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## Student Walkout Guidance (examples) for Administrators

Posted on **February 26, 2018** by **Jack McKay**

The following information was originally from the National School Public Relations Association site.

School Districts sharing information

Highline School District, Seattle

Guilford County Schools (NC)

Clovis Unified School District, California

Michigan School Public Relations Association

### **Highline School District**

Student Walkout Guidance February 2018

Principals,

Following the school shooting in Florida, students around the country are planning walkouts to protest school violence. Anticipating that this movement may come to Highline schools, we want to give you guidance about employee absences associated with student walkouts.

The priority we all share is student safety. In the event of a student walkout, please direct your staff as needed to ensure that students are safe and supervised. For example, you may direct some staff to accompany students off campus, while requiring other staff to stay on campus to supervise students who choose not to walk out.

This is consistent with the way we have responded to other recent events impacting some of our schools, such as the post-Super Bowl Seahawk parade and walkouts associated with immigrant rights.

Staff may ask you if they can participate in these protests or attend rallies with students in Olympia or other off-site gathering places during the workday. Employees who choose to do so should take the appropriate leave, such as personal leave for HEA-represented staff.

If you have specific questions about your school, please consult your ILED. Thank you for your leadership as students and staff respond to this important and emotionally-charged issue.

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### **Guilford County Schools (NC)**

Communications to Principals from Superintendent; re. Walkouts

Dear Principals:

In the wake of the tragedy in Parkland, Fla., last week and other losses of life on school campuses in recent years, messages posted on social media and shared via news accounts have encouraged students nationwide to walk out. The days, times and organizers vary, and will likely spark local protests as well.

The best preventive measure is to use this as a teachable moment for students on an age-appropriate basis, particularly for secondary school students. Make sure that all views are respected by staff and students. With student input, consider providing a safe space on campus for students to assemble peacefully, and encourage them to stay on campus for safety reasons.

Should any of our students choose to participate in a peaceful student protest, the following protocol should be considered to keep students safe:

- Designate campus personnel who will remain in the school building/on campus with students who remain in their classrooms and common areas, and designate campus personnel who will walk with students to keep them safe. Teachers need to stay with our students and play their designated roles in keeping kids safe.
- Ensure that there is a source of communication for those designated to walk with students either via radios or via cell phones.
- If reporters contact staff for comment, refer them to District Relations. Principals may want to pre-select some students and staff who can speak to the media after the event and/or in coordination with District Relations.
- Staff that remain with students in their classrooms will retake the attendance and note students that remain in class and those who choose to leave. Submit new attendance information to the office in order to relay that information to parents and school support officers.
- Encourage respectful and civil behavior and remind students that a walk out is not an excused absence. Remind students to be conscious of their surroundings and safety; specifically emphasize the importance of using sidewalks and staying out of the streets.
- Allow students to walk out peacefully. Encourage respectful and civil behavior.
- Send a ConnectEd (r) call informing parents that some students have chosen to participate in a walkout. Parents may want to remind their children to stay safe by staying on campus. Additional guidance on Peaceful Protests is provided on page 115-116 of the crisis management and emergency handbook.

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**Clovis Unified School District, California**

## Guidance to Schools RE Nation-wide Online Walkout Movements Not for Distribution in its Entirety

In the wake of last week's tragic shooting at Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School in Florida, several nation-wide online movements have sprung up advocating for students and staff to stage walk outs during the school day on several different dates (March 14, March 24 & April 20) to advocate for political action on the issue of gun control. Because we have students and staff members interested in participating, the following guidance and talking points have been developed for use in our schools.

### Guidance

Our goal is the creation of a secure learning environment that allows students to fully engage in the educational process free from political or religious partiality.

Because the timing of these walkout movements presents a potentially negative impact on classroom learning if students miss valuable instructional time, and the safety of students would be compromised if students left campus without permission during the school day safety, it is our goal to identify alternate ways for student expression to occur on our campuses.

From a point of impartiality, teachers can provide students interested in a dialogue about the tragedy at Florida's Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School, and the national movements that have sprung up in its wake, avenues to have those conversations in a constructive fashion here on campus.

Well outside the moment of these walkout movements, staff can engage students in dialogue about constructive and mutually respectful ways to express opinions, but in such conversations and/or assignments should avoid using inflammatory or biased language that would appear to require students to agree with the personal views of the educator.

