

Macomb County students participate in National School Walkout Day



On the one-month anniversary of the Parkland, Fla. school shooting, Warren Mott students leave classes and gather outside to honor both the victims killed and the survivors of the deadly shooting during the peaceful protest in Warren. BRANDY BAKER -- FOR THE MACOMB DAILY

By [Don Gardner](#), The Macomb Daily

Posted: 03/14/18, 5:20 PM EDT | Updated: 2 hrs ago



Chanting “I matter, you matter, we all matter,” students at Lakeview High School in St. Clair Shores walked one lap around the track at their event, which was held after the school day ended. MITCH HOTTS -- THE MACOMB DAILY

One month after the mass shooting at a Florida high school that killed 17 people, students in several Macomb County districts left their buildings for 17 minutes Wednesday as part of the National School Walkout to protest gun violence in schools.

About 380 students at Utica Academy for International Studies stood in solidarity with thousands of students across the country to honor the 17 students and staff members killed in Parkland, Fla. and demand an end to the violence.

Intermittently shouting “Enough is enough,” “We want change,” and “Keep us safe,” the students marched around the school building four times in 17 minutes.

Some were carrying signs to remember the victims of a school shooter at Stoneman Douglas High School; others demanded changes in national gun laws.

Many wore orange T-shirts under their winter jackets, the color that has become a national symbol of solidarity in the effort to stop gun violence. Other students chose to walk arm-in-arm for the 17 minutes -- representing the 17 people gunned down at Stoneman Douglas High School.

School administration for the International Baccalaureate World School monitored various points around the school with walkie-talkies while a Sterling Heights police officer was parked nearby. The walkout was orderly, and students were respectful of the moment.

School administrators said a small group of students chose not to participate or were denied attendance by their parents. A Macomb Daily reporter was asked not to speak to students during the walkout.

“This was my first walkout, and I have a feeling this won’t be the last one,” Principal Shaun Green-Beebe said. “I’m exceptionally pleased with the way our students behaved. They were very respectful, very responsible -- pretty much exactly what we anticipated.”

The #Enough! National School Walkout, nationally organized by the Women’s March Network, was expected to include more than 3,000 schools across the country. It is being called one of the largest student walkouts in history.

The walkouts were scheduled to begin at 10 a.m. in each respective time zone. The agendas varied, but in general, they were designed to be peaceful, non-political in nature, and aimed at protesting gun violence in schools, reflect upon lives lost, discuss school safety, and call for changes in laws to protect school children.

Individual schools also planned to discuss the importance of treating fellow students with kindness and respect, achieving universal background checks, calls for bipartisanship and a ban on bump-fire stock.

Green-Beebe said organizing the walkout showed initiative by the students. She said guidelines that were established were developed by the students, in concert with administrators.

“The fact that we’re in this environment every day, and what’s happening in our schools is troubling -- troubling to the students, troubling to me as an administrator and troubling to me as a parent,” Green-Beebe said.

“I would never want to take away their First Amendment rights, I would never want to put a child in harm’s way. But by the same token, I think this is something that most of our students feel very passionate about.”

In other local districts:

- At Dakota High School in Macomb Township, one of two Chippewa Valley Schools high schools participating in the event, senior class president Mackenzie Bailey led a walkout that was contained inside the school building for safety concerns. Student leadership set up locations in different parts of the school to speak on various topics.

Bailey spoke about anti-bullying and unifying the student body.

“I was nervous at first about how this would turn out, but it was about impacting people and making people feel more empowered,” Bailey said. “I’m happy we were able to do this. Maybe we can give students a voice they haven’t heard yet and have a unified voice for a cause.”

Bailey said she and her fellow students felt like they were part of something bigger than themselves.

“It really unified us that we can really do something,” she said. “Even if we’re just high school kids, we have a voice.”

Dakota Principal Paul Sibley said about one-third of the 3,000 member student body took part in the walkout. Students who did not participate remained with teachers in class. He added that just because students didn’t participate, it didn’t mean they were against the cause.

Both Sibley and Green-Beebe acknowledged some of the criticism from the community, particularly parents, for allowing the walkout to take place. Sibley said it was anything but a waste of time, as some who were opposed the walkout claimed.

“Today couldn’t have gone better. Our student leaders were very organized,” Sibley said. “They did an impressive job of communicating an important message and getting fellow students to buy into what they wanted to accomplish today. This was a powerful day for students who took part and talked about things that are so important.”

- At Lakeview High School in St. Clair Shores, students organized a You Matter movement that took place at the end of the school day.

About 100 high school students, teachers, staff members and students from nearby Jefferson Middle School held up posters and signs to show their support, and observed a moment of silence for those killed in the Feb. 14 incident in Parkland, Fla.

The students then completed one lap around the track, chanting: “I matter, you matter, we all matter.”

“Mostly for us, we just want our voices to be heard and we want to make a difference, especially in the community. Even if it doesn’t start with us, it’s a national movement,” said Erica Beckstrom, a Lakeview junior.

Megan Dombrowski, a junior who co-organized the event with Beckstrom, said there was no specific agenda involved — just a reminder to be nicer and more polite to everyone they encounter.

“We want everyone’s opinions to be respected, and in this political climate, it’s too partisan,” she said. “No one’s working together. If we make our voices heard by one another in a respected way, and get to have an open conversation, something will have to come out of it.”

Scott Kapla, Lakeview principal, said he didn’t want students to walk out of school in the morning because he was concerned about safety and disruptions. But he was proud of those who stayed after school to participate.

“It shows the student leadership is committed to making sure everyone knows that whoever steps foot in our building, everybody matters,” he said.

- At Roseville High School, there didn’t seem to be any organized program as students milled about outdoors as Principal Pat Adams and several police officers watched over the crowd. Some students appeared to have walked off campus to a nearby party store but returned as the event wrapped up.

Macomb Daily Staff Writer Mitch Hotts contributed to this report