



CCSSO Recommended Guidance on Student Walkouts

Updated: February 23, 2018

The following is recommended guidance that state education agencies can use and share with local education agencies regarding possible student walkouts to protest an issue. This guidance was developed at the request of state education agencies in light of plans some students across the country have made to organize walkouts on March 14, March 24 and April 20 in protest of gun violence; however, these recommendations are broad and could be applied to student walkouts in protest of any issue.

Our overall goal through this guidance is to equip state education agencies with tools and resources to support local schools and districts to handle student walkouts in a positive way and use these efforts as teachable moments for the students, staff and surrounding community.

In crafting these recommendations, CCSSO sought input from organizations representing local education agencies, educators who have personal experience with student walkouts, and representatives in state education agencies. We want to especially thank the Council of the Great City Schools, the Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools for sharing [the guidance it provided to schools](#), and 2017 National Teacher of the Year Sydney Chaffee for her input and feedback.

The following recommended guidance includes:

- General Recommendations for State Education Agencies
- General Recommendations for Local Education Agencies
- Recommendations for Guidance to School Administrators
- Sample Messaging Guidance for School Leaders
- Additional Resources

General Recommendations for State Education Agencies

- Designate a single point of contact at the State Education Agency (SEA) who will communicate with local education agencies on this issue, provide guidance and answer questions.
- Develop recommendations or guidance for how local education agencies (LEAs) should handle possible student walkouts.
 - Vet a draft of the guidance with key superintendents, local school board members, educators, students, parents and other necessary stakeholders (consider: PTA/PTO chapters, community-based organizations, mental health advocates, state or local law enforcement) before finalizing.
 - Be sure the guidance includes sample text that LEAs can send to school principals, counselors, students, community members and families.
- Set up a conference call and/or webinar with LEA leaders to walk through the guidance and answer any questions.

- After the guidance has been shared with LEAs, send a copy of the guidance to key stakeholders, such as government leaders, tribal leaders, PTA/PTO chapters, community-based organizations, mental health advocates, state or local law enforcement.
- After the guidance has been shared with LEAs and key stakeholders, send a copy of the guidance to members of the media and be proactive about how the state and local districts are preparing for possible student walkouts.
 - *Suggestion:* Connect reporters with key superintendents, educators, students and parents who helped inform the guidance.
- Make sure the SEA is ready and available to support LEAs on the day of walkouts in case they have questions or need additional support.
 - Example: If a local school district is facing a possible walkout, reach out and make sure the district has enough counselors or mental health supports in place to serve students.

General Recommendations for Local Education Agencies

- Designate a single point of contact (or team) at the Local Education Agency (LEA) who will lead communications with schools on this issue, provide guidance and answer questions.
- Develop clear guidance on how school principals and school administrators should handle possible student walkouts.
 - Be sure to include plans for how to handle the following situations:
 - Possible plans to walkout
 - When walkouts occur
 - After walkouts occur
 - Work with the local school board to approve the guidance. Be sure to vet a draft of the guidance with principals, educators, students, parents and other necessary stakeholders (consider: PTA/PTO chapters, community-based organizations, mental health advocates, state or local law enforcement) before finalizing.
 - Be sure the guidance includes sample text that school principals or counselors can send to students, staff and families.
- Set up a conference call and/or webinar with school principals and administrators to walk through the guidance and answer any questions.
- After the guidance has been shared with school administrators, send a copy of the guidance to key stakeholders, such as local government leaders, PTA/PTO chapters, community-based organizations, mental health advocates, state or local law enforcement.
- After the guidance has been shared with LEAs and key stakeholders, send a copy of the guidance to members of the local media and be proactive about how the local district is preparing for possible student walkouts.
 - *Suggestion:* Connect reporters with principals, educators, students and parents who helped inform the guidance.
- Make sure the LEA is ready and available to support schools on the day of walkouts in case they have questions or need additional support.

- Example: If a school is facing a possible walkout, reach out and make sure that particular campus has enough counselors or mental health supports in place to serve students.