In Peer Counseling, Principals and Student Advisory (PASA) groups, and in your student leadership groups, discuss with student options to be considered to allow expression on both sides of the issue. Note: It should be emphasized with students that not everyone will agree on this issue, and students must expect there to be disagreements over what action, if any, should be taken by our state and federal government. At the elementary level (if students are seeking avenues to pursue this conversation, which is unlikely) this could take the form of an option essay or poster project in the upper grades. At the intermediate or high school level, this conversation could take place in social science classes, or during lunchtime activities.

If a staff member feels compelled to participate in a walkout he/she should speak with a learning director or supervisor to address his/her concerns and discuss alternate avenues (such as taking personal time and arranging for a sub) and should not include students in their plan. Staff should not spontaneously abandon their teaching responsibilities and walk out while students are present because his/her behavior could inhibit students from feeling that their teacher is creating a learning environment in which students are free to express differing beliefs or attitudes without fear (whether real or perceived) of repercussion. Additionally, any such act may be perceived by a student or members of the public as the opinion of the Clovis Unified.

All high schools and intermediate schools should develop optional alternatives to provide students with avenues of free expression. Should a student choose to leave class and/or campus without permission as part of a protest movement, disciplinary consequences will occur, though all school administrators should proceed diplomatically and with sensitivity in responding to such a decision by a student.

Additional direction will be provided by the School Leadership Division regarding these disciplinary measures and how to communicate these consequences to students before the date of proposed walkouts. Should a student choose to walk out of class prior to this direction being provided to schools, administrators should consult with their Area Superintendent prior to determining consequences to ensure we are consistent across the District.

#### Talking Points For Use with Staff

- While every person who cares about kids, and cares about the safety of our nation's schools has been deeply moved by the tragedy in Florida last week, there are widely held and differing opinions about how the nation should react.
- The conversation currently underway across the nation is a political one, related to whether or not our state and federal governments should act in certain ways on the issue of gun control legislation.
- Because this is a political debate, all of the professional standards and education code requirements related to the political neutrality of public education employees remain in place. Board Policy No. 6311 outlines employees' obligation to maintain neutrality from political issues during their duty day. Outside of the duty day, however, employees must also ensure that any political activity in which they participate is clearly presented as personal opinion and not that of the District. This is consistent with the annual acknowledgments educators sign at the beginning of each year that employees are to refrain from the political speech in their role as public employees.
- Public educators play an important role in setting an example for our students of how to respect varying viewpoints, and to encourage student dialogue without, by our words or actions, inhibiting any student from expressing a viewpoint that may be contrary to others'.
- Clovis Unified educators play a critical role in the creation of welcoming learning environments in which students feel free to engage in the learning process regardless of their personal beliefs. This includes avoiding the appearance of partiality toward any student, political or religious ideology, race, ethnic or cultural group, etc. Toward this end, staff should remain neutral in their speech or behavior before students while representing Clovis Unified.
  - Clovis Unified educators play a critical role in the creation of welcoming learning environments in which students feel free to engage in the learning process regardless of their personal beliefs. This includes avoiding the appearance of partiality toward any student, political or religious ideology, race, ethnic or cultural group, etc. Toward this end, staff should remain neutral in their speech or behavior before students while representing Clovis Unified.
  - While every person who cares about kids, and cares about the safety of our nation's schools has been deeply moved by the tragedy in Florida last week, there are widely held and differing opinions about how the nation should react to this tragedy.
- We have reviewed with staff our expectations for political neutrality when they are wearing their Clovis Unified badge. This does not, however, prohibit them from expressing their personal opinions outside of their workday.

- We respect the fact that many of our students may desire to express their opinion about these walk out movements, and some may wish to join in. We are working with our student leadership groups to discuss ways that we can provide students avenues to express their opinions while remaining on our campus, and fully participating in instructional time in class. As we develop plans (such as lunchtime activities, optional poster or essay contests, or classroom discussions), we will ensure students are aware of the options available to them.
- It is our expectation that students will respect the rules of our school and remain on campus during the school day to protect their safety and the safety of others, and by accessing the avenues for their personal expression of opinion we make available during the school day.

### **Compiled by MSPRA Leadership and leaders from Michigan education organizations**

How to Approach Student Walkouts February 23, 2018

#### Introduction

As you are aware, walkouts are a very complicated issue. Each situation is different. Always consider your school's policies, codes of conduct, local community needs, and your local climate as you address each instance. You may wish to contact your school district's legal counsel for advice. When you learn of a planned event, you may also wish to contact your local law enforcement agency. [NOTE: This document has been prepared in cooperation with the Michigan Association of School Administrators, Michigan Association of Intermediate School Administrators, Michigan Association of School Boards, Michigan Association of Secondary School Principals, Michigan Department of Education, Michigan School Business Officials and the Michigan School Public Relations Association. It is informational only and intended to highlight some of the approaches to addressing this issue.]

