

Dear HSE Students, Parents, Staff and Community Members:

The tragic deaths of students and teachers at Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School in Parkland, Florida, have impacted all of us involved in education. The responses from the students most directly impacted have been inspiring. They have raised their voices, called for action from all stakeholders, and have motivated students throughout the nation to do likewise.

You may have heard that our students are being encouraged to “walk out” of school at 10 a.m. on Wednesday, March 14. Walking out of school, however, raises concerns for schools trying to balance student safety and instruction while still supporting student expression.

Students have a constitutional right to free speech and expression, but those rights do not extend to the creation of a substantial disruption to the learning environment, which could occur in the event of a walkout. The mission of HSE Schools is to teach, guide, and protect our students, so they have a safe place to learn. Consistent with that mission, we will continue to encourage our students to engage in opportunities for civil discourse while we preserve instructional time.

Our students are in discussion with teachers and administrators about positive ways to voice their concerns. For example, students might choose to remain silent for 17 minutes in support of MSDHS students; they might write letters to elected officials; or they might take part in a social media movement prompting students to “Walk Up Not Out,” which involves reaching out in positive ways to include and support peers and school staff.

While these student-led initiatives exemplify critical thinking, decision-making, and idea expression, schools are required by law to stay politically neutral. School staff walk a fine line in response to any requests to sponsor or endorse political views or demonstrations.


Teachable moments of this magnitude are rare. We want to be clear that we do value student voice, student engagement, and student initiative. We view this moment in history as an excellent time for administrators to review school safety plans, for teachers to discuss how to engage and connect with all students, and for students to reflect on how they interact with one another. We encourage everyone to talk with students about responsibly engaging in civic issues so that student voices are heard.

Below is a list of frequently asked questions related to this topic. We respect and welcome discussion on any and all issues that affect our students.

Sincerely,



Allen B. Bourff  
Superintendent



Matt Burke  
Board President

## FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

### **STUDENTS:**

#### **What if students wear armbands, t-shirts or other expressive clothing? What if they carry signs, banners?**

*Students may express political views that are not disruptive to the school setting. The student handbook contains more detailed guidance.*

#### **Will students be penalized if they exercise their right to freedom of speech?**

*Our students have the right to free speech and expression, but those rights do not extend to the creation of a substantial disruption to the learning environment. We encourage students to exercise their right of free speech in ways that will not disrupt the education of others.*

#### **Will students receive disciplinary consequences for walking out or violating any provisions of the student handbook? For example:**

- **What if students plan to congregate inside of the school for a portion of the day, sometimes referred to as a walk-in or sit-in?**
- **Will students have to leave the premises if they protest by leaving class?**
- **What if students do not show up to class or arrive late as a protest?**
- **Will students who walk out of the school/class be excused?**

*According to the student handbook, students are expected to be in their assigned areas during instructional time. Students who choose to leave class or school violate this policy. The consequence for being out of an assigned area, according to the student handbook, generally involves a disciplinary response. Administrators always talk to students who violate school policies, and administrators take into account extenuating circumstances before assigning consequences. HSE Schools sees disciplinary consequences as an opportunity to teach and not as a punitive experience.*

#### **How safe will students be if there is a walkout?**

*We will maintain our normal safety and security protocols.*

#### **May I protest with my child at school?**

*For the safety and security of our students, adults will not be allowed to protest on school property.*

#### **Will teachers continue to teach if students walk out?**

*Yes. Absent students will be required to make up any missed work.*

#### **What will happen if I call my son or daughter out of school on March 14 and bring them back after the protest is over?**

*Parents may follow the regular procedures for calling students out of school and re-entry into school. Delays may occur based on the volume of call-ins.*

#### **Are students allowed to pass out flyers about a protest event?**

*Students must follow the normal procedures for posting informational flyers, posters, etc.; however, schools must remain politically neutral.*