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March 14, 2018

Chris Ragsdale, Superintendent
Cobb County School District
2601 Shallowford Rd, Marietta, GA 30066
chris.ragsdale@cobbk12.org

Chris Richie, Principal
Lassiter High School
2601 Shallowford Rd
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chris.richie@cobbk12.org

Dr. Andy Bristol, Principal
Kell High School
4770 Lee Waters Rd, Marietta, GA 30066
andy.bristow@cobbk12.org

Joseph D. Sharp, Principal
Sprayberry High School
2525 Sandy Plains Rd, Marietta, GA 30066
joseph.sharp@cobbk12.org

Via E-mail

Re: Reports of Physically Blocking Students From Participating in Walkout

Dear Superintendent Ragsdale and Principals Richie, Bristol, and Sharp,

Schools are not prisons. Yet today we have heard extremely disturbing reports that Lassiter High School, Kell High School, and Sprayberry High School physically prevented students from leaving the school to exercise their First Amendment right to walk out in protest against the nationwide school shooting epidemic.

If these reports are true, it is shocking and unconscionable that you would be so desperate to suppress the First Amendment rights of your students that you would physically lock them into the building—creating an extremely dangerous fire hazard—just to make a point. Such actions, if true, smack of unconstitutional intent to suppress the expression of speech you do not like in violation of the First Amendment. *See Cornelius v. NAACP Legal Def. & Educ. Fund, Inc.*, 473 U.S. 788, 812 (1985) (even facially neutral actions are unconstitutional if intended to “suppress a particular point of view”). They raise serious Fourth Amendment concerns as well.

We are dismayed by any school that would resort to intimidation, threats, and physical force to control their students, rather than take advantage of this historical opportunity to teach students important lessons about civic responsibility and how to exercise their First Amendment rights. As the United States Supreme Court explained nearly half a century ago, “state-operated schools may not be enclaves of totalitarianism. School officials do not possess absolute authority over their students.” *Tinker v. Des Moines Ind. Comm. Sch. Dist.*, 393 U.S. 503, 511 (1969). Any school official who treats students like prisoners does not deserve to be in the education business.

If you deny these reports, we suggest that you be prepared to respond to allegations and any proof to the contrary. If these reports are true, we suggest you issue an immediate apology and allow your students to express their speech in the manner that you sought to prevent, and to lend your aid to their effort. If you do not, you may be exposed to costly litigation.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Sean J. Young". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Sean" being more prominent than the last name "Young".

Sean J. Young
Legal Director
ACLU of Georgia