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Email Subject Line: Student Protests Planned

Recipient Groups: Board Members, Superintendents, Superintendent Secretaries and Board Attorneys

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**\*This email is being sent to all Alabama school board members, superintendents, superintendent secretaries and board attorneys.**

Once again, national politics are impacting our schools, but this one hits a bit closer to home. In the wake of the school shooting in Parkland, Florida last month, students across the country are planning walk out events to protest gun violence in our schools. These are the events we know about so far:

- **Wednesday, March 14, 2018 – National School Walkout**

Students and teachers are being encouraged to walk out of their classrooms at 10:00 AM for 17 minutes in memory of the 17 students and staffers killed in Parkland;

- **Saturday, March 24, 2018 – March for Our Lives (Not a school day, but may end up on campus)**

Stakeholders will march on Washington and across the country to demand better gun control legislation. So far, Alabama marches are planned in Huntsville, Birmingham, Montgomery and Mobile;

- **Friday, April 20, 2018 – National High School Walkout**

Students are being encouraged to wear orange and walk out of their classrooms for 15 minutes in memory of the 19<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the 1999 shootings at Columbine High School in Colorado.

Some systems will be on Spring Break next week and will likely not see any impact, but if your schools are in session on either of these dates, it's important to be aware of these dates and communicate with your staff about how to handle students wishing to protest.

Last week, NSBA distributed "Navigating Student Walkouts & Mass Protests" which you'll find attached. It has some great information and examples that we think will be helpful so we're sharing it with you. We encourage you to read it and share it with your staff, but here are the 5 most important takeaways:

- **Talk to everyone and don't stop talking.** Engage and plan with your stakeholders including students, teachers, parents and law enforcement. This will hopefully get everyone on the same page, make this event more organized and limit the potential for confrontation and chaos.
- **Be safe.** Make sure your local law enforcement is aware of the walk out and what to expect. They may need to be on hand to make sure everyone involved is safe, particularly if counter-protesters show up at the same time.
- **Outsiders.** Be prepared to address non-students who wish to participate. Will parents be permitted to join in? What about community members?
- **Mind your discipline.** So that students are treated equally, give your staff clear directions on how to handle the situation when the moment arrives. If you choose to discipline students for leaving class (which we are not advocating), be mindful that you can't discipline a student more harshly for walking out in protest than walking out for some other reason.
- **Learn from it.** Use this as an opportunity to teach your students about the historical, social or legal aspects of student protests.

As always, work closely with your local counsel when you're making decisions—both before and after this event. Feel free to contact us with questions or to share your experiences.

Sincerely,

Jayne Harrell Williams  
General Counsel & Director of Legal Advocacy  
Alabama Association of School Boards