#### Talking Points/Key Messages

Frame the issue as student/school safety—rather than gun control—in your messaging.

- We're working with students, staff, and local authorities to ensure students are safe and are able to have their voices heard.
- We will be respecting the rights of all students, whether they choose to participate or not.
- The role of our staff during this time will be to help keep our students safe.
- • During the planned activities, our staff will be with our students.
- • This can be a learning opportunity that helps our students apply the citizenship lessons that they are learning in school.
- We encourage our students to be actively engaged citizens who are knowledgeable about multiple viewpoints surrounding current events. We teach them how to participate in our democracy in a variety of ways that might include addressing lawmakers through letters, creative works that help express how they feel about an issue, and discussions. Through these kinds of experiences, our students learn the skills they need to form, support and express their own personal positions on issues. Legal Precedence
- No court cases have dealt with this issue recently.

- We are operating with a Supreme Court ruling that is nearly 50 years old: *Tinker v. Des Moines*. In *Tinker v. Des Moines*—students wearing black armbands protesting the Vietnam War—was deemed protected speech by the First Amendment. (On February 24, 1969 the Supreme Court ruled 7-2 that students do not “shed their constitutional rights to freedom of speech or expression at the schoolhouse gate.” The Court ruled that the First Amendment applied to public schools, and school officials could not censor student speech unless it disrupted the educational process.) The standard: Schools must prove a material and substantial disruption to the learning environment. Overall Points to Remember
- If you have any concerns, contact your district’s legal counsel.
- Do not restrict protected student speech.
- Schools are allowed to set reasonable time, place and manner restrictions on the activity.
- This is similar to the National Anthem issue but on a larger scale. (Remember the schools that objected were the ones in the media.)
- Schools must remain neutral – -not seen as being in support or non-support—while being prepared for the walkouts, since advance notice (a set time and date) has been given. (For example: A school could offer an indoor place for walkout students to assemble with time for a student leader to speak and an alternate indoor, supervised location with a planned, meaningful activity for non-participating students to gather. Another school could provide supervision in the hall or gym where students could gather, while learning continues in the classroom. At other schools, students could leave the building and could be directed to a designated area on campus.)

If you have questions about the free speech rights of students, you can contact Brad Banasik ( [bbanasik@masb.org](mailto:bbanasik@masb.org) ), Legal Counsel for the Michigan Association of School Boards.

### Communicating With Your Audiences Board/Administration

- Review your board policy on free speech.
- Meet with principals and staff—get input for reasonable time, place, and manner restrictions. (For example, young children wanting to walkout may be directed to stand in the hallway, go to the playground, or go to another area where they can be supervised.)
- Remind staff that school districts don’t engage in protests. However, students have a free speech right and may express their political viewpoint, if it doesn’t present a material or substantial disruption to the learning environment.
- Work with your union leadership—remind them this has to be a student-led process. School staff must remain content and viewpoint neutral, while they are working at school. Teachers/staff have other avenues/channels through which to express their political views and lobby.
- Decide, together, how staff will ensure a structured environment for those students choosing to walkout, and those students choosing not to participate. In both instances, remember to be careful about viewpoint discrimination.
- Provide talking points to staff to share with community members who ask questions. Students
- Find out which student(s) are leading a planned protest.
- Meet with student(s) and find out what they are planning to do and when.
- Review the Student Code of Conduct as part of your conversation(s) with students.

- Help students committed to taking action to think about how to make it a positive/productive learning experience (e.g. letters to legislators; finding their voice) and how to respect the rights of those students choosing not to protest. This is an opportunity to apply the citizenship lessons they are learning in school. Parents
- Repeat your key message about keeping students safe.
- Explain that school districts don't engage in protests. However, students have a free speech right and may express their political viewpoint, if it doesn't present a material or substantial disruption to the learning environment.
- Remind parents, if they are on school property during the school day, they are subject to the school's rules and regulations. Media
- Designate a spokesperson.
- Use your key messages.
- Understand that you don't have to allow the media into your buildings, parking lots, or campus.
- Know that there is nothing to prevent them from setting up outside, across the street. Community Members
- Remember the school is not required to allow community members to come on the property during the school day.
- During the school day, administrators can regulate who is on school property.

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