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February 27, 2018

Dear Cherry Hill Public Schools Families,

As many of you are likely aware from recent news coverage, students at Cherry Hill High School East have endeavored to make their voices heard in the form of a sit in on February 26, 2018 and a brief walk out today, February 27. Assemblies were held following each event to provide students with a safe forum in which to voice their concerns to the administration. It was brought to my attention that students and parents desired additional outlets for conversation, and I met with a group during a previously scheduled community conversation on Monday evening, February 26 at Cherry Hill High School West.

During Monday evening's meeting, school safety, security, and students' desire for discussion and assembly were among the topics of discussion. Students at the meeting indicated a plan for Cherry Hill High School East students to conduct a walk out at 8 am this morning, February 27. When asked if I would support the walk out, I responded that I support students' efforts to make their voices heard in a safe manner, and asked that the students instead conduct their demonstration inside the school in the interest of safety.

Additionally, I explained that as we work to guide students who seek to share their voices, our high school and middle school principals will meet with students, beginning with student leaders, to discuss how students and staff, as a whole, can work together in productive discussion.

As events such as walk outs become more publicized, with anticipated dates including March 14, March 24 and April 20, it is predicted that the popularity of these events among students will be on the rise as well. Walk outs are a deviation to our school's standard supervision and safety procedures. As a result, walk outs possess the potential of creating an unsafe situation for participants. Planning and providing for a collective and structured voice, while still maintaining a safe and structured learning environment, will be a component of the upcoming conversations.

As mentioned in my original letter posted on our web sites on February 15, 2018, students may have a mixture of strong emotions in the aftermath of the tragic Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School shooting, for which assistance is available. I encourage students to speak with their guidance counselors and/or student assistance counselors. Resources are also available on the District web site, www.chclc.org, under the "Departments" pull-down menu by clicking the "Student Assistance" link. The direct link is www.chclc.org/departments/student-assistance. There you will find links to resources for parents, and mental health and crisis information resources. Families requiring printed information regarding these resources should contact their building principal.

We will continue our dialog with our students, parents, staff and community members regarding safety, security and the student voice in our schools. We are always striving to improve in all that we do. I ask that you work with us to support our children, as one community. Respectful, civil discourse will continue to be an essential part of that process.

Sincerely,


Dr. Joseph Meloche
Superintendent, Cherry Hill Public Schools