STUDENT DISRUPTIONS AND DEMONSTRATIONS 5.301

Purpose and Authority – The Sarasota County School District has a primary responsibility to maintain a safe, orderly learning environment for all students and staff, and to ensure that instructional time and school operations are not materially and substantially disrupted, and to prevent such disruption when school officials can reasonably forecast that such it is likely to occur.

Additionally, the District recognizes that at times students in public schools retain First Amendment rights to freedom of speech and expression while on school grounds, however these rights may not infringe on the rights of others or interfere with the orderly operation of the schools.

This policy is adopted pursuant to the School Board's authority under section 1001.43(1)(d), Florida Statutes, which expressly authorizes district school boards to "provide procedures for managing protests, demonstrations, sit-ins, walk-outs, or other acts of civil disobedience," and is intended to balance student expressive rights with the District's obligation to protect health, safety, and the educational mission of the schools. This policy applies equally to all demonstrations, regardless of the subject matter, cause, or viewpoint expressed.

I. Definitions – For the purposes of this policy, the following definitions apply:

a. "Demonstration" – Any organized or expressive activity by students intended to convey a political, social, religious, or ideological message, including but not limited to protests, sit-ins, walkouts, rallies, marches, chanting, sign-holding, symbolic expression, or other similar conduct, whether planned or spontaneous, that occurs on school property, at school-sponsored activities, or during the school day.

b. "Disruptive Conduct" – Student speech or behavior that materially and substantially interferes with classroom instruction, school-sponsored events or activities, the orderly operation of the school, or the rights or safety of others, regardless of the viewpoint expressed, or for which school officials can reasonably forecast that such material and substantial disruption will occur.

c. "Protest" – A form of student expression, verbal or symbolic, through which students communicate disagreement with, opposition to, or support for a particular idea, policy, action, or issue.

d. "School-Sponsored Event or Activity" – Any event or activity the school creates or hosts for students to study or participate in while in the custody of the school district including field trips, extracurricular activities, or other supplemental programs and activities.

e. "School Day" – The period of time school is in session from the first bell signaling the start of the class to the final bell signaling student dismissal.

f. "Sit-In" – A demonstration in which students occupy school property or facilities

in a manner that interferes with normal operations or access.

g. "Walkout" – A form of demonstration in which students leave scheduled classes or instructional areas without authorization during the school day.

II. Recognition of Student Free Speech Rights – The Sarasota County School Board affirms each of the following:

a. During the school day, students maintain their constitutional rights to freedom of speech and expression, but those rights are not unlimited in the public school setting.

b. Student speech and expression is protected to the extent it does not constitute disruptive conduct that materially and substantially interferes with school day or school-sponsored events or activities or infringe upon the rights of others.

c. The district shall remain viewpoint neutral and shall not regulate student expression based on disagreement with the content or message of such expression.

III. Reasonable Time, Place, and Manner Restrictions – To ensure the orderly operation of schools, the District may impose time, place, and manner restrictions on demonstrations provided the restrictions are applied consistent with constitutional principles governing student speech, including the requirement that restrictions be reasonable, content-neutral, tied to legitimate educational interests, and leave open other channels for student expression. Consistent with this, the District may:

a. Prohibit demonstrations that constitute disruptive conduct that materially and substantially disrupt instruction during the school day or during a school-sponsored event or activity.

b. Limit organized, non-disruptive demonstrations that require coordination to designated non-instructional times or areas.

c. Restrict the use of sound amplifying devices, signs, or other items when their use constitutes disruptive conduct.

IV. Attendance Expectations – Participation in a demonstration that constitutes disruptive conduct that involves leaving an assigned classroom or campus during the instructional school day will be treated as an unexcused absence for all class periods missed and subject to discipline in accordance with the Code of Student Conduct.

V. Discipline – Students who engage in demonstrations remain subject to all Board policies, school rules, and the Code of Student Conduct. Disciplinary action shall be imposed based on the disruptive conduct, not the content of expression and shall be administered consistently and proportionately when a student does any of the following:

a. Engages in disruptive conduct after appropriate warnings where feasible;

b. Fails to comply with lawful and valid directives of school staff and/or school administrators;

c. Endangers the safety of anyone on campus;

d. Engages in vandalism, trespass, threats, or other unlawful actions.

e. Organize, direct, lead, incite, or facilitate student demonstrations that constitute disruptive conduct which occur on school property.

VI. Staff Neutrality and Responsibilities – All district employees are expected to maintain professional conduct in accordance with state law, Board policies, and Rule 6A-10.081, F.A.C. Principles of Professional Conduct for the Education Profession in Florida. Nothing in this section shall be interpreted to restrict staff members from engaging in protected speech. Failure of staff to adhere to this policy may result in progressive discipline, in accordance with applicable law and the Collective Bargaining Agreement. All staff members are expected to:

a. Maintain professional neutrality with respect to student demonstrations or disruptive conduct during duty hours.

b. Not encourage, discourage, organize, or lead student participation in demonstrations or disruptive conduct in their official capacity.

c. Take reasonable steps to supervise students under their control and enforce Board policies and procedures when demonstrations or disruptive conduct occurs.

d. Refer potential safety concerns or disruptive conduct to school administration promptly.

VII. Outside Organizations and Third-Party Involvement - No outside individual, organization, or group, including political, advocacy, religious, or social organizations, may organize, direct, lead, facilitate, supervise, or materially assist student demonstrations that constitute disruptive conduct on school property, during the school day, or at a school-sponsored event or activity. Violations of this policy involving any outside individual, organization, or group if disruptive conduct occurs may result in administrative action, including, but not limited to, removal of non-authorized individuals from campus, termination of any partnerships or contracts (where applicable), ineligibility for future partnerships or contracts for a period of two years (where applicable), and requirement of School Board approval of future partnerships or contracts. When disruptive conduct has occurred, nothing in this section prohibits students from independently expressing viewpoints that may be similar to or aligned with those of outside organizations, provided the demonstration otherwise complies with this policy.

VIII. Administrative Authority and Law Enforcement Involvement – School administrators are authorized to take reasonable steps to prevent or address disruptive conduct on campus, protect student and staff safety, and restore order to continue

instructional activities. Law enforcement assistance may be requested when necessary to address unlawful conduct or imminent safety threats and shall be used as a last resort consistent with District safety protocols.

IX. Review and Enforceability – This policy shall be reviewed in accordance with District policy review procedures or as needed due to changes in state or federal law, applicable administrative rules, or district needs. If any provision is found invalid or unenforceable, the remaining provisions shall remain in full force and effect.

STATUTORY AUTHORITY:

1001.41, 1001.43(10), F.S.

LAWS IMPLEMENTED:
1001.43, 1003.02, 1003.32, 1003.4505, 1006.07, 1006.09, F.S.

Rule 6A-10.081, Florida Administrative Code

HISTORY:

ADOPTED: 04/21/2026
REVISION DATE(S):
FORMERLY:

NOTES: