

Laconia High School community may join March 14 gun violence protest



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In what Superintendent Brendan Minnihan believes will be a unique, teachable moment, the entire Laconia High School community, including students, teachers, and administrators, may walk out of classes later this month to protest gun violence. (JOHN KOZIOL/Union Leader Correspondent)



- **Inter-Lakes students could face discipline for proposed gun violence protest**

LACONIA — Details are still being worked out, but Superintendent Brendan Minnihan said it's possible the entire Laconia High School community — including students, teachers, and administrators — will walk out of classes March 14 to protest gun violence.

“The hope and expectation is that the walkout will be a teachable moment,” Minnihan said Thursday. “We like students to feel that their voice matters and the teachable moment comes in first explaining that their voice matters.”

As of Thursday, 1,855 walkouts have been scheduled nationwide for March 14, according to womensmarch.com, which has called upon students, teachers, school administrators, parents and supporters at secondary schools and colleges to walk out between 10 a.m. to 10:17 a.m. — one minute for each of the Feb. 14 school shooting victims in Parkland, Fla.

Minnihan said Laconia High School students reached out to administrators to say they wanted to take part in the March 14 walkout

After setting some basic ground rules — like keeping the walkout voluntary, brief and free of violence and confrontation — he said administrators began pondering “what’s the education or social benefit coming out of this?”

Once the walkout concludes, the conversations will begin between students and teachers, said Minnihan.

In addition to teachers and staff keeping an eye on Laconia High School students during the walkout, Laconia police will be there, too, said Chief Matt Canfield.

The department has a school resource officer at the school and officers on patrol are required to regularly stop at all schools to make their presence known, said Canfield.

The chief praised the close working relationship between police and Laconia schools, noting that the parties combined to secure some \$500,000 in grants that will be used to “harden” schools.

New doors, locks and camera surveillance equipment will be installed, said Canfield, as will window film. Each of the measures is designed to slow down a shooter, with the window film transforming easily shattered plate glass into the equivalent of auto safety glass that remains mostly solid, tedious and time-consuming to remove.

Having routinely done active-shooter drills and also studied the FBI’s standardized approach to such situations, Laconia police officers know they have seven to eight minutes to take action, said Canfield, noting that when the alarm is raised, each officer can act alone or as part of a team.

School safety, and what Laconia schools and the Laconia Police Department are doing to ensure it will be a topic of public conversation at Laconia High School on March 7.

School safety is constantly evaluated and updated, said Canfield, who added that a goal is to use some grant money to outfit Laconia schools with closed-circuit cameras that feed to monitors at the police department.

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