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Dear Parents/Guardians:

My heart still aches for the Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School community. The senseless loss of life leaves us heartbroken, scared, and angry, and ignites a community-wide fervor aimed at fiercely protecting the safety of our own children.

Whereas adults' voices have led the conversations following past tragedies, the atrocities in Parkland, Florida, have compelled students across the nation to action.

At New Paltz Central School District, our Middle and High School students have requested to show solidarity with the students of Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School by participating in a 17-minute walkout from school at 10 AM on March 14. Their expressed desire is to stand with their national peers in hopes of putting a focus on school violence, effecting change, and memorializing the 17 souls who lost their lives.

Recognizing that a National School Walkout to demand a safe school environment is consistent with the District's vision of student and staff empowerment, as well as its obligations under the Project SAVE law to provide a safe learning environment, the Board and I have agreed to grant the students' request to peacefully assemble and exercise their first amendment rights to free speech.

We also recognize that some students may not want to participate in a walkout, which is an equally respected and supported decision.

No student will be reprimanded for attending the protest and returning at its end, nor will any student be criticized for not attending. However, students who do not return after the 17 minutes will be sanctioned according to our Code of Conduct.

The first priority of any school district is the safety and wellness of its students and staff. The logistics of protecting our students during the walkout are being carefully coordinated in each building and in conjunction with the New Paltz Police Department.

Please be advised that the New Paltz Middle School and New Paltz High School campuses will be CLOSED to all traffic and visitors from 9:45-10:45 AM. If you are dropping your child off to school or need to pick them up for an appointment, we urge you to be at the school before 9:30 AM to ensure your business can be conducted prior to the closing of campus.

Elementary school participation in the walkout will not be supported. Participation in such events would create additional safety concerns in ensuring sufficient supervision, as well as have the potential to increase the sense of fear and anxiety among our younger students. Any parents wishing to allow their elementary-aged children to participate will have to sign them out of school and assume responsibility for their safety.

If your child is planning to take part in this walkout, we also encourage you to discuss the purpose of the walkout and the role of peaceful protest. While we support students' rights to express their views and opinions in a respectful and meaningful way, the District does not endorse any particular viewpoint or advocacy group. Faculty meetings are planned to ensure that staff members understand their roles.

Freedom of speech and the right to peacefully protest are among our nation's most cherished traditions, and through civic engagement our youth develop the abilities needed for citizenship in our democracy. When students advocate for an issue they feel passionate about, they learn vital skills needed to form, support, and express personal positions on issues, and we are proud of them for engaging adults.

Sincerely,



Maria C. Rice
Superintendent