



Feb. 27, 2018

To: District Superintendents
From: Ted Alejandre, County Superintendent
Subject: National Student Walkouts

Our hearts continue to grieve for the Parkland, Fla., school community. Each time there is violence on a school campus, it prompts us to pause and reflect on the efforts we have in place within our own school communities to ensure staff and students are safe.

In the aftermath of the shooting, students from Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School and organizers across the nation are calling for student walkouts and demonstrations to peacefully protest gun violence and advocate for stricter gun-control laws. Information about the planned activities is below:

Planned Activities

March 14: #EnoughNationalSchoolWalkout:

The Women's March's Youth EMPOWER group is planning a National School Walkout on March 14 to protest gun violence in schools and neighborhoods, according to the group's [website](#) and [@womensmarch](#). At 10 a.m. in every time zone, organizers are encouraging teachers, students, administrators, parents and supporters to walk out of school for 17 minutes — one minute for every person killed at Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School.

March 24: #MarchForOurLives:

On March 24, organizers of March For Our Lives are planning to march in Washington, D.C., to call for school safety and gun control. Organizers also are encouraging marches in local communities. Read more [@AMarch4OurLives](#) and at the group's website: www.marchforourlives.com.

April 20: #NationalSchoolWalkout:

A National Day of Action Against Gun Violence in Schools is being planned for 10 a.m. on April 20, which is the 19th anniversary of the Columbine shooting. Plans and updates are currently being housed on Twitter at [@schoolwalkoutUS](#) and the National Network for Public Education [website](#).

When such pivotal societal and political issues arise, we should encourage students and members of our school communities to engage in thoughtful and responsible activities to address such important topics. At the same time, we have the responsibility to keep students and staff safe while maintaining secure and orderly learning environments. In anticipation of potential walkouts, my office has prepared the following information to guide districts in planning and response efforts.

Classroom Discussions and Forums

Students have the right to protest peacefully, however, there is concern for the safety of students, if they leave campus. I encourage school administrators to work with school staff and student groups to

identify alternatives to a walkout that ensure county students have a safe place on campus to express themselves. Alternatives to walkouts can include student forums or school assemblies, in which student voices can be heard and thoughtful discussions can take place.

Teachers can use the highly charged national debate on gun control as a valuable civic education and student voice opportunity. Organized debates, legislative advocacy, sharing concerns with elected officials, editorial writing opportunities, close analysis of news media and placing the highly charged topic in historical, economic and political context are all appropriate school activities.

Student Safety and Discipline

I encourage you to stress to your students the importance of remaining on campus and expressing their opinions in a safe and productive manner, while discouraging activities that jeopardize the safety of students or interrupt the educational process.

It is important to remind students that they have a right to express themselves, unless their expression incites students or creates disruption of the orderly operation of the school (EC 48907). According to EC 48260, a student who is absent for more than any 30-minute period during the school day without a valid excuse on three occasions in one school year is classified as truant. EC 48900(v) states that alternatives to suspension or expulsion are to be imposed against pupils who are truant, tardy or otherwise absent from school. Consequences should be determined that are consistent with school policy and practice, as well as based upon a student's involvement and behavior.

Emergency Operations and Communications

If students do choose to leave the school campus, we must do what we can to ensure they remain safe. Such tragedies as the recent shooting in Florida remind us how important it is to review annual school safety plans and to ensure strong partnerships with inter-agency partners, local law enforcement and first responders. In planning for potential student walkouts, refer to your comprehensive school safety plans. Work closely with campus staff and local safety officials in developing a plan to monitor and maintain the safety of students on and outside school campuses.

Such highly charged subjects do not occur without intense media coverage. This often can require the need to communicate timely and accurate information to parents. Attached for your use is a sample parent letter and other communication templates. I also am forwarding a brief from the American Association of School Administrators (AASA), [*Supporting Superintendents, Supporting Students: Resources For Schools And Gun Safety Discussions And Advocacy*](#), and guidance from the [Council of Chief State School Officers](#). Both sources provide links to a number of valuable resources on this topic.

No school community should have to experience the trauma of a mass shooting. Students and staff have the right to school campuses that are safe and secure. Let's do what we can to support the rights of students to engage in the public debate on an issue of such critical importance while maintaining a safe and secure learning environment. My office will continue to monitor these activities and will keep you apprised of further developments and guidance for schools.

Sincerely,



Ted Alejandre
San Bernardino County Superintendent