

# **East St. Louis School District 189 and students team up against gun violence**

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EAST ST. LOUIS - Some school districts across the country have punished students who have walked out of class to rally against gun violence. But East St. Louis District 189 has teamed up with students to allow youth to have their voices heard in a safe and constructive way.

East St. Louis schools will recognize a National Day of Action to Stop Gun Violence in Schools April 20, which marks the 19th anniversary of students at Columbine High School in Colorado being massacred by two of their classmates who brought weapons to their campus.

In order to respect the authenticity of youth voice and support the development of youth advocacy skills, District 189 will advance the following actions, according to Superintendent Arthur Culver:

- All staff and students are invited to wear orange, the national symbol for supporting peaceful schools on Friday, April 20.
- All secondary social science classrooms will devote Thursday, April 19 and Friday, April 20 to discussions about social justice and student activism. This will include discussion about how communities of color and poverty have and are impacted by gun violence, statistics about gun violence, youth agency, and the history of student-led resistance that have sparked positive change. Students will create posters that summarize their classroom conversations.
- Student-created posters will be posted within the school building for the week of April 23-27 and students will be invited to take a gallery walk to contemplate the reflections.
- Students at East St. Louis Senior High School and Wyvetter Younge Alternative Center will participate in school-wide assemblies held during the final class period on Friday. The assembly will include a guest speaker and will culminate with a moment of silence to remember the victims of the Columbine school shooting and others of gun violence. Outside of the building, members of the Superintendent's Student Advisory Council will release 15 balloons -- one for each life extinguished during the horrific Columbine shooting incident.

Culver credited the students of the Superintendent's Advisory Council with creating the constructive ideas for the April 20 events. This effort fits with District 189's newly adopted strategic plan that includes expanding "platforms for developing student leadership and empowering student voice, aligned with community efforts to increase youth civic engagement, leadership and advocacy."

Meanwhile, activist groups across the country have called on students to walk out of schools on that date as part of a string of protests that have played out since the notable mass school shooting Feb. 14 in Parkland, Fla. in which 17 students were killed and another 17 injured.