

Dear North Carolina School Administrators, Educators and Officials:

Young people across our state and our nation are grappling with the aftermath of the mass shooting at Parkland High School. Students in North Carolina, shaken by this tragedy and inspired by the courage of their peers in Florida, are choosing to express their voices. In this rare moment it is incumbent on all of us to support, rather than suppress, their civic participation—to show them that their voices matter.

As educators, this tragedy presents a unique opportunity to take essential lessons of civic responsibility and political discourse beyond the classroom. We encourage you as educators to guide your students toward healthy civic engagement and to teach them the value and history of peaceful protest in creating change in our great nation. Just 58 years ago, North Carolina high school students participated in sit-ins in Greensboro and sparked our nation to act against segregation. Those sit-ins showed us the power of student voices. Today, once again, students can use their voices to make a difference.

There are many ways that you can nurture your students' participation in our democracy:

- **Do not punish students for participating in demonstrations**
- **Create opportunities for open dialogue where students with different viewpoints can have meaningful discussions**
- **Teach students about the history of student activism and how it has created positive change in our country**

The First Amendment was created to protect the right of the people to speak freely and to peacefully assemble, precisely to inspire dialogue on difficult topics—conversations that are the backbone of a healthy democracy. We encourage you to support your students who have found the courage to express their voice. Thank you for respecting North Carolina students' right to free speech.

Sincerely,



Chris Brook
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