



Considerations / Questions Related to Student Protest and Walkout Activities

The SAANYS staff has researched the issue of how to deal with upcoming student actions related to school violence. We have concluded that there is no one “correct” approach. Variations in district policies, procedures, and environment call for localized plans and decision-making. However, we have developed a set of questions, considerations, and suggestions to help members work through the process in their buildings and districts. There may be other considerations. Members should feel free to provide suggestions for additions or revisions.

Safety and Security Considerations

How do you fulfill your obligation for student safety while encouraging student voice?

- How will you assess risk, especially if students are outside? A large group of students outside the building is a huge “target” for someone intent on harming children. Is there a potential for involvement by “outsiders” arriving at your facilities? Are there related issues (traffic, weather, etc.)?
- How will you handle the potential for differing views and any related confrontations?
- What role will local law enforcement play? What protocols are in place for building leaders to consult with them? Will they monitor the grounds or even take a more prominent role in planning?
- What role will school and district staff play? How will they be deployed? Will it be voluntary or mandatory? Are there related contractual issues?

District Considerations

- **Plans should be developed and disseminated at the district level, but with building involvement.**
- Attorneys for the school district should be involved.
- Has the district determined to what extent it wishes to support student initiatives involving protests and walkouts or is it the intention to communicate that such activities are not supported? Alternatively, will other forms of expression be developed or suggested?
- If student initiated protests/walkouts are not supported, is it the intention to have building leaders discipline students who participate in such activities? If so, to what extent?
- Does the district need different plans for different building levels, considering developmental factors?
- How will the district involve multiple stakeholders (students, staff, parents, central office, others) in preparation and planning? Is there a need for public meetings? Can student leaders play a role in developing safe activities?

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- Is there a need to coordinate with other districts or organizations? Does BOCES have a role?
- Will the district arrange for media coverage? If so, who has responsibility for this and how will it be accomplished?
- The district should consider monitoring social media to keep a pulse on community input, reaction, and potential plans.
- The district should be as clear as possible, up front, about the district's positions and plans, especially those related to safety and security. Communications should be to all stakeholder groups before any events being planned by the school/district or others. Such communications may need to differ for specific groups (e.g., SWD, ELL students and their families).

Sources of Guidance

- How do school and district documents guide your actions (Board Policies, Code of Conduct, Athletic Code, etc.)? Specifically, what do these say about:
 - » Student protests and, particularly, any that disrupt the educational process
 - » Free speech
 - » Unexcused absences
 - » Leaving the building and/or grounds without appropriate permission
 - » Makeup of classwork or tests for excused or unexcused absence
 - » Any difference between class absence (e.g., cutting class) and longer, multi-period absence
 - » The impact on participation in extra-curricular activities related to various types of absence: is it different for different lengths of time (class vs. majority of the day)?
- How have such situations been handled previously? Will these protests and walkouts be handled now in a consistent manner? If not, how will you explain and justify a difference?

Operational Considerations

- Can you make a “walkout” an optional school event? Should you? Is it OK with the district and student leaders? Does it have to be outside or could there be an inside assembly point?
- Are there alternative activities that could be suggested, supported, and facilitated by the school/district to provide for expression of student “voices” on the issues?
- Will you require parent permission for any activity that becomes an optional school activity as you would

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for a field trip or other optional in-house events?

- Might different events be handled in different ways?
 - » **March 14** – proposed as a “coalition” effort by the Women’s March group (more easily a joint student, staff, district, parent activity); a 17 minute event at 10:00am by time zone.
 - » **March 24** – proposed as a student led march on Washington, DC. (But, can or should you make school buses available and under what arrangements?)
 - » **April 20** – proposed as a student led walkout at 10:00am; perhaps for the remainder of the day (it might be difficult to get students to relinquish “control” of this initiative and agree to a joint effort as an optional school event).
- What will be planned for students who do not participate? (Classes as usual, if you don’t need the staff for supervision? Supervised study periods? Other?)
- Can you, even for student led activities, identify each activity’s purpose, agenda, and schedule ahead of time?
- Will staff be allowed to express views, while at school, on issues being raised by students? If so, in what ways? (First amendment rights are somewhat restricted for public employees.) Or, is their role limited to fostering reasonable student free speech opportunities and a safe environment for such expression?

General Suggestions

- If planning is directed to be done at the building level, have district administration involved as much as possible.
- If building plans are required, have them reviewed and approved by the superintendent and/or board of education. Request that review in writing and request a written response. If no written approval is provided, resend your plans with indication that you will proceed, assuming permission, unless you hear otherwise (not the ideal, but better than just plowing ahead absent notice to the district).
- Plan for all buildings. It is reasonable to expect that students at grade four and above may be interested in expressing themselves. It is possible that parents of younger students are discussing these issues at home and may want them, too, to have opportunities to express opinions.
- Consider how student frustration and concern can be channeled into teachable moments and effective student influence.
- Consider that the greatest potential may be in finding ways for our students to become active citizens in appropriate ways.
- Be ready for the unexpected, to the best of your ability. Identify nimble contingency planning strategies.