

NATIONAL SCHOOL WALKOUT

March, 2018

On Wednesday, March 14, 2018 students, teachers, school administrators, parents, and allies will participate in a National School Walkout to show solidarity with Parkland students and protest Congress' inaction towards gun violence in our schools and neighborhoods. This student-driven walkout begins at 10 AM local time and lasts for 17 minutes.

WHAT ARE THE GOALS OF THE ACTION?

The purpose of the action is to bring attention to the refusal of Congress to address gun violence. The organizers - mostly young people working with Women's March Youth Empower - call for Congress to declare gun violence a public health crisis. They want Congress to dedicate federal funding to researching and implementing solutions, including addressing violence by police. They want solutions that will limit gun violence: banning the sale of assault weapons and high-capacity magazines, expanding background checks, and stopping the militarization of police departments. They are against arming of school staff, and they are calling for schools to be gun-free zones.

AS A STUDENT, CAN I GET IN TROUBLE FOR WALKING OUT?

Maybe. As the Supreme Court said, students do not "shed their constitutional rights to freedom of speech or expression at the schoolhouse gate." But, schools can discipline students for missing class - they just can't discipline students more harshly for missing class due to this walkout than they would for missing class for other unexcused reasons. Whether or not a student will get in trouble for walking out will vary based on the school district and the school. Some schools and districts, including the School District of Philadelphia, have said that they will allow students to participate in a 17-minute walkout without discipline (that means that participation in a longer protest may result in a student being disciplined).

Schools may choose not to discipline students for peaceful participation in the walkout. However, schools could discipline students for disruptive or destructive conduct during the protest. Some schools are designating a safe space for students to gather during the walkout - if this is the case in your school, students who move beyond that area or leave school property may be disciplined. To find out more about possible disciplinary measures that can be taken, read your school's or district's policy for unexcused absences.

Students who already have unexcused absences on their records should also look into their school's policy on truancy. In Pennsylvania, "truancy" means having three or more unexcused absences in the current school year (absences do not need to be consecutive). Students who are under 17 who already have three unexcused absences should consider whether the walkout may result in increased disciplinary action. See more ELC factsheets about truancy [here](#).

More information on students' rights is available in this ["toolkit" from Youth Empower and Know Your Rights video from ACLU.](#)

WILL A PERMISSION NOTE FROM MY PARENT EXCUSE ME FOR LEAVING SCHOOL?

School districts have individual policies about whether parent notes will be accepted to 'excuse' an absence. You should review your school district's policy, but it may help to submit a parent's note showing you have their permission to participate.

WHO CAN I CONTACT IF I AM FACING DISCIPLINARY ACTION FOR PARTICIPATING IN THE WALKOUT?

The National Juvenile Defender Center will be staffing a legal referral hotline, to connect students or their parents to local attorneys when students face suspension, expulsion, or arrest as a consequence of participating in the National School Walkout. The hotline number is 1-857-529-9373 (1-857-LAWYER3).

WHERE CAN I FIND OUT WHAT WALKOUTS AND EVENTS ARE GOING ON IN MY SCHOOL OR COMMUNITY?

Women's March Youth Empower has a [searchable map](#) showing the location of many of the scheduled actions in the U.S. and beyond, including more than 50 in Pennsylvania alone.

WHAT ELSE IS HAPPENING AFTER MARCH 14 TO END GUN VIOLENCE IN SCHOOLS?

Participants are encouraged to follow up by attending congressional [town hall meetings](#) and contacting their representatives, participating in voter registration drives, or signing petitions like [this one](#) calling for a ban on military-style assault weapons. On March 24, there will be a "March for Our Lives" in Washington, DC, and similar [marches around the country](#) calling for action to prevent gun violence. On April 20, the anniversary of the mass shooting at Columbine High School, another [national walkout](#) by students is planned.

THE PRESIDENT HAS CALLED FOR "HARDENING" SCHOOLS. WHAT'S THE ALTERNATIVE?

One example of a package to address school violence without more guns comes from the Philadelphia Student Union, which created a ["Student Vision for School Safety."](#) Their vision includes the following demands:

- Ending the expansion of police presence and security personnel and shifting resources to programs that promote a nurturing school environment
- Providing comprehensive mental health services in every school
- Hiring more guidance counselors and social workers
- Expanding restorative justice practices
- Protecting students and families from ICE arrests around schools
- Gun control that does not result in targeted policing of black and brown bodies.

The Education Law Center-PA (“ELC”) is a non-profit, legal advocacy organization dedicated to ensuring that all children in Pennsylvania have access to a quality public education. Through legal representation, impact litigation, trainings, and policy advocacy, ELC advances the rights of vulnerable children, including children living in poverty, children of color, children in the foster care and juvenile justice systems, children with disabilities, English language learners, LGBTQ students, and children experiencing homelessness.

ELC’s publications provide a general idea of the law. However, each situation is different. If questions remain about how the law applies to a particular situation, contact us for a referral or contact an attorney of your choice. Visit www.elc-pa.org/contact or call 215-238-6970 (Philadelphia) or 412-258-2120 (Pittsburgh).