



INTEROFFICE MEMO

TO: High School Principals of Cincinnati Public Schools

FROM: Superintendent Laura Mitchell

RE: Student Demonstrations

Date: March 2, 2018

In the wake of recent school shootings, students, teachers and community leaders across the country have been calling for walk-outs and other demonstrations regarding gun violence.

We are aware of two dates that have been circulated as national protest dates: a 17-minute walkout on March 14 in memory of the students who died in the Parkland, Florida shooting, and a community walkout on April 20.

As we encourage our students to find their voices and stand up for their beliefs, we also must keep in mind our core responsibility as educators to provide an atmosphere of continuous learning in which every student can thrive. As such, I want to remind our school leaders about our district's policy around **Disorder and Demonstration (Board Policy 5520)**. The Board of Education has charged our administration with developing procedures to implement Policy 5520; the intention of this memo is to provide flexible guidance to you to respond to demonstrations initiated by students and staff in each of your schools.

Cincinnati Public Schools recognizes the right of each student to receive a quality education. Activities on school grounds that disrupt teaching and learning will not be tolerated.

While the District does not permit protests or other activities that fall within the Board's definition of "disruption," the District recognizes the right of students to exercise "Constitutionally guaranteed rights to assemble peaceably and to express ideas and opinions, privately or publicly, provided that such exercise does not infringe on the rights of others and does not interfere with the operation of the schools."

Part of our job of preparing students to be productive citizens in our world is supporting their ability to discern information and stand up for their beliefs. But we must also be mindful of our core work of providing academic environments that support learning for every child.

I encourage you to speak with student leaders about planned protests and work collaboratively with them to find ways that allow students to exercise their rights safely and with minimal classroom disruption. This includes suggesting protest participants “walk out” into the hallway or school gym/cafeteria for 17 minutes of silence; this could also include walking to a safe place outside of the building if school security can make arrangements for students to safely do this. Some schools have created “teaching pairs” that allow students involved in the protest to be accompanied by a teacher or staff member, while those who stay in their classrooms remain with another teacher.

Board policy does not prohibit discipline and in fact empowers the District to maintain order. If students are disciplined, however, be very cautious about not discriminating based on viewpoint.

Again, our goal is to best support our students’ Constitutional rights, while not allowing those rights to interfere with other students’ ability to learn. Please contact Assistant Superintendent Bill Myles with any questions.