

An Open Letter to Belle Plaine Parents about the Florida Gun Control Walk Out

Dear Parents,

Since the terrible shooting at the High School in Florida, students and adults have been very busy discussing ways to address the very real problem of school shootings. Students at the high school have become very politically active regarding the situation and part of the solution that many of them are demanding is additional gun controls. On Wednesday, March 14 at 10 am, students are being encouraged to walk out of school for 17 minutes (1 minute for each of the victims in Florida) to support gun control. A remark that was made by one of the organizing sites was that 'if a large number of students walk out, the school won't be able to punish you.'

I have a problem with concerned groups using part of the school day to make a political statement, particularly when the cause is controversial. I also have a problem with groups that encourage the breaking of school rules to make a political statement. When parents send their students to school, their expectations include supervision by the school. We have not provided for supervision during this demonstration, and I do not consider it appropriate for the collective school district to spend part of our day to be a part of this demonstration. If you, as parents, feel it's important to be a part of this, I give you this option. Come to the school in person and check your student out for seventeen minutes. If you can't make it in person, send someone in your place, but please contact us (preferably in writing) about this person you're sending. They can check them out of school for seventeen minutes, and your student can return to class at the end of that time with no need for school consequences.

If this was a walk-out to show our support to the fallen students or to provide some kind of comfort to the parents and friends of the victims, I'd support it. There's no controversy there. But this is a walk out to show support for one side of an issue, and though my personal views may side toward additional gun control, I will not use any part of our school district or the operation of it to push that viewpoint forward. I would expect the same ground rule to be followed by the other side of this opinion, or for the side of any other controversial issue. I encourage parents to talk to their students about this issue and, hopefully, work to find another way to respectfully share their opinions one way or the other.

Sincerely,

James Sutton
Belle Plaine Superintendent

