

“We’re just allowing kids to grieve and show compassion.” - Brad Skeritch, Southwestern Superintendent

Jersey County students take a stand on National Walkout Day

By Rachel McGlasson

On March 14, thousands of students across the country walked out of their classrooms to participate in protests, rallies and silent sit-ins as part of a call for action against gun violence. Jersey Community High School students and Southwestern school district students were just some of those involved in the national movement.

National Walkout Day was the first of many other planned protests throughout March and April as part of the #NeverAgain movement. The protest comes exactly one month after the shooting in Parkland, Fla., which left 17 dead.

JCHS Principal Cory Breden said JCHS had just less than 30 students who participated in the 17-minute-long protest. The number, he said, was surprising.

“I didn’t know just how many of our students were going to participate,” Breden said.

“Leading up to the day, we didn’t hear a lot of our kids talking about it. We have right around 1,000 kids here at JCHS so I think the number was pretty high.”

Southwestern had higher numbers of students participating. Superintendent Brad Skeritch said approximately 150 students from the middle school hung white and burgundy ribbons in front of the school on the day of March 14 and approximately 50 to 75 high school students had a moment of silence around the flagpole during the 17 minute protest.

While he didn’t know of the magnitude of students who would participate, Breden said JCHS was ready no matter how many students participated.

“I talked to the faculty about the possibility of how many [students] came out. Our superintendent, resource officer and two district administrators were here that day,” Breden said. “I also contacted the Jerseyville Police Department. We just wanted to make sure the kids were safe and properly supervised while out there.”

Skeritch said his district worked with students to plan the safest way for students to protest.

“The district committed to allowing students to better understand what is occurring in our country and allowing students to display compassion to the victims of the tragic event,” Skeritch said.

In both districts, no disciplinary action was taken against the students who walked out. At JCHS, administration instead worked and spoke with the students afterwards to try and help them understand the importance of their actions.

“I asked all the students to come into our conference room after [the protest],” Breden said. “We talked about the reasons why they did their protest and I talked to them about the importance of letting us know if one of their friends or classmates is having trouble that may indicate that they’re going to hurt themselves or potentially hurt someone else.”

Breden said he stressed to the students the importance of making faculty and staff aware if an issue like that were to occur.

Skeritch emphasized that allowing students to participate in the protest and safely supporting their actions is not a political stance by the district. Instead, it is a way to encourage students to grieve.

“The district is not taking a position on political discussions currently taking place in our

country and we'll remain neutral," Skeritch said. "There's been a lot of debate and discussion out there. We're just allowing kids to grieve and show compassion."