Strategies to Address Student Walk-Outs and Threats of Walk-Outs

In order for students to remain safe during student protests and threats of protests, different levels of strategies need to be in place. It is important, as adults, we avoid a combative position with students if at all possible. Protesting is every student’s right. As adults we need to provide them with guidance on how to become effectively proactive to effect the change they desire. This can be a very powerful teachable moment.

Tips for School Administrators
The following are a few suggestions that school administrators can implement as they identify the possibility of student unrest:

1. Quickly research the issue via news articles, internet, legislation reviews, and interviews with key staff, law enforcement and students to better understand their perspectives and gauge whether students in your area are planning a walk-out or protest.
2. Develop talking points to help others understand the issue and how to support the students to find a positive outlet for their protest.
3. Involve local law enforcement in your plan and strategy so they understand your intent and collaborate with you, students and opposing groups.
4. Provide talking points to teachers and staff regarding the issue. Remind staff, to use discretion in voicing either their support or opposition.
5. Identify vocal student leaders, and inform them where they may convene for a meeting to express their concerns, and brainstorm ideas.
6. Identify key teachers who have a positive rapport with many students to assist in facilitating student forums.
7. Provide a well-supervised forum (an opportunity to convene) for student leaders to express concerns, and brainstorm options that would appropriately benefit their goals of protest. Encourage students to remain on campus for the forum rather than staging a walk-out.
8. Establish an atmosphere of respect for all in the forum
9. Convene some members of the community and agency members, including law enforcement who are student friendly and experienced, to support their efforts toward developing a plan and activities that would include appropriate methods of protest with the greatest efficacy.
10. Provide highly visible law enforcement presence on and around campus throughout the day.
11. Provide communication to parents via letter or newsletter, and utilize the media and the school marqui to inform members of surrounding community, parents and other stakeholders of efforts to address this issue (See attached SAMPLE letter).
12. Be prepared for counter-protesters, outsiders and instigators. Work closely with law enforcement to identify locations for counter-protesters away from the protesting group. Be aware of points where conflicts may occur and provide a strong law enforcement presence.
Tips for Teachers
It is important that adults utilize these difficult times as opportunities for teachable moments. This is the time to demonstrate to students that the education offered is connected and relevant to their realities. The following are several suggestions how teachers can assist students to be proactive and positive in the pursuit of their objectives:

1. Include discussions on these issues when appropriate in classes such as political science, history, and others.
2. Inform all students of the cost to schools (ADA) when they leave campus, and how that cost effects student programs.
3. Encourage students to collaborate with existing student groups and clubs in order to strengthen their efforts.
4. Students may research adult groups such as unions, political groups, and others that support their efforts by taking a political stand with them.
5. Students may research supporting a campaign through letter writing, phone calling, faxing, and emailing to local, state, and federal representatives encouraging them to support their issue.
6. Encourage students to develop meetings during lunch, and after school to educate other students on their issue (include speeches, music, poetry, and pamphlets).
7. Remind students that violent demonstrations, blocking traffic or harming businesses may effect public opinion to adversely effect their cause.
8. Encourage students to develop theater/drama pieces to be performed in the school and community to raise awareness about their issue.
9. Students might develop websites, write letters to the editor of newspapers, and write blogs to inform others about their issue.
10. Teach students that they have a powerful voice that can effect a change, and to develop all their activities in the spirit of great leaders such as Cesar Chavez, Martin Luther King Jr., and Mahatma Ghandi.

Suggestions for dealing with student walk-outs:
Lesson’s learned from student walk-outs and protests from Los Angeles, Orange, Riverside and San Diego Counties have indicated that working proactively with students has provided the safest outcomes. It is recommended that schools discuss the issues with students due to possible misinformation being spread. In addition, areas that provide a safe opportunity for students to be heard have experienced less problems. The following is a list of recommended actions that have worked in other areas. Please review with your school safety team, district office and school resource officer to determine the best plan of action. If you have utilized other strategies that have worked please send those strategies to the California School Resource Officers’ Association. Email address is provided on the last page.

Suggest students march after school:
1. Partner with local law enforcement to identify protest routes.
2. Identify and meet with vocal student leaders, and inform them that their voices are respected.
3. Remind students of the cost to the school and the students when students leave during the school day.
4. Organize the student leaders to inform students that there will be a meeting after school to cover the rules for a peaceful march.
5. Hold the after school meeting. Law enforcement discusses peaceful protest, routes, including do’s and don’t’s for the peaceful march.
7. Plan follow-up meetings with student leaders.
8. Continual monitoring of the situation.
9. De-brief with partnering agencies to determine how effective the school and law enforcement efforts were and areas for improvement.

In case students are threatening to walk out of school during school hours and you do not plan on stopping them from leaving:
1. Plan a safe route with law enforcement.
2. Work with student leaders on safety issues.
3. Remind students they may face school discipline issues to legal issues including arrest.
4. Video students leaving.

In case students are threatening to walk out of school during school hours and you will not allow them to go:
1. Place school under general Lockdown.
2. Inform students that they will only be allowed to walk from class to class during passing periods.
3. Inform students that there will be a meeting after school where they will be able to discuss the issues and have their voice heard.
4. Provide for guest speakers to come in to discuss appropriate ways to protest.

Please note, this step has not shown to be effective and places students in direct conflict with the school. And, has the effect of prolonging protests, negative feelings with the outcome of the school becoming and additional target.

IMPORTANT NOTE: The intent is to keep students on campus and allow for their voices to be heard, however, strategies are also recommended in the event of a walkout. In case you are unable to stop a walk-out during school hours, meet with local law enforcement to provide the most peaceful walkout possible under the circumstances.

Should you need additional information or have suggestions for additional strategies please email:
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