

February 18, 2026

Dear Parents and Community Members,

Yesterday, approximately 100 students from Gervais High School participated in a walk-out to protest recent ICE activities. This was a student-led action and was not organized, endorsed, or sanctioned by the high school, any staff members, or the district. High school administration became aware last Friday that a walk-out was being discussed and immediately sought guidance from the district office and legal counsel.

Based on advice grounded in federal law and local board policy, the school's response was clear and measured. Staff were informed of the possibility of a walk-out and directed to continue instruction so that students who chose not to participate would receive a full instructional day. Students who chose to leave campus were marked with an unexcused absence and were not permitted to return until the end of the school day.

Students have a constitutional right to freedom of speech and peaceful expression. The United States Supreme Court has consistently upheld students' rights to engage in non-disruptive protest. At the same time, the district has an obligation to maintain safe and orderly schools and to protect the instructional rights of students who choose not to participate. Once students leave campus during the school day without authorization, they assume a different status under our policies. Not allowing students to return mid-day was not punitive; it was a predictable and consistent consequence intended to prevent disruption to classes already in session.

As many of you know, this is a difficult line to navigate. Our schools are not political institutions. They are neutral spaces dedicated to learning, growth, and support for every student—regardless of background, belief, or viewpoint. We will always work to protect students' rights while also maintaining safe and focused learning environments.

When students walked toward Highway 99, high school administration contacted the Oregon State Police, who did respond and monitor the situation for a period of time. Out of concern for student safety, we also contacted the Gervais Police Department multiple times requesting assistance. We cannot confirm whether they responded. Our primary focus throughout the event was ensuring that students were as safe as possible once they had left campus.

It has been disheartening to read some of the public commentary directed at staff and students in the aftermath of this event. Assumptions have been made about actions taken during a rapidly evolving situation without full knowledge of the facts. It is also inappropriate for adults to disparage or argue with high school students on social media. Our students deserve guidance and modeling from adults even when we disagree with their choices.

Many community members are also aware of the district's ongoing disagreement with the City regarding the required sidewalk construction tied to the middle school project. The district is required to issue a check for just over \$243,000 in bond funds to the City before receiving the final occupancy permit. The city will then be responsible for constructing a sidewalk. I publicly

expressed concern about this requirement because of the supervision and safety challenges it creates.

Even without the sidewalk currently in place, students were able to access Highway 99 quickly, where supervision became extremely limited. The proximity of the abandoned Fiber Fab building and the direct access to a major highway already create safety concerns for school staff when trying to monitor student activity and activity in the high school parking lot. Any additional pedestrian infrastructure in that area will require ongoing attention and monitoring from local law enforcement and city officials.

Our responsibility as a district is to uphold student rights, maintain safe schools, and protect instructional time for all learners. Yesterday's event required us to balance each of these obligations carefully and lawfully. We will continue to review our procedures, communicate clearly, and work with local partners to ensure student safety remains our top priority.

We ask our community to approach these situations with patience, facts, and a shared commitment to the well-being of all Gervais students.

Sincerely,
Dandy Stevens
Superintendent
Gervais School District