

Graham Local Schools Safety Update #3: Graham Response to questions about March 14th planned “Student-Led School Safety Awareness Program” at Graham High School.

1.) What steps are district and school leaders taking to address student-led participation in programs/walkouts/rallies related to recent school violence?

Student organizers are calling for nationwide awareness events Wednesday, March 14, for students to stay out of class for 17 minutes - one minute for each person killed in the recent Parkland, FL incident.

The student leaders have apprised GHS principals throughout their planning of this unsanctioned event. The planned student-led program is not a district-sanctioned event. However, the GHS team is using this occasion to provide valuable advice to students on school procedures, behavior, safety awareness, and speech rights.

School officials have been in contact with the local authorities, and GLS Administration and local authorities will monitor and supervise any student activity that occurs on campus tomorrow. The Emergency Operations team has convened, prepared our planned response, and shared information with local authorities. GLS has already posted 2 previous safety updates for our community.

GHS student leaders shared a document Tuesday, March 13th with school administration about a planned “student-led school safety awareness program” Wednesday. The information shared includes a planned student forum in the football stadium from 10:00-10:30AM for a remembrance moment of silence, student dialogue about GHS safety issues, sharing of local mental health and PBIS resources.

2.) What are the different forms the programs/walkouts/rallies might take?

Graham’s high school administrators have provided advice to student leaders to find a proactive way to incorporate dialogue about violence, school safety, and mental health into their agenda for March 14.

Student leaders have determined ways to participate in the national event while staying on campus. Students will honor the 17 Parkland victims and plan to hold a forum for students to dialogue about the importance of student voice, using a section of the football stadium’s north stands.

Graham Administrators and local authorities will be monitoring the planned event. GLS has shared our protocol previously in two prior postings to community, including our attendance procedures. Parents or students wishing to sign a student out should follow the standard operating procedure tomorrow, prior to 10:00AM.

3.) What happens if a student leaves (walks out) and gets hurt? Is the district legally responsible?

GLS is generally responsible for the safety and welfare of students during the school day—a principle called in *loco parentis*. However, if students leave their classrooms without permission but remain on campus during a “student-led safety program”, there is a gray area in the law about district liability. The GLS staff and authorities will still act responsibly regarding the students’ safety and welfare, and hope

student avoid any disruptive behaviors on school property. The planned “student-led school safety awareness program” is not a district-sanctioned event where students remain in the school’s custody.

In cases where students leave campus with permission from their parents prior to the immediate event with an “excused absence”, the school district is not likely to be held responsible if a student were to then participate in activities related to the event. If an older student (over 12) leaves the building without parental permission, the equivalent of an “unexcused absence” (skipping class), it would be difficult to argue that the district is responsible since he or she would not have been under the district’s supervision at that point.

GHS Admin Team has worked to communicate expectations to students regarding student behavior and the supervision responsibilities the school personnel have to ensure safety.

4.) Can students be disciplined for this program/walk outs/rallies?

Yes. Students that violate school policy around attendance, and who cause disruptions if the protest interrupts the educational environment, can be disciplined. Schools can always discipline students for cutting class. But the GHS Team is also using this student-led program as a teachable moment for their student civil rights expression. Staff will not levy harsher punishment for students who participate in the program than they would for a similar violation of school policy. Administrators are advising the student leaders to define behavioral expectations, safety expectations, timing, and the use of school property to minimize disruption to the school day.

5.) What can happen to staff who “walk out”?

Teachers and staff are in a slightly different position legally. While they do have protected First Amendment rights at work, they also have to follow the requirements of their job. School will operate tomorrow and all classes will be offered as part of our regular schedule.

6.) How can schools accommodate students who don’t participate and/or don’t agree with the politics behind the safety program (walkout)?

Graham Administration has made it clear where this program is planned, outside of the building for safety, and to minimize disruptions to normal operations. Also that students don’t have to feel any need to be a part of the “program”.

Principals and teachers are not participating in the “safety program” because that decision could alienate students who may not agree with the protests. Participating in a program outside of normal school operations could send a message to students that educators are endorsing or sanctioning the violation of school policies. This is not the case. However, our administrative staff will respond and monitor students, and the GHS team is using this occasion to provide valuable advice to students on school procedures, safety awareness, and speech rights.

7.) How is GHS Period attendance recorded?

As usual. Period attendance will be taken at the start of each period of the day. By law, absent students will be reported to homes with a call within two hours.