

**Meria Joel Carstarphen, Ed.D.**  
Superintendent

Phone: 404-802-2820

Fax: 404-802-1803



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February 26, 2018

Dear Parents:

The tragic school shooting at Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School in Parkland, Florida on February 14 has led to a national dialogue on school safety and violence. I want to take this opportunity to update you on Atlanta Public Schools' commitment to the safety and security of our students and staff and our plan of action around two issues evolving because of this national dialogue.

### **Threats Against Schools on Social Media**

In the wake of the tragedy in Parkland, Florida, school districts around the metro Atlanta area have seen an increase in threats of violence against schools made on social media. Specifically, on Friday, February 23, Atlanta Public Schools was made aware of a threat against Maynard Jackson High School, South Atlanta High School, Carver High School, and Washington High School posted on Instagram. I can't emphasize enough that the safety and security of our students and staff is our top priority and we take every threat very seriously. We have put a safety and security plan in place to address this threat.

While I am unable to share the confidential components of our plan, I can tell you that Atlanta Public Schools Police Department (APSPD) began an investigation of the threat immediately in coordination with the Atlanta Police Department's homeland security, the Georgia Bureau of Investigation and the FBI Joint Terrorism Task Force. Out of an abundance of caution, we are implementing comprehensive security measures at our schools. You should expect to see an increased APSPD and Atlanta Police Department presence on our campuses, all safety and security protocols will be strictly enforced by our staff in accordance with district policy, and students will be reminded of the seriousness and criminal consequences of posting or reposting threats of violence on social media.

### **National School Walkout Day on March 14**

In addition, you may have seen information on social media and on websites encouraging students, teachers, and their allies around the country to organize a National School Walkout Day on March 14, 2018, at 10 a.m. for 17 minutes to insist that Congress take legislative action on keeping schools safe. There are two additional dates for student civic engagement proposed for March 24 and April 20.

As the birthplace and school district of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., Atlanta Public Schools (APS) takes seriously our responsibility to prepare our students to succeed beyond high school and to help them become well-rounded individuals equipped with the knowledge and tools necessary for actively engaging in society. To support student engagement around a national dialogue on National School Walkout Day, our schools are planning to work with our students and student leaders to develop a structured plan that will be implemented during that 17-minute walkout. Some schools are already getting prepared for the learning experience!

It will be supported by our Teaching & Learning team. They are recommending age-appropriate instructional activities to support teachers' efforts in facilitating this conversation around civic engagement and social responsibility.

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We are proactively communicating with students about the guidelines that will be in place around their participation in the non-disruptive activities (e.g. once the 17-minute activity is complete, instruction must resume and students who choose to go outside those expectations will be considered in violation of our discipline code). It is also important for students to remember that disruptive “walkouts” are against district policy, and any student led demonstrations that have not received prior approval will result in disciplinary consequences. Said simply, while we support peaceful organized protesting that is school sanctioned (with prior approval), we do not support disruption of school or obstruction of the school district’s mission, process or function as explained in board policy.

Finally, any participation in any student-led protests or demonstration on March 14th at 10 a.m. is optional, and we’re limiting the grade level to middle and high schools.

APS is focused on graduating every student ready for college and career, and we know that for our students to succeed, they must also be able to engage in the world around them. We believe that by creating opportunities for safe, structured, student-led civic engagement around a national dialogue such as this one, we are ultimately helping our students develop social and emotional skills and be informed residents in our democracy.

If you should have any questions related to threats against schools on social media or your school’s approach to student engagement activities, please contact your school principal.

Regards,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Meria J. Carstarphen', is written in a cursive style.

**Meria J. Carstarphen**