinking, would make a rape her fault.

But Techiya Levine, a mother of three, says she felt that she had no choice but to warn her daughter anyway. She likens it to warning kids about the dangers of crossing the street.

"Just because it's the right of way for pedestrians to cross the street at the crosswalk, you still teach kids to look both ways," Levine says. "It doesn't mean you tell your kids, 'You just walk down that crosswalk. Cars might be coming but it's your right.' That really does assume that we live in a perfectly fair world, and we don't."

Levine and her husband often drilled their daughter with what to do if she was ever in trouble, even teaching her some martial arts. It's what saved her when then-17-year-old Nava Levine narrowly escaped an assailant near her Atlanta high school last year.

"I just clicked right into, 'Now you scream and now you run,'" Nava recalls. "I actually started screaming 'fire' because I had once learned that people respond better when they hear 'fire' rather than 'rape.'"

"So all those little things, they started kicking in, because I had it ingrained in me just so many times that it was a reflex."

**Not One Person's Problem**
One thing experts say all parents should be talking to kids about is stepping up to help someone in trouble.

University of New Hampshire prevention researcher Caroline Layva likens it to the massive shift in societal views toward drunken driving.

"We have to change the culture around who's responsibility is it," Layva says. "It isn't just that person's private business, or that person's problem."

That doesn't just mean students, parents and grandparents, but schools as well.

"It does have an impact on the entire community," Layva says, "and everybody has a role to play."
Emma Sulkowicz, center, with her mattress at Class Day, a graduation event for seniors at Columbia College on Tuesday. Ms. Sulkowicz carried the mattress around campus with her this year to protest the university’s handling of her sexual assault complaint. Michael Appleton for The New York Times