

From Superintendent, Michael Payne

Information Regarding Potential Teacher Walkout

March 16, 2018

I am writing to address questions related to the potential April 2, 2018 teacher walkout requested by OEA (Oklahoma Education Association) and other teacher leadership groups.

At the March 12th regularly scheduled board meeting, the Board of Education of Verdigris Public Schools unanimously voted to approve authorizing the Superintendent to close schools for up to eight (8) days, provided that such days must be made up if required by law, with such a closure to occur only if a teacher “walkout” is scheduled by teacher groups or organizations and if the Superintendent determines that such school closures are necessary for the safety of students and for the fiscal integrity of the Verdigris School District in order to avoid the necessity of hiring substitute teachers. If the “walkout” exceeds 8 school days, the Board will meet to discuss authorizing the Superintendent to close schools additional days.

Additionally, the Board of Education approved a Resolution encouraging the Oklahoma Legislature to work urgently on behalf of the children and families in our state to take swift and meaningful action to develop a plan that includes a dedicated source of revenue that can be utilized to fund much needed, reoccurring salary increases that will be provided to public school teachers in Oklahoma and address the needs of common education funding now and into the future. *Please click on this link to read the Resolution in its entirety.*

I am hopeful that our legislators will address the issue of teacher pay in Oklahoma and support and restore public education funding, thus preventing this “walkout” from occurring. Please note that the potential teacher “walkout” is not only about teachers’ salaries, but is a demand for the Oklahoma Legislature to fund public education, which includes teachers’ salaries.

This is a very fluid situation and information is rapidly changing. Consequently, it is impossible for me to address all of the potential questions and scenarios. However, I want to provide the following Q&A as it relates to the potential walkout and what we know now.

Q: Why are the teachers planning a “walkout” in Oklahoma?

A: The Oklahoma Legislature has not given our teachers a pay raise in nearly a decade although Oklahoma teacher pay is among the lowest in the nation. Additionally, the Oklahoma Legislature has not provided a dedicated source to fund public education. This has resulted in Oklahoma schools receiving less funding per child in 2018 than they received in 2008. Additionally, our education funding, as a whole, is among the lowest in the nation. Educators believe this is the only way to get public education properly funded.

Q: Will classes be in session during the proposed “walkout”?

A: Classes will not be in session during a teacher “walkout”.

Q: Will days that school is out during the “walkout” have to be made up?

A: Yes. However, we are an “hours district” which means our students and teachers must complete a minimum of 1,080 hours of instruction time during the year to be in compliance with State Department regulations. If we have less than 1,080 hours of instruction time, we will risk having our State funding reduced proportionately to the shortfall of hours.

Following the “walkout” we will begin making up the time by using the 4 snow days built into our school calendar and the 2 days that we have not used as of today. Additionally, we will amend our school calendar and attend school on March 30th and be out of school on April 2nd. We can also attend 2 more days and still be out of school and in compliance with State requirements prior to the Memorial Day Weekend Holiday. If the “walkout” exceeds 8 days, the Administration will determine the best way to make up time, whether that means adding minutes to each remaining school day or adding more days to the school calendar after the Memorial Day Holiday.

Q: What about state testing for 3rd – 8th and 11th grade currently scheduled in April?

A: On March 12th, State Superintendent Joy Hofmeister wrote that there would be no change in the state testing schedules. However, we will work to modify our schedule based on the days school is not in session to make sure all required testing takes place. The only scenario that could prevent state testing from being made up is if the “walkout” exceeds the entire window available for state testing. We will communicate updated testing dates as soon as the information becomes available.

Q: What about the ACT test Verdigris Juniors are scheduled to take on April 3rd?

A: We are providing ACT testing on April 3rd and April 4th, and the make-up date will be April 5th. Students will be provided more information the week prior to the test. Students and parents will be responsible for transportation to and from Verdigris High School to take the exams.

If your student is scheduled to take the ACT on a Saturday, that test is nationally scheduled and will occur as scheduled.

Q: What about Graduation?

A: Graduation will be held as scheduled Friday, May 18th at the Union Multipurpose Activity Center (UMAC).

Q: What about Prom?

A: Prom will be held as scheduled Thursday, April 12th at the Mike Fretz Event Center.

Q: What about Northeast Tech, will those classes still occur?

A: Northeast Tech will be in session. If there is a “walkout” resulting in school cancellation, high school students should still attend their Tech classes. Students may drive themselves to their Tech campus or normal transportation procedures will be in place.

Q: What about concurrent (college) classes at TCC and RSU?

A: Off campus college classes are not affected by the “walkout” and will continue. Students should continue to attend these courses.

Q: Will extra-curricular activities take place if school is not in session due to a teacher “walkout”?

A: Currently, all athletic games and tournaments, fine arts competitions, concerts, extra-curricular activities, etc. will take place as previously scheduled.

However, as a result of the rapidly changing information, this could change. We are working with the OSSAA and other entities to make these choices and will provide more information as soon as decisions are made.

Q: What about practice for fine arts, athletics, and other activities?

A: At this time, all grade levels will be able to practice during their regular practice hours. If this changes, a notification will be provided.

Q: What about out-of-state trips planned for a competition, concerts, tournaments, etc.?

A: As Booster Clubs and students have conducted fundraisers for these events, they will still occur.

Again, I am hopeful that the Oklahoma Legislature will take the required steps to prevent a “walkout” by providing a dedicated source of revenue for reoccurring teacher salary increases and funding for common education, now and into the future. I encourage you to contact state lawmakers and let them know that it is time for them to fund education for our children.

- For House Members – <https://www.okhouse.gov/Members/Default.aspx>
- For Senate Members – <http://www.oksenate.gov/Senators/Default.aspx?selectedtab=0>
- Text your zip code to 520-200-2223 to receive a text with names and phone numbers
- Download the OAEC 56th Legislature Guide app from the Apple or Android store.

Thank you for your ongoing support of Verdigris Public Schools. Again, this is a very fluid situation and updates will be provided on the school website as information becomes available.