

March 9, 2018

Dear Western School Corporation Community,

The purpose of this memo is to share with you Western School Corporation's plans in response to the planned national student protests resulting from the tragic events in Parkland, Florida on February 14, 2018. At this time, two dates, March 14th and April 20th, have been identified as days of protest with students being called upon to walk-out of school in protest of school violence.

As a school system we have the responsibility to educate our students in a safe and secure learning environment. Key to this charge is helping students think critically and understand their role in this complex world. As a school, we must do this from a combined position of neutrality and authority. While the Supreme Court has ruled that students retain limited constitutional rights of freedom of speech and expression in the school setting, these rights do not overshadow the role of the school in maintaining safety, security, and preventing substantial disruption.

As the school must remain protest neutral, we leave the decision as to participate in a protest walk-out, or any other future protest, to the students with necessary guidance from their parents. It is imperative our schools not actively facilitate any protests on any topics. If we do, we will be in a position to enforce them all. For these protests or any future protest, our priority will be maintaining student safety while remaining neutral. Students, as a part of becoming an educated citizen, must be able to think critically about issues and potential responses. We strongly encourage you to talk with your children not only about the planned protest walk-outs, but also about the issues and events which have led to these planned protests.

While Western clearly recognizes the potential for some students to choose to participate in these opportunities to demonstrate their lawful freedom of expression and speech, we have an obligation to maintain a safe environment for students and to prevent substantial disruption. We will have additional resource officers present to help maintain a safe learning environment for all of our students. Western will rely on our student handbooks and administration in the determination as to the level of disruption and any possible violation of student conduct.

Opinions regarding the planned walk-outs and the issues that pushed them to the national conversation cover a wide-range with individuals having very different thoughts with respect to how schools should handle the situation. Western will adhere to relevant legal statutes, Board approved policy, and the recognition that this is also a learning opportunity for students. Western will plan for student safety and through teaching and conversations encourage students to address controversial issues respectfully.

Sincerely,

