

Dear Valparaiso Community School Families and Staff:

For several weeks our students and our Culture and Student Services Team have been working together to find a safe and meaningful way to engage in discussion and plan an event to honor the memories of those lost in the tragic school shooting at Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School in Parkland, Florida. We are very proud of our student leadership for their engagement in this discussion and for finding a safe, least disruptive, and unifying way to show our support on March 14, 2018 for the lives lost.

Our core mission is to educate, thus making sure our young people are well-informed enough to make choices, decisions, and formulate opinions about complex matters. Integrated into our teaching role is the obligation to be protest-neutral and protect our students so they have a safe environment in which to learn. The law regarding students' free speech rights in the schoolhouse is not widely known to those who do not work in our highly regulated and litigated realm. In *Tinker v. Des Moines*, the U.S. Supreme Court established that students do not "...shed their constitutional rights to freedom of speech or expression at the schoolhouse gate." Thus, with guidance from their parents, we leave the matter of deciding how to honor the lives lost to our students. It would, however, be ill-advised for us to abdicate our charge to operate orderly schools and plan for student safety in and around our school campuses. In anticipation that some students may choose to walk out, we will rely on our published student handbook when school leaders assess the extent to which walkout participants' actions may have disrupted the normal order of our schools.

Participation in the walkout has the potential to compromise campus safety and security. In an attempt to maintain campus safety and security during the walkout, in partnership with the Valparaiso Police Department, we will have police officers at all entrances/exits to the campus. For the safety and security of our students, we will not allow any traffic in or out. Please refrain from attempting entry onto the property from 9:30 – 10:30 on March 14, 2018. All construction traffic will be stopped from 10:00 until 10:30. We will not allow anyone other than students and school employees access to the designated site.

In summary, we are hopeful that our students will participate in the student-planned and administration-supported unifying event, details of which can be viewed on our VCS website at www.valpo.k12.in.us. We will maintain order, plan for student safety inside and outside the school, and we will continue to keep teaching and learning as our focus.

Sincerely,



Dr. Julie Lauck, Acting Superintendent

Frequently Asked Questions and Comments

<p>Q: Will students who walk out of school be excused? A: For attendance purposes, students are expected to be in their assigned areas at all times. The student handbook is the guide.</p>	<p>Q: What is the punishment for leaving class? A: As we would with any other time a student leaves the classroom/building without permission, we will follow the student handbook.</p>
<p>Q: Will teachers continue to teach lessons if students choose to walk out of their classes? A: Teachers will continue teaching unless otherwise assigned because of a significant disruption to the school function. This is true every day in our schools.</p>	<p>Q: Why is this considered a disruption? A: On a normal day, we would not have to have additional law enforcement and personnel on the campus to ensure student safety and security, or staff stationed at doors. The VPD will be required to pay overtime for the officers who are called to assist. Teachers will be in the middle of teaching class when students get up and leave thus disrupting the students who choose to remain in class.</p>
<p>Q: How safe will students be if there is a walkout? A: VPD will be on campus to stop all vehicles from entering/exiting the campus, and construction vehicles will be instructed to stop as well. The general public will not be allowed to participate with students.</p>	<p>Q: Will faculty and staff be allowed to protest with the students? A: Faculty and staff are on duty during the school day, and they must remain on duty to assist with teaching, supervision, and other important roles such as safety. They will not be participating in the protest.</p>
<p>Q: Will teachers discuss the protest in class? A: It is our policy that teachers remain neutral in all teaching situations in an effort to be inclusive of all students and all student perspectives.</p>	<p>Q: Will students be allowed back into the school? A: Yes, students will be directed to re-enter through a specified door and go through a check-in process. This may take some time and delay them getting back to class.</p>
<p>Q: Why can't VCS endorse protests? A: Our schools must not facilitate any protests on any topics lest we be forced to facilitate them all. We will remain protest-neutral and safety vigilant.</p>	<p>Q: Why doesn't the superintendent stop student protests and order students to stay in class? A: Students have free speech and expression rights while at school. The school must be protest-neutral.</p>
<p>Q: I am a parent/community member and want to protest with the students, may I? A: For the safety and security of our students, we are not allowing anyone other than students and VCS staff to be on property and interact with our students.</p>	