

From: Steven Sullivan <steven.sullivan@chccs.k12.nc.us>
Date: February 7, 2024 at 5:03:50 PM EST
To: Chapel Hill High Recipients
<recipients@chccs.parentlink.net>
Subject: Anticipated Student Walkout
Reply-To: Steven Sullivan <steven.sullivan@chccs.k12.nc.us>

Subject line: Anticipated Student “Walkout” on Feb. 8

Good evening Chapel Hill High School families,

I’m writing to let you know that we are aware of some social media posts circulating among students (and adults) that encourage a “Walk-Out Against Genocide” on Thursday morning during the transition from 2nd period to Flex Block. Recently, we identified and met with students who are organizing the event in order to discuss concerns and reach an agreement on expectations during the school day.

Students are intending for this to be a brief and peaceful act of protest in our school courtyard, calling for “...*an immediate ceasefire in Gaza and an end to the ongoing Genocide of the Palestinian people.*” [Direct quote from an Instagram post.] The student organizers have selected 4-5 student speakers who will make brief statements, including a statement about our agreed-upon expectations as well as a reminder of counselors and mental health specialists who are available for support. While we also know additional language in that Instagram post is interpreted by some as anti-Semitic hate speech, we have made abundantly clear that any vitriolic rhetoric during a peaceful protest will not be permitted.

Our first priority at all times is to maintain a **safe and supportive school environment** for everyone, and in particular our Jewish students, staff and families who have shared their distress related to what’s been posted. We’re working with our district office to ensure that any event is peaceful, and that our students’ social-emotional and physical safety is protected. We have brought local law enforcement into the conversation, and we will involve our School Support and Wellness teams to provide our students any support they may need.

Like other schools and neighboring districts both public and private, we are navigating the Israeli-Palestinian conflict with sensitivity and balance, while **condemning any forms of antisemitism and Islamophobia** in our schools and community. Our schools work to cultivate learning environments where students feel empowered to express their thoughts and ask difficult questions. As one example, here in CHCCS we promote

the core value of Social Justice Action, which means we support our students to be informed advocates on topics they feel are important. We want them to encourage open dialogue, to listen actively, to appreciate the complexity of the issues unfolding around them, including how rhetoric and actions affect their fellow classmates. We will support students who wish to develop their skills related to engaging peacefully and respectfully, and we believe school remains the safest environment for learning and growth to take place. We will also do all we can to ensure students feel safe while they're in our care.

While our preference would be that class is attended normally, we recognize that students do not give up their rights when they enter school grounds. We'll continue to monitor this situation and share updates as often as necessary. In the meantime, if there is any feedback you can share, or just something you need us to know about your student, please don't hesitate to get in touch.

Sincerely,

Steve Sullivan

Principal, CHHS

Additional questions and answers:

What is our expectation of students during a walkout?

- Our expectation is that students who choose to participate will act peacefully and remain in the courtyard, which is a secure location. Leaving school property without permission is not allowed. We expect students to return to class promptly.

Do students face disciplinary action for participating?

- Generally, no. Students may receive a follow-up discussion (i.e. a "Teachable Moment") if their actions differ from our agreed-upon expectations. All students must remember: Disorderly conduct that disrupts school operations is not acceptable.

What is the role of our staff?

- Staff will not actively participate. Employees, while on school time, will carry out their professional duties.

What about students who choose not to participate?

- Students should attend their Flex Period as they usually do. Support from our School Support and Wellness team members will be available as needed.

What can I do as a parent/caregiver?

- We encourage families to have a discussion with their student(s) about his or her beliefs related to a potential walkout. Discuss your family's expectations for their actions and behavior. Remind students that their school district is interested in respecting their wishes while being protective of everyone's safety.
-