

SOUTH WINDSOR PUBLIC SCHOOLS

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D R E A M . A C H I E V E . I N S P I R E .

March 9, 2018

Dear families...

As you are likely aware, there is a national dialogue regarding the call for student voices to be heard in a stand against school violence and to demonstrate support and compassion for the victims, students and families of Parkland, Florida. While there are multiple events planned on a variety of dates, I am writing to you today regarding the call for a seventeen-minute "walk out" on March 14. Initially conceived as a walk-out for seventeen minutes in honor of the seventeen victims who lost their lives at Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School, we know that many school districts and student groups across the country are discussing a variety of methods to show support, including, but not limited to, a walk-out scenario.

Traditionally, a school-based walk-out is an act to demonstrate opposition and is done so in defiance of school officials. In contrast, we envision the student-led activities on March 14 to be done in partnership with the school and facilitated by school staff. Ultimately we are responsible for the safety and supervision of all students throughout the entire instructional day and we cannot abdicate this responsibility for seventeen minutes. Please know that thoughtful conversations are occurring at the building level so that student safety will be the overriding principle that guides all decisions.

The approach on March 14 will differ among our three school levels.

Elementary Schools

There are no plans to engage our elementary students as we know that each family is choosing the degree to which their children have access to information on such a difficult topic. As a reminder, if your child has expressed anxiety or is in need of support due to the recent tragedy, please contact your child's teacher or building principal so that we can be responsive to your child's needs.

Timothy Edwards Middle School

At the middle school level opportunities for structured, age-appropriate activities focused on fostering a positive school climate will occur within classroom settings. For example, students may work with their teacher to develop a list of seventeen ways in which they can promote a school community built on kindness and inclusion. More information from Mrs. Larson will be shared with parents on Monday.

South Windsor High School

We are in the midst of on-going conversations with both students and staff. The initial concepts our students have brought forward for a seventeen-minute activity are well thought out. There could, however, be local or national intervening events between now and March 14 that would inform our thinking and cause us to refine our plans. These student leaders understand that we want to support their efforts to be heard, but also understand that the school must work with students collaboratively so that student safety is the guiding principle behind all decisions. More information will come from Mr. Sullivan on Monday.

While we are supportive of students who want to participate in this form of civic engagement, we are equally supportive of those students who do not wish to participate in the activities planned. We must ensure that our students are both emotionally and physically safe and that the structure of the day meets the needs of all students, including those who wish not to participate.

This morning Mr. Sullivan and I met with a group of student leaders. I was impressed with their empathy, maturity, and thoughtful approach. It was clear that these students understood that any planned activities must be respectful of the victims' families and reflect the seriousness of the heartbreaking epidemic of school violence with which our nation's schools are confronted.

It is important to note that in order to maximize student safety this is not a public event. We must limit participation to South Windsor High School students and staff as a critical safety measure. There will also be an increased police presence on campus that day.

I hope you can appreciate all of the complex logistics that must be considered when planning for such an activity. I encourage parents with concerns or questions to contact their schools and speak directly with the school administration. Thank you for partnering with us as we navigate these challenging times.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "KATE CARTER". The letters are in all caps and have a slightly cursive, casual feel.

Kate Carter, Ed.D.
Superintendent of Schools