Recommendations for Guidance to School Administrators

The following are tips school principals and school administrators can use in supporting students upon learning about the possibility of an organized walkout, or similar effort:

- **Meet with student leaders.** Meet with student leaders to assess their plans. Use this initial meeting to listen and ask questions. Let students lead the discussion and ask how you can be supportive.
 - Help ensure that any efforts to invite participation are open and that the events be inclusive of ALL students.
 - At the same time, be sure student leaders are respectful of students who may not wish to participate, or students with opposing views.
 - Talk with students about their plans for peaceful assembly. With student input, school administrators may be able to help students determine the best place for a peaceful assembly to take place on school campus, or discuss whether they are interested in alternative forms of protest, such as a 'walk-in' on the school campus.
- **Offer counseling and support.** Remind students that counseling and guidance support are available to any student and that the local school and district encourage every student to reach out to a counselor.
 - Be sure to include information on local, regional or statewide school safety tiplines.
- **Prioritize safety.** Remind students that *[SCHOOL]* and *[DISTRICT]* support their rights to peaceful assembly and free expression, and a student's safety is the most important priority. Therefore, reiterate that school/district policies, rules and/or student code of conduct remains in place and will be enforced.
 - Explain that there may be increased staff, *[LOCAL POLICE or CAMPUS POLICE]* presence and that this presence is for student and staff protection and safety, not to quell their expression.
 - If there will be increased security, offer student leaders the opportunity to meet with the heads of security to make a plan and ensure clear, respectful communication throughout the event.
 - Invite student ideas for improving campus safety, security and culture during this event and in the future.
- **Make this a teachable moment.** School is about teaching, and learning is a priority for all students at *[SCHOOL]*. Assess ways you can turn this into teachable moments for students, staff and the community.
 - Remind students, teachers and parents that student activism is a part of the learning process. An important way to look at student activism (any kind of activism) is students taking what they are learning in school and making it real. When kids are passionate about an issue, it is an opportunity for educators to help students see the connection between curriculum and real life.

- If students in a school are planning a walkout, prepare educators to be able to turn this activism into “teachable moments.”
 - *Resource:* 2017 National Teacher of the Year Sydney Chaffee recently wrote about this issue and included several resources schools and teachers can use in their classroom: <http://sydneychaffee.com/2018/02/23/how-schools-can-support-student-activism/>.
 - Provide teachers with additional time and space to discuss ideas or share best practices for how to address this in their classroom.
- **Prepare staff in advance.** In addition to teachable moments within the classroom, set aside time to prepare teachers and staff to handle walkouts in accordance with [DISTRICT] guidance to ensure they feel prepared to:
 - Understand the guidance as it relates to teacher and staff walkouts, and
 - Appropriately and respectfully handle the situation if a student walks out in the middle of class.
- **Proactively communicate with students, families.** Fully inform students and families when you know an event may be planned and once an event takes place. In addition, be transparent with students, families, teachers and staff on how [SCHOOL/DISTRICT/LOCAL SCHOOL BOARD] will handle absences if a student chooses to walkout.
 - *Resource:* See the *Sample Messaging Guidance for School Leaders* below for sample text.
- **Ensure respect among all students.** Ask students to be respectful of students on campus who may not wish to participate, and/or students who may hold opposing views to those being shared during the event.
 - Be sure to provide resources to students, teachers and staff on how to accomplish this. This is another opportunity for teaching and learning and a way to engage students in teachable moments on how to engage in respectful discussions and debate.
 - *Resource:* Here is [a link](#) for ideas on resources to help.
- Stay in touch with [DISTRICT SUPERINTENDENT or DESIGNEE] on any plans that may emerge.

Sample Messaging Guidance for School Leaders

The following messaging guidance is largely taken from the [sample guidance](#) that the Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools (CMS) provided to its local school principals. We edited CMS’s text to apply more broadly to other schools and districts and offer this as sample text for you to customize based on your state context.

If you hear plans of a walkout or protest

Good morning/evening [SCHOOL] students and families,
This is [Principal NAME] with an important message. Recently, I have heard that some students are considering plans to protest or walkout of our school in response to _____. At [SCHOOL],



our top priority is to [*CUSTOMIZE: support the academic and social emotional needs of our students while maintaining a safe and orderly learning environment for all*]. We respect and support the right of our students to advocate for causes that are important to them and welcome the opportunity to work with any student or student group to discuss appropriate and creative ways to do so while at school. They can contact me or any school administrator at any time.

I encourage you to talk to your child(ren) about how they may be feeling about [TOPIC] and the importance of expressing themselves in appropriate ways at school. [*CUSTOMIZE: As educators, we also recognize that student activism is a part of the learning process. When kids are passionate about an issue, it is an opportunity for educators to help students see the connection between curriculum and real life. We will be doing this in school, aligned with our curriculum and state standards.*]

In addition, it is important to know that disorderly conduct that disrupts school operations is not acceptable and will be handled compassionately but firmly, in accordance with the [*CUSTOMIZE: Code of Student Conduct*]. We are proactively working with students, counselors and local law enforcement to ensure any student-led efforts are handled in the most peaceful, respectful way and in the best interest of our children.

