

OPEN LETTER CONCERNING NATIONAL SCHOOL WALKOUT
ON MARCH 14

March 12, 2018

Via email or fax

Dear Louisiana School Administrators,

In recent weeks, students of Parkland, Florida who survived a mass shooting at their school have inspired high school students across the country with their leadership and courage. Many Louisiana students will participate in National School Walkout on March 14, a 17-minute walkout to commemorate the 17 students and teachers killed last month at Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School.

The ACLU of Louisiana asks you to support student efforts to engage in the issues of the day. Rather than focus on discipline, schools should regard National School Walkout day as an opportunity for a practical lesson in participatory democracy.

During school hours, students have protection for political speech under our state and federal constitutions. The Supreme Court held in 1969 that students do not lose their constitutional rights “at the schoolhouse gate,” and upheld the right of [Mary Beth Tinker](#) to wear an armband to school in protest of the Vietnam War.

This means that students have the right to participate in a walkout on National School Walkout day if they do not disrupt classwork and do not disturb other classmates who decide not to participate.

We therefore urge school districts to follow these well-established guidelines governing student protest:

- **Students cannot be punished for expressing their beliefs** unless it disrupts the educational process or the substance is lewd or vulgar.



Louisiana

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- **Students can't be considered disruptive for wearing clothing, armbands, or other accessories that bear political viewpoints** just because someone may disagree with that view.
- **Any disciplinary action for walking out cannot be a response to the content of the protest.** Students cannot be disciplined because of the message they are supporting.
- **The Constitution forbids disciplining students more harshly for politically motivated conduct** than for similar, non-political behavior. If your school typically disciplines students for missing class, students cannot be disciplined more harshly because they miss class to express a political view.

We hope that Louisiana school districts foster your students' civic participation and responsibility on National School Walkout day, and help to ensure the health of our democracy in decades to come.

Sincerely,

ACLU of Louisiana
Jane Johnson, Interim Executive Director

Online student speech resource:

<https://www.aclu.org/issues/free-speech/student-speech-and-privacy/students-rights-speech-walkouts-and-other-protests>