

Strategies to Address Student Walk-Outs

In order to keep students safe before, during and after demonstrations, strategies need to be in place and the school must be prepared. Staff is responsible for providing students with guidance on how to be proactive, effective, and positive in their demonstrations. These are opportunities for teachable moments with students during important times.

Tips for School Administrators

The following are suggestions for school administrators if they identify a potential student walk-out. Some tips may not be useful to you or may not be appropriate for your campus culture. Evaluate each for its value in your situation:

- ❑ Reinforce with your staff that all adults should be aware of and report to administration rumors/potential walkouts or similar situations. This happens primarily through maintaining positive relationships and fostering communication with students.
- ❑ Remember that students do not give up their right to free speech when they walk onto campus.
- ❑ If a walk-out is inevitable, work with students to identify the safest route possible. If possible, encourage students to remain on campus and designate a safe location (i.e. gym or football field).
- ❑ Avoid using the term “protest” and encourage adults to avoid using language that could incite students.
- ❑ Involve local law enforcement - if they are willing, ask them to drive with the students on the walk-out to keep them safe and provide supervision.
- ❑ Inform law enforcement of your plan before the walk-out so they understand your intent and can collaborate with you in the most constructive ways possible.
- ❑ Identify vocal student leaders and suggest alternative ways to express their opinions (see “Other Ideas for Students to Express Opinions” document).
- ❑ Explain to student leaders that if they participate in the walk out, there are school consequences for missing class (outline those consequences).
- ❑ Provide high visibility adult supervision presence (this may or may not include law enforcement) on and around campus throughout the day.
- ❑ Communicate proactively with families (see attached sample letter).
- ❑ Communicate to staff about the planned walk-out and inform them of how you would like them to communicate with students who are participating.
- ❑ Work with student leaders to identify the route of the walk and provide that to law enforcement.
- ❑ Work with student leaders to model peaceful and appropriate conduct.
- ❑ Have administrators walk with the students to ensure safety and provide supervision.
- ❑ Capture video of the walk-out to chronicle behavior issues and for the students’ own protection.

Other Ideas for Students to Express Opinions

Instead of a student walk-out, you can suggest that students:

- ❑ Gather in the quad or a central area at the school during lunch or after school. Provide them with sound and supervision. Students can express their concerns and brainstorm options that would appropriately benefit their goals.
- ❑ Meet in the school gym or theater at night to express their thoughts and brainstorm next steps. The student group can invite community members, parents, and local organizations to be a part of the conversation.
- ❑ Research issues and engage in a letter writing campaign to local, state, and federal representatives encouraging them to support their issues.
- ❑ Set up opportunities during lunch and after school to educate other students on their issues (speeches, music, poetry, pamphlets, etc.)
- ❑ Create theater/drama pieces to perform in the school and/or community to express their emotions and opinions.
- ❑ Gather as a coalition group of students with representatives from a wide variety of student organizations and clubs. Establish regular meetings with faculty supervision and create an action plan for coalition work.
- ❑ Invite local government officials to come to school and hold a forum for students to ask questions and express opinions.