



Sweetwater Union High School District
Office of Equity, Culture, and Support Services
1130 Fifth Avenue, Chula Vista CA 91911

Parents/Guardians of Sweetwater Union High School Students:

The first of three planned school walkouts is scheduled for March 14, 2018 to mark the one-month anniversary of the tragic school shooting at Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School in Parkland, Florida. The organizers of the “National School Walkout” are calling for students to walk out of school for 17 minutes, one minute for each victim, to show their frustration with the lack of political action taken in response to the many school shootings that have occurred in the United States.

A listing of the national walkouts/demonstrations include:

- The Women’s March’s Youth EMPOWER Group National School Walkout on March 14, 2018, at 10:00 a.m.
- March For Our Lives March on Washington D.C. on March 24, 2018
- National High School Walkout on April 20, 2018

Like our colleagues throughout the nation, we are deeply saddened by the events in Florida and have worked with district stakeholders (students, staff, parents, community members) to develop resources and guidance for supporting our schools and students. In addition, we recognize that this is an opportunity to provide guidance to students on how they can be civically engaged and politically active in a safe and constructive manner. As a district, it is important for us to seek opportunities to listen and understand, with respect and empathy, while helping our students develop their voices. The Parkland school shooting has prompted emotion and student engagement across our nation, however, for safety reasons, we are encouraging students to remain on campus and in school during the scheduled walkouts.

Please find below some frequently asked questions that you may find helpful:

Q: Will school be in session on the student walkouts listed above?

A: School is in session for two of the scheduled walkouts (i.e., March 14 and April 20). The March 24, 2018 date is a Saturday during Spring Break. We expect students to attend school and classes on all scheduled school days so please make sure your children are in school. We would also recommend that all parents/guardians speak with their child/children about the upcoming walkouts and encourage them to not leave school, but to find alternative ways to express their views on campus (see suggested alternatives below).

Q: What are schools doing to prepare for the walkouts?

A: School leaders have been encouraged to reach out to student leaders to discuss plans for the upcoming walkouts and discuss alternatives. This discussion should result in a strategy that is meaningful and productive, allowing student voices to be heard in a safe environment.

Schools are also designating time for classroom discussions prior to the planned walkouts. It is important that our students understand the history of protests and civil demonstrations in our nation and the world. We want our students to be informed about the issues, and to appropriately honor the Parkland students. Schools have also been provided with resources which can support lesson planning around social movements (e.g., protests, counter-protests, demonstrations, etc) which have impacted societies across the world.

Q: What are the consequence of leaving class for students?

A: Legally, students voluntarily electing to leave class/campus without authorization are truant and subject to the same consequences as any other truant student. It is, however, important to note that district students will not be punished for their participation in a school approved event. We are also aware that students have differing views and it is never our intent to force participation in demonstrations against their will. It is up to each student to determine whether or not they participate.

Q: Will teachers walk out as well?

A: California law mandates that school districts carefully supervise students while they are on school premises during the school day. No district staff should leave class, school premises, and/or abandon their position and duties without authorization. It is also expected that teachers, if a walkout from school is imminent and unavoidable, stay behind to provide instruction to students who choose not to participate, unless otherwise directed by school administration.

Q: Will students receive consequences if they participate in an upcoming walkout?

A: The law requires that students attend school. Students who leave school to participate in a non-school organized event may be considered truant and be given typical consequences for their actions. However, students will not be punished for participating in school approved and organized civic actions.

Q: Can students organize a protest at school?

A: It depends on the specific activities planned and when the protest will take place. Schools can adopt reasonable rules which regulate the “time, place, and manner” for exercising free speech rights. So, students cannot organize a protest if it will disrupt the orderly operation of the school or commit an act that is unlawful or in violation of school rules. It should be noted, however, that peaceful, orderly protests at lunch or before or after school, can be organized. The size of the demonstration, as well as other factors, may affect when and where student-led demonstrations may occur.

Q: What are possible alternatives to walkouts?

A: Some of the discussed alternatives have included:

- Before/after school events (instead of walkout)
 - Supervised after school access to auditoriums with reasonable time restrictions
 - Other before/after school activities as appropriate
- Lunch activities (instead of walkout)
- A planned forum at the precise times when walkouts are planned
- Discussions with local or national politicians

- Letter writing and social media campaigns
- Free speech zone for student speeches
 - Schools can regulate vulgar, lewd, obscene, and offensive speech
 - Must be aware that both sides of the issue(s) may be presented by various students
- Student debates (structured and moderated by staff)
- Classroom discussions on related topics led by school staff
- A designated protest area
 - Schools can designate a safe and adequate space on campus for students to hold their demonstration
 - Could be a symbolic location at the school
 - Students could be encouraged to sign cards to send to Parkland students or postcards to forward to elected officials (could “march” to a location on campus to deliver the cards and letters)
- On-site/campus forums for discussions (designate specific places for student meetings or speech)
- Modified schedules

If you have additional questions, please contact the principal at your child’s school.