

Local high school students join national walkout

By John T. Miller



Students who participated in the nationwide walkout at Miramonte could register to vote and write postcards to elected representatives at tables set up on campus. Photo John T. Miller

Hundreds of high school students in the Lamorinda area participated in the national walkout protesting gun violence, joining over 3,000 other participating schools in the movement that took place at 10 a.m. March 14 across the nation's time zones and Puerto Rico.

Mercifully, it seems, the heavy rains abated for the 17-minute event here, and returned just moments after the student protests were over.

At Miramonte, students from the Acalanes Union High School District organization Equiteam organized and ran the event. Areeba Yasin, Zahra Hasanian and Thalia Kelly set up tables for voter registration, post card writing to the area's elected officials, and gave out orange ribbons representative of the #neveragain movement.

They chanted slogans such as "No hate, no NRA or gun violence in the USA," "Keep your guns out of our schools," and "When do we want this? Never again!"

Many teachers wore orange in support of the protests, and one woman, a parent and a teacher, wore a flak jacket.

A teacher commented that he believed "the NEA and the NRA should be going toe-to-toe, and I'm wondering where my union is on this."

The event ended with a long and heartfelt minute of silence for the shooting victims in Parkland, Florida.

Miramonte principal Julie Parks praised the students who organized the event, and said, "We believe in supporting the students' freedom of speech and encourage them to have have a voice. Students who chose to leave class early were asked to submit a reflective statement as an appropriate consequence for missing class."

At Acalanes High School, approximately 300 students joined the national multitude and walked out of classes. The students gathered in the front quad and silently walked to the corner of Pleasant Hill Road and Stanley Boulevard where they stayed for the duration of the walkout.

Kate Gilbert and Fiona Warburton, seniors who led the event,

walked through the crowd and gave a somber recital of the names of each of the victims of the Parkland shooting.

In a letter home to parents, Acalanes principal Travis Bell stated, "This was not a school-sponsored event, as walking-out is not something we can plan or promote." He also stressed that appropriate consequences would reinforce the school's "core values of respect, engagement, and student safety." Like Parks, he affirmed students' Constitutional right of free speech.

After the walkout, Academy sessions were available for all students to write letters to the families in Parkland, Florida.

Over 200 students chose to walk out of class at Campolindo High School to attend the student-led rally for school and public safety and show solidarity with the national movement.

Sofia West, a junior, along with a group of fellow students, organized the rally. Participants gathered in the main quad area of the school and listened to a pair of student speakers, Sam Nunn and Fiona Deane-Grundman, who delivered compelling messages about gun violence and its effects.

At the end of the event, student leaders had information for registering and preregistering to vote.

Principal John Walker called it "a powerful display of student activism and a clear call for increased school safety."

The events at the AUHSD schools meant students missed five minutes of their fourth period block and the first two minutes of the Academy period. All three schools called on their respective police departments, school administration, and other personnel to help supervise those who decided to walk out in order to ensure the students' safety.

At Bentley School in Lafayette, the entire student body of approximately 350 students participated in the walkout, gathering in the sports field for a reading of the 17 names.

Afterward, students had their choice of activities, from creating art and video messages to the victims' families, letter writing, or talking about issues such as safety,

gun laws, and how they wanted their futures to look.

Arlene Hogan, head of school for Bentley, said, "The students were remarkable. They were very passionate about participating."

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