



## Civil Rights Groups Send Letter to Needville ISD Over Threats to Punish Student Protesters

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HOUSTON — Three civil rights organizations sent a letter to Needville ISD Superintendent Curtis Rhodes today regarding a recently deleted Facebook post in which Rhodes threatened to punish students with an automatic three-day suspension for participating in political demonstrations at school. In the letter, the ACLU of Texas, the Texas Civil Rights Project and Texas Appleseed expressed constitutional concerns over the superintendent's decision and reiterated the need to support students' political speech.

“Needville administrators can't censor political speech they might find distasteful, nor can they punish students more harshly for missing school to take part in a political protest than they would for any other unexcused absence,” said **Kali Cohn**, staff attorney for the ACLU of Texas. “Moments like this one create important opportunities for students to learn about civic engagement, and schools should support them—not punish them—as they use their political voices.”

Superintendent Rhodes's initial Facebook post threatened the disciplinary measure against students for “any type of protest or awareness!!” [sic]. According to the letter's signatories, such blanket bans of political expression raise serious constitutional concerns.

“Across the country, young people are making their voices heard on the issues that affect their lives,” said **Natalia Cornelio**, criminal justice program director with the Texas Civil Rights Project. “In this important moment in our democracy, we need to encourage their political voice; not suppress it. The Needville ISD's Superintendent's Facebook post threatening to suspend students for expressing their political voice raised serious legal questions that we hope are addressed with our letter. We encourage students, parents, and any other community members to know their rights when exercising their voice and we will fight to ensure that young people are not afraid to take action on the issues they care about.”

Along with the letter, the civil rights groups also sent Know Your Rights Materials useful both to students and administrators. Additionally, [the national office of the ACLU will host a nationwide training for students](#) who plan to participate in post-Parkland protests.

“Suspending students from school for adding their voices to an important public policy dialogue simply makes no sense,” said **Morgan Craven**, director of Texas Appleseed’s School-to-Prison Pipeline Project, “not only because they would be punished for behavior that is a highly valued part of our democratic process, but also because of the longer-term harms that flow from use of exclusionary discipline.”

[Read the letter sent by the ACLU, TCRP, and Texas Appleseed to Superintendent Rhodes.](#)

[View Know Your Rights material for political speech in schools.](#)

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