

Dear Parents:

One week ago today was the tragic school shooting in Florida. Since that day, young people across the country have been looking for ways to become activists and fight against school violence.

Today, in many schools across America, students made the choice to do a 17-minute school walk-out in support of changing laws and in the hopes of getting lawmakers to pay attention to youth, crying out, for support of laws to protect them in schools. Today, at Scranton, about 200 students made the choice to join this movement and conduct a walk-out at noon.

Administration was made aware that some students were choosing to participate in this event at approximately 10:00am. At that time, it was decided that we wanted to support them in the desire to advocate for their personal safety. While we value educational minutes, we also know that student advocacy and students taking responsibility for their safety in schools is equally important. Therefore, we began planning a way to safely support students and allow them to assemble peacefully and show respect for the 17 lives tragically lost in Florida last week.

When teachers or other adults were asked about the walk-out, they shared with students that we were not preventing anyone from participating. We shared that we supported their advocacy efforts and believed, that with proper planning, a future event could be planned that could potentially be more impactful. We shared that we would support them in preparing for future events to allow the best chance for their advocacy to impact rules, laws and policies that protect their personal safety. We also shared that, if they felt they needed to participate today, that we needed them to report to the football field so that we could adequately supervise and support the student population. About 200 students arrived at the football field at noon.

As students entered the football stadium, Mr. Wilson pulled aside small groups and explained that we were attending in support of the friends and families of the 17 lives, needlessly lost, in Florida last week. That as an expectation, students were to spend the time together being respectful of these lives and figuring out a way to make a difference. It was shared with the students that if that was not the reason they were there, that they should respectfully return to the building. Almost all stayed. For the next 17 minutes, groups of children (some large, some small) sat in circles together. Some holding hands, others with bowed heads, all respectful and all engaging with one another in an attempt to make our world a better ... a safer ... place. At most times, you could hear a pin drop. 17 minutes later, we all reentered the building and went to class.

Moments like these are hard for schools. It is always a gamble. Do you let the kids go outside in peaceful protest? What if they misbehave? What if they don't take it seriously? Are the kids just trying to get out of class? But as a school, sometimes you just need to trust the "goodness" that is your kids. Sometimes, you need to believe that if you believe and trust in them, they will do the right thing. Today we took a chance and it was the right decision. Our kids took the first step in advocating for political change...what a great civics lesson.

Whether your child stayed in the building today or came outside as part of the walk-out, I would encourage you to talk to your child about this. Through talking with kids about their role in keeping the world around them a safe place, we all win.