DISTRICT NEWS RELEASE

HAYS CONSOLIDATED INDEPENDENT SCHOOL DISTRICT

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Statement Regarding Hays CISD Student Protests

Today students from Hays CISD campuses staged protests by walking out of classes and their respective school buildings. These protests were not condoned by the district, nor did the district enable the behavior. The district must recognize the right of students who did not protest to have disruption-free environments and protected classroom instruction time. Students who chose to participate in the walkouts did so on their own accord and classes continued for students who did not participate.

Skipping Class Not Allowed in Hays CISD

Leaving class without permission or skipping class is against the rules in Hays CISD. Additionally, the district has policies and procedures in place that govern when campuses can be used for non-school activities. Many of these rules were violated by those who chose to protest. Accordingly, students who left campus without permission during the school day will receive unexcused absences and face other potential, applicable disciplinary action.

Safety is Priority

In addition to protecting instruction time, safety is a paramount consideration for students while at school. Teachers and campus administrators who were not teaching class at the time of the protests did monitor the protestors while they were on campus in an effort to preserve order and security. It is the district's understanding that local law enforcement officers assisted in monitoring protesting students who chose to march off of district property – also to make sure students remained safe.

Hays CISD Does Not Participate in Political Activity

As a governmental entity that serves tens of thousands of citizens with a vast array of political opinions and views; Hays CISD recognizes that the district belongs to everyone and consistently maintains neutrality in matters that are politically charged. The district does this because it is required by law, but also because it is the right thing to do. While individuals within the system retain a right to their own beliefs on their own time; as an entity, the district does not take a stand. It is important to note that the hardworking and professional campus and district staff and administrators in Hays CISD recognize this. They are tasked with many difficult things in their profession, including – from time to time – addressing student protests. These dedicated staff members are not politicians. They have no need for and don't seek votes or campaign contributions; nor are they ever up for election.

Freedom of Expression

Though the district takes a strong stance on the integrity of the instructional day, it is not void of understanding the current climate in the country and can respect that some students may feel compelled to exercise their constitutional rights to free speech and expression. Sometimes, individuals feel so motivated to express their views that, upon weighing the potential consequences of breaking the rules, they are willing to accept the ramifications of their actions. In a precedent setting 1969 Supreme Court decision (Tinker v. Des Moines Independent Community School District), the court recognized that students in public schools retain their First Amendment rights concluding, "It can hardly be argued that either students or teachers shed their constitutional rights to freedom of speech or expression at the schoolhouse gate."

The district hopes that all students, regardless of their positions on the issues or choices whether to participate in the protests, will use this as a learning opportunity to better understand their rights and freedoms, and the responsibilities that accompany them.

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