

Responding to Officer Van Dyke Trial:

A Guide to Support Student Safety in Civic Engagement

In this document, you will find guidance and resources for supporting and managing safety during potential student civic participation following the trial.

District Guidelines for Student Participation in Student-Organized Walkouts

To ensure students have the opportunity to safely engage in civic action, Chicago Public Schools has created the following guidelines for student-organized walkouts.

Schools should consider taking proactive steps to engage student organizers and support nonviolent forms of expression as the trial of CPD Officer Jason Van Dyke comes to end.

School administrators should work with student organizers to **designate an appropriate, safe space for students to convene for group activity**. Students participating in this type of expression or protests may participate in the following ways:

- **Planned Student-Led Activity:** For instance, this can be a student-led rally or town hall for students who wish to participate.
- **Coordinated Student-Led Walkout or Protest:** If students want to plan a walkout or group protest on school grounds, they should discuss these plans with school leadership. Disciplinary consequences should not be issued as long as the walkout follows these guidelines and does not exceed 30 minutes.
- **Organize a structured program for students:** It is at the principal's discretion to organize an activity for student expression. This may include speaking, chanting, singing, holding silence, or expressing themselves in non-disruptive ways in a designated common area on school grounds.

Students who do not wish to participate, or whose views are counter to those of the walkout/protest organizers, should be provided with a safe space to convene and engage in meaningful student-led activities, if desired.

Teachers should neither punish nor incentivize student participation. Students should have confidence that teachers will avoid scheduling tests or other graded assignments during this period and be allowed to make up missed assignments.

Note: It is critical that in all cases (both at the classroom and school level), students are invited to express a variety of views and opinions around critical questions. This means that no official solution, political position, or policy proposal is given priority over others and the message is clear that all students are invited to weigh in and share their ideas.

These guidelines are adapted from previous CPS guidance as well as examples taken from other school districts.

Planning and Preparation Guidelines in the Event of a Student Walkout:

Supporting Student Civic Action Through Instruction

It is important for students to learn about the issues as well as consider its potential root causes, and identify proposed solutions. After students have been given an opportunity [to learn about and discuss the Officer Van Dyke trial](#) and a broader set of issues connected to the trial, schools should consider authentic opportunities to support student civic action on issues of concern to them.

The trial of Officer Van Dyke is an emotionally charged subject. However, when students are interested in issues central to their lives, we have a rich opportunity to teach them about the ways they can engage in political and social discourse.

Classroom resources for teachers can be found [here](#).

Safety Protocols and Procedures

Leading Up to the Verdict:

- Ensure that you maintain open communications with your students and community members by listening to any concerns and communicating important information related to this situation.
- Monitor the news media and social media to keep abreast of the latest details of the status of the trial.
- If you receive any information or indication that your school may face any extraordinary risk, contact the Student Safety Center at 773-553-3335 so that supplemental planning can take place in advance.

Planning for a Student-Organized Walk-out:

School staff are encouraged to create safe and productive opportunities for students to share their views, voice their concerns, and deliberate on topics that are important to them. If administrators become aware of a planned school walkout they should take the following steps:

- **If a Walkout is Expected to Occur:** Schools should develop safety plans and arrange for additional CPD supports, if appropriate. Please work with the CPS Office of Safety and Security for support in coordination of safety plans.

- **Engage Student Leaders:** Discuss their plans and consider possible alternatives. This conversation is intended to find safe and productive opportunities for participation in civic action. It should not stifle student expression.
- **Establish and Communicate Clear Expectations to All Students:** Prior to the walkout, you should:
 - Discuss the purpose of the walkout;
 - Communicate that participation is optional;
 - Outline any specific routes or locations designated for the walkout;
 - Set expectations for returning to school within 30 minutes; and
 - Encourage students to be respectful during the walkout.
- **Develop a Plan for Students Who Do Not Wish to Participate:** Not all students may choose to participate in a walkout. Schools should develop a plan that provides students who do not participate with an alternate safe space inside of the school where school staff can coordinate other activities and supervise students.
- **Ensure Adequate Staffing for Planned Activities:** School leaders should ensure participating and non-participating students behave respectfully and safely. Schools expecting large student participation should consider identifying a prescribed location for students to gather. Administrators should contact the CPS Student Safety Center at 773-553-3335 (Open 24/7) for assistance.
- **Students who walk out and do not return within 30 minutes** should be marked as an unexcused absence, and their parents should be notified that the student has left school grounds for the walkout and did not return.

Mass Demonstrations Outside of Your School

If there is a demonstration outside of your school and you believe it is a safety threat to your students and staff, take the following steps:

- **Immediately initiate a soft lockdown:** Ensure that any student or staff who are outside are calmly and safely ushered into the school building.
- **If the safety threat is immediate:**
 - **Call 911**
 - Then Call the CPS Student Safety Center at 773-553-3335 (Open 24/7) for assistance (e.g., protesters are trying to enter the school).
- **Remain in Lockdown Mode:** Until CPD responds and gives an all clear.

Social & Emotional Considerations

Students may experience a wide range of emotions and reactions in response to the outcome of the trial, including fear, anxiety, sadness, anger, and desensitization. Schools can help students understand and process their emotions by ensuring [safe, supportive school climates](#) with consistent routines and positive adult-student relationships. Classroom discussions around social issues and civic actions can build students' [social and emotional competencies](#) and create non-judgmental spaces for students to express their emotions.

In some cases, students' emotional responses may manifest as problem behaviors such as inattention, irritability, or defiance. School staff should be aware of signs of trauma or distress and refer students as necessary for additional supports through the school's Behavioral Health Team/MTSS team or counselor/clinician. See [SEL and Mental Health resources](#) for additional resources.

CPS Employee Engagement in Planned Protests

Educators must ensure that deliberation on controversial issues offer an opportunity for multiple perspectives to be shared and considered. Teachers must remain neutral facilitators and not utilize classroom time to support or present their individual preferences and beliefs on political issues. Below are some frequently asked questions regarding staff and their role in planned protests.

May school administrators or teachers initiate or encourage students to organize a walkout?

No. School administrators and teachers must remain neutral and not encourage, organize, or recruit students at their schools to protest or walk out. Teachers and school staff are free to participate in activities outside of school time. Teachers must refrain from either penalizing or incentivizing student participation in walkouts.

If students are planning a walkout, can teachers serve as chaperones to ensure safety as long as they are not protesting?

If allocation of non-teaching staff is insufficient to manage the walkout, teachers may be assigned to supervise students who walk out. Any CPS employee who has that assignment must perform supervisory duties only. Administrators should engage teachers or their Professional Problems Committee (PPC) on how best to assign teachers/staff.

Should schools encourage conversations about the issues related to the walkouts?

- It is appropriate in classes or special school events to create an environment in which students of all viewpoints feel that they can express themselves in a safe and respectful environment. Schools should take this opportunity to teach students how to respectfully deliberate on political issues with both evidence and an open mind.
- Discussions should be centered on student expression of views and perspectives. School staff and/or teachers must remain neutral and be careful not to impose their personal political perspectives and beliefs on students.
- For ideas on how to incorporate learning around these issues, **find classroom resources for teachers [here](#)**.

Participation by External Organizations/Community Partners

Community engagement is a key component of our priorities. At some schools, external organizations and community partners may express interest in participating in or supporting student efforts. The following guidelines apply:

- External organizations and members of the public are not permitted to join in any in-school programming (inside of the building or on school grounds.)
- If student organizers decide that they wish to partner with an external organization, schools should create opportunities for students to participate in a safe environment. If you have any questions or concerns, contact your network chief.