Thank you for your continued support of [SCHOOL]. Enjoy your evening, and please let me know if you have any questions.

Thank you,
Xxxxx

When a peaceful protest or walkout occurs

Good morning/evening [SCHOOL] students and families,
This is [Principal NAME] with an important message. Today, some of our students participated in peaceful protests on campus in response to _____. Our students [*CUSTOMIZE: explain what happened i.e. sit-ins, poetry readings, etc.*] for about [TIME in minutes/hours/day], and then peacefully returned to class for the rest of the day's planned instruction.

[*CUSTOMIZE: As educators, we recognize that student activism is a part of the learning process. When kids are passionate about an issue, it is an opportunity for educators to help students see the connection between curriculum and real life. We will be doing this in school, aligned with our curriculum and state standards.*] Therefore, our teachers made sure to use this as a teachable moment to tie what students are learning in the classroom every day – about problem-solving, collaboration, reading, writing – to the current events at our school for those who participated in the protest as well as those who chose not to participate.

At [SCHOOL], we understand that our students may be feeling lots of emotions, including anxiety, fear and even anger about [TOPIC]. We respect the right of our students to advocate for



causes that are important to them and support their efforts to do so in an authorized and orderly manner while at school. We thank our students for the way they conducted themselves today while allowing their civic voices to be heard. I encourage you to talk to your child(ren) about how they may be feeling about [TOPIC]. [SCHOOL] also has counselors available and ready to talk to students at any time.

Thank you for your continued support of [SCHOOL]. Please let me know if you have any questions.

Thank you,
Xxxx

When a protest or walkout becomes disruptive

Good morning/evening [SCHOOL] students and families,
This is [Principal NAME] with an important message. At [SCHOOL], we respect the right of our students to advocate for causes that are important to them. Unfortunately, some students on our campus today chose to protest in ways that significantly disrupted school operations and threatened the safety and order for other students and staff within our school. Swift action was taken by school staff and [CUSTOMIZE: local law enforcement] to address the situation. No students or staff members were injured during the incident.

The safety of our students and staff is our top priority. Inappropriate behaviors that threaten school safety will be handled immediately and firmly in accordance with the [CUSTOMIZE: Code of Student Conduct and/or applicable SCHOOL/DISTRICT policies and/or STATE laws].

We understand that our students may be feeling lots of emotions, including anxiety, fear and even anger about [TOPIC] and today's events. I encourage you to talk to your child(ren) about how they may be feeling about [TOPIC] and today's events, and the importance of expressing themselves in appropriate ways while at school. [SCHOOL] also has counselors available and ready to talk to students at any time.

We look forward to welcoming students back tomorrow for a great day of teaching and learning. [CUSTOMIZE: As educators, we recognize that student activism is a part of the learning process. When kids are passionate about an issue, it is an opportunity for educators to help students see the connection between curriculum and real life. We will be working with students and teachers to find ways to use this as a teachable moment for all students, aligned with our curriculum and state standards.]

Thank you for your continued support of [SCHOOL]. Please let me know if you have any questions.

Thank you,
Xxxx



Additional Resources

The following are additional resources that may be helpful as you plan for and provide guidance. This list is in no way meant to be comprehensive. Please work with educators and experts at the state and local level to provide additional resources.

Curriculum Resources

2017 National Teacher of the Year Sydney Chaffee wrote the [How Schools Can Support Student Activism](#) blog post that includes research, news articles and curricular resources for schools and teachers to use student activism efforts as teachable moments.

Direct link: <http://sydneychaffee.com/2018/02/23/how-schools-can-support-student-activism/>

U.S. Department of Education Resources

The U.S. Department of Education—Readiness and Emergency Management for Schools (REMS) Technical Assistance Center developed [Lessons Learned from School Crises and Emergencies](#) report in 2008.

Direct link: https://rems.ed.gov/docs/LL_Vol3Issue1.pdf

AASA, The School Superintendents Association

AASA posted [Resources for School and Gun Safety Discussions and Advocacy](#) on its blog.

Direct link: <http://www.aasa.org/policy-blogs.aspx?id=42161&blogid=84002>