

Suggestions for Management of Student Activism

Whether it is gun control, foreign policy, or any other topic, students have a right to freedom of speech and may participate in free speech activities while on school campus. *Tinker v. Des Moines Indep. Cmty. Sch. Dist.*, 393 U.S. 503 (1969). Students may exercise these rights as long as their conduct is not disruptive to the education process, obscene, lewd, libelous, slanderous, and does not incite students to destroy property or inflict injury upon any person.

A school may prohibit protected expression if a school official has reason to believe that the expression will materially and substantially interfere with school operations or the rights of others. However, school actions should be carefully measured based upon the intent of the students and long-term impact on the local school climate.

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 that adults avoid a combative position with students. Protesting is every student's right. Staff need to provide students with guidance in becoming proactive by implementing effective and peaceful activities in order to produce the change students may desire. Student energy can be focused on positive activities instead of violent activities. These times can be teachable moments by affording staff an opportunity to teach young people about: peaceful demonstrations; learning about the issue in more detail; media literacy by examining facts and reports from the media; reinforcing the need to be aware of the activities of elected officials, law enforcement, the community and outside influences; and the importance of exercising the right to vote.

Considerations for School Administrators:

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.
2. Develop talking points to help others understand the issue and how to support the students to find a safe outlet for their protest.
3. Involve local law enforcement in your plan and strategy so they understand your intent and collaborate with you.
4. Provide talking points to teachers and staff regarding the issues.
5. Identify 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 for student leaders to express concerns and brainstorm options that would appropriately benefit their goals of protest (peaceful demonstration).

8. Use social media and discussions with student leaders to clarify any misinformation that might be spread.
9. Monitor social media to maintain awareness of community responses and be aware of information students are receiving.
10. Establish an atmosphere of respect for all in the forum.
11. Remind students that violent demonstrations, blocking traffic, or obscene acts may affect public opinion to adversely impact their cause.
12. 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.
13. Provide highly visible law enforcement presence on and around campus throughout the day.
14. Provide communication to parents via letter or newsletter and utilize the media and the school marquee to inform members of surrounding community, parents, and other stakeholders of efforts to address this issue.