March 13, 2018

Dear Parents, Students and the Extended Tantasqua Community:

This Wednesday, March 14th, marks the one-month anniversary of the tragedy at Marjory Stoneham Douglas High School in Parkland, Florida. Since then our school and our student body have been managing a number of emotions. Consequently, some students contacted the high school administration, noting their intention to organize and participate in the National School Walkout on March 14th at 10:00 a.m.

In meeting with some student leaders over the past few weeks, it has become clear that the goal of the Tantasqua’s students planned participation is based on a desire to honor the students who perished in the Parkland tragedy with 17 minutes of silence, as well as others lives lost due to school violence. Our students hope to come together as a community to show its collective vigilance against violence and support of each other. This event is being led by students for students. At 10:00 a.m. students have planned to exit through the main foyer doors and walk out to an on campus location where they will meet for 17 minutes, after which they will return to classrooms. This is an opportunity to have our students model effective communication, civic and civil responsibility, respect for others, the acceptance of disparate points of view, and the articulation of thoughts and ideas - all of which are part of our core values.

In addition, at lunches this week, Student Council will offer all students the opportunity to sign a banner that will be mailed to the Parkland school. The banner will have a message to the effect of, “TRHS stands with Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School,” while keeping political motivations out of the discussion. Student council is also asking students to wear black clothing that day in honor of those 17 victims.

As this is an opportunity to promote civic learning and encourage thoughtful civic engagement, later this week, our history classes will present students with historical references to positive civic engagement in the United States. America’s public education system was founded on the belief that the survival of a democratic republic depends on an educated, informed and active electorate who can make reasoned and sound judgments that benefit the present and future populace. The law is fairly clear on the subject, as outlined in the Supreme Court’s landmark Tinker v. Des Moines decision. In that decision, the Court held that, first, students have a constitutional right to freedom of speech while at school and on school grounds, but that also must be balanced against maintaining orderliness in the school environment. Employing these standards, the Court’s baseline provides schools with the latitude to regulate freedom of speech if it will likely result in a substantial disruption of the educational process; material interference with school activities; or invasion of the rights of others. At TRHS we want to engage students in dialogue about thoughtful and meaningful approaches to freedom of expression, the right of assembly, the rights and responsibilities embodied in dissent, and the democratic processes that promote change.

Administration and local police will be on campus to ensure student safety during the event, and to secure the driveways leading up to the building to ensure that visitors do not pose any security risk to our students.
Parents/guardians who have appointments and arrive at that time will be directed to the field house parking lot and escorted to the building by administration or staff, should they arrive during the 10:00-10:20 window, when we anticipate this planned event to occur. Although some in the community may want to get involved in support of our students, this event is led by students for students only. It is essential that we as a community listen thoughtfully to our students and find ways to support them through our own active engagement in this issue.

As we are planning a regular day of school, students who do not wish to participate will stay in class during that period, where teachers can continue with normal instruction. Those students leaving class, who participate appropriately, will be responsible for making up any missed work that evening as homework and/or attend their next help session. Students will be asked to write a reflection, that could be shared with legislators, about why they felt compelled to participate in this civil act. Students who choose to participate but do so inappropriately, or in a way as to disrupt the planned activity - or who attempt to subvert the intentions of those organizing the event - will face consequences in accordance with the Student Handbook.

We are impressed, so far, with the maturity with which our students are approaching this event. We are hopeful to share in a civil civic discourse with our students. We are confident that it will connect our students to a world much bigger than their own high school while focusing on our collective responsibility to the community in which we live. And we are appreciative of our community and families for supporting our students, our staff, and our administration as we tackle these particularly challenging times and provide safe learning opportunities for our Warriors.

Sincerely yours,

Mike Lucas

Michael Lucas, Principal TRHS