

## **Barrow County School System Statement on Potential Student Walkouts to Protest School Violence**

In light of the recent tragic school shooting in Parkland Florida, we recognize that students around the country, including in Barrow County, may choose to participate in walkouts to protest school violence and school gun-related violence in particular. We want to state our position on these walkouts should they occur within the Barrow County School System.

Our students represent the future and we respect their right to express their opinions in a peaceful manner. Learning to express heartfelt opinions on a very important and personal topic in a peaceful and productive manner can be a very powerful learning experience. We respect our students' right to exercise their First Amendment rights to express their views on this very important topic.

Other students may choose not to participate in such activities and would prefer to stay in class. Not every student will have the same thoughts and opinions about this issue. We value this exercise of First Amendments rights as well because we believe that our schools educate our children to be independent and critical thinkers in a democratic society.

We are required by law and ethics to maintain complete and accurate records. Students from across the country have indicated they intend to hold a 17-minute walkout during the school day – one minute for each of the 17 lives taken in the February 14 shooting at Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School. A short walkout would not constitute an absence. However, we would code this as partial class attendance and, according to state law and board policy, unexcused for the amount of time students are out of class.

We want students to feel safe and respected, no matter what they choose to do. Our focus is to keep students safe and maintain an orderly environment for teaching and learning. In the event students in the Barrow County School System choose to exercise their voice through a walkout, we will respect and empower their choice. At the same time, we will do everything possible to maintain safety, order, and discipline. We are not going to assign disciplinary consequences to students who engage in peaceful and respectful activism; rather, we will take a common sense approach that ensures learning can continue.