Good afternoon.

We have all been moved by the tragic school shooting in Florida and are motivated to stand for school safety. We respect that many educators in Highline want to honor the 17-minute observance slated for March 14 across the nation.

We must also be aware that elements of this national conversation are political in nature as they relate to gun control laws. As public educators, we must strike a delicate balance in our actions during the work day. Our role as educators is to create safe, respectful learning environments where students can express their views freely but appropriately.

Our first responsibility is the supervision and safety of our students. Staff may not leave their classroom or duties to participate in walkouts — whether initiated by students or staff — unless directed by their principal to accompany students for safety reasons.

Any activity initiated by school staff must be developmentally appropriate and geared toward increasing students’ sense of safety at school. Activities should be educational for students and consistent with [Board Policy 2331.](https://www.highlineschools.org/cms/lib/WA01919413/Centricity/domain/1147/school%20board%20policies/series_2000/2331.pdf) Some examples:

* Engage students in a discussion on their feelings about school safety. Bear in mind that conversations about school safety may trigger fear in students and adults, so it is important to create an environment where everyone feels safe. While there is currently a heightened perception of risk, remind students that schools are among the safest places for children.
* Review your school’s safety plan or practice an emergency drill.
* Provide a forum for students to express their views. Any discussion must respect varying viewpoints and encourage student dialogue without inhibiting anyone from expressing a viewpoint that may be contrary to others’. Here are some helpful [ground rules](https://michelletiedje.files.wordpress.com/2013/05/ground-rules-for-civil-discussions.pdf) and

 [guidance.](https://www.facinghistory.org/sites/default/files/publications/Fostering_Civil_Discourse.pdf)

* Talk with students about their own civic engagement and advocacy. [Civic Discourse in](https://www.tolerance.org/sites/default/files/2017-07/Civil_Discourse_in_the_Classroom.pdf)

 [the Classroom (Teaching Tolerance)](https://www.tolerance.org/sites/default/files/2017-07/Civil_Discourse_in_the_Classroom.pdf) is a good resource. Any discussion must be consistent with [Procedure 2331P](https://www.highlineschools.org/cms/lib/WA01919413/Centricity/domain/1147/school%20board%20policies/series_2000/2331P.pdf), which states, “Students should be provided opportunities to learn about all sides of an issue. Teachers should refrain from promoting their biases in order for students to be able to make independent judgments on the issue.”

As we grapple with the issue of school safety in the coming weeks and months, let’s take this opportunity to engage our families about how they would like to respond with us as a collective school community.

Thank you for your cooperation as we work through this difficult issue together. If you have any questions or concerns, please contact your principal, ILED or a cabinet member. I appreciate all you do every day to know our students by name, strength and need.