

March 8, 2018

Dear Students and Families,

The horrific school shooting at Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School in Parkland, Florida, on February 14, 2018, has profoundly affected communities across the country, and many young people feel spurred to take action.

Young people, through actions like civil disobedience and peaceful protest, have been at the forefront of many movements and struggles for justice in our City's and our nation's history, and we recognize that many of our own students may similarly decide to engage in forms of discourse and protest in response to the tragic event in Parkland.

We have been made aware that as part of their civic engagement, some students are planning to participate in what is being called the “#ENOUGH National School Walkout” on Wednesday, March 14. The walkout is scheduled to be 17 minutes long to commemorate the 17 Parkland victims who lost their lives.

While we support students participating in civic engagement and exercising of their First Amendment rights, we also want to remind you of our attendance procedures, and inform you of additional measures the New York City Department of Education will be taking to help ensure the safety of students and staff members.

Participating in a walkout like the one planned is an individual decision that we encourage families to discuss together. For anyone who participates in the walkout, it is important to do so in a safe and respectful manner. Staff members from each school will be assigned to be present outside their school buildings during the walkout to help ensure safety and order.

If your child is planning to participate, please notify your school by following your school's regular attendance protocol. For middle and high school students, walking out for 17 minutes and returning to school will be considered cutting class, not an absence. Students will not face consequences beyond a notation in their student attendance record and a conversation with an administrator. Please be aware that regular classroom schedules will continue as usual.

If middle and high school students are planning to attend events after the 17 minutes, they will be considered absent from the classes they miss. With parent or guardian permission, this will be an excused absence. Without parent or guardian permission, this will be an unexcused absence. If you have any questions about your school's attendance protocol, please call your school's main office.

Elementary school students who wish to participate in the walkout need to be signed out by their parents or guardians. For students of all ages with nurses or paraprofessionals required for safety, parents or qualified staff members must be willing to accompany students who wish to participate in the walkout. If a parent or qualified staff member is not willing to walk out and accompany the student, the student must remain inside the school. Schools must ensure that the individual needs of each student are taken into account and addressed at all times.

We know young people can and do make a difference, and many school staff members will be speaking with students about their individual reactions to this event, including the accompanying calls for action and civic engagement, in their classroom and school communities. As part of our Civic Education for All initiative, we are encouraging teachers to facilitate opportunities for students to have respectful discussions on current events in greater depth, and from multiple points of view. For a list of civic engagement resources and other information, please visit <http://schools.nyc.gov/safety>.

Schools must promote safe, welcoming, and inclusive learning environments for all students. We commend all students and staff members, who help make our schools safe, respectful places where all students can learn free from the threat of deadly violence.

Thank you for your partnership.



Carmen Fariña
Schools Chancellor