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# Obama to address your kids - or not

Local schools left to make decision on whether to air president's speech during class Tuesday; parents divided



AP President Obama will deliver a televised back-to-school speech Tuesday.

By DAVE HANEY (dhaney@pjstar.com) OF THE JOURNAL STAR  
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When kids across the country return to school Tuesday, some will see a televised, back-to-school speech from President Barack Obama, and some will not.

While state education officials say it's up to local school districts whether students hear Obama talk about the need to work hard and stay in school, area school districts are taking both sides, or in some cases, putting the decision in teachers' hands.

Peoria District 150 Superintendent Ken Hinton said Friday they are making the speech available for students.

"The president is speaking about the importance of education . . . it has nothing to do with the president's party affiliation, it is about our children knowing and realizing the great importance of acquiring a good education," Hinton said.

Elmwood Superintendent Roger Alvey says they've issued no mandate either way.

"Apparently, there's some national hysteria over this, though we've only gotten two calls," Alvey said. "We told the teachers if they have time to show it, fine, if not, don't worry about it. From what I've seen (the speech) is about goal setting, the importance of education and persistence . . . the day we start censoring the president is the day I really start to worry. (But) if parents do not want their child

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to watch, just let us know."

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Canton Union School District 66 Superintendent Roy Webb said high school students also will be given the option of watching the speech.

But calls by concerned parents have led many other schools not to tune in Obama's speech, to be delivered at 11 a.m. Tuesday.

IVC District 321 Superintendent Nick Polyak posted a letter to parents on the school's Web site why they are not.

"The timing of the address is during our lunch hours and we have received numerous phone calls from parents on both sides of this issue," Polyak said. "We have decided to leave this in the hands of our parents as to whether or not they would like to view the presidential address and have a discussion with their children."

East Peoria Community High School Superintendent Cliff Cobert said they were taking a similar stance.

"Some parents have called to inform us that they did not want the speech shown during class time. Parents can view the speech on the Internet, and we are encouraging parents to decide for themselves whether or not to view the speech," Cobert said.

Dunlap is delaying showing the speech until Wednesday to give parents a chance to view and then give them the option of allowing their children to watch or not, said Superintendent Jay Marino.

He said he heard from parents, some who voiced fear of potential political propaganda, or the president being "out of line" by requesting schools tune in, to those favoring its viewing. Marino said they still will treat the speech much like any other presidential address or "other historic event" on Wednesday.

Other school officials cited parental disapproval stemming from the president's belief system not aligning with their own.

At least one Peoria-area principal, who asked not to be named, said controversy about the speech, whether fair or not, has thrust her school and others into politics, with parents standing strongly on both sides. "It's a no-win situation," she said.

Transcripts of the speech are expected to be released by the White House on Monday and be available to read on the Internet.

Morton Superintendent Roger Kilpatrick asked teachers to review the text, adding it would be left up to teachers to decide. He also noted "any 'assignments' or 'classroom activities' suggested by the president or the Department of Education as part of this presentation are not part of our curriculum and need to conform to our curriculum."

On the U.S. Department of Education's Web site is a list of activities students can partake before, during and after the speech, some which pose specific questions including "What is the president trying to tell me?" and "What is the president asking me to do?"

"It is our impression that the president will voice his support for all students," said Farmington Superintendent Mark Doan, where students can view the address unless parents object and request their student not watch.

"We will respect their wishes," Doan said.

While Metamora Township High School Superintendent Ken Maurer said they were not considering viewing it, he noted: "I hate to see it degrade into this (controversy). That can be a pretty powerful message - encouraging kids to come to school regularly, study hard and take responsibility in their own education."

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In an e-mail, Pekin 108 Superintendent Bill Link said they also were not viewing it because of "technical and practical challenges. (But) the staff may use the broadcast or portions of it at a later date to take advantage of the relevant 'teachable moments.'"

Hinton said the Peoria school district received numerous calls from families stating they will keep students at home if the district chooses to show the speech.

"Parents have every right to do that, but I think it's our responsibility to promote education and the well-being of our children," Hinton said. "I'm old-fashioned, I got to tell you, regardless when the president of the United States speaks, I don't look upon him being a Republican, a Democrat, he is the president - in the future she might be the president and we listen to the president and what the president has to say."

The district was discussing whether the absence would be treated as excused or not.

*Dave Haney can be reached at 686-3181 or dhaney@pjstar.com.*

#### Comments (9)

dlosh 3 hours ago  Report Abuse


Sad that Bush did the same speech in 1991, Regan did one too and because this is a black Democrat we these 'critics'. The majority of people could care less but the minority will make their children political puppets.

MissyL 3 hours ago  Report Abuse

Oh do you really thing it's because he's a black president - come on. It's because our country is sliding down a slippery slope. Politics and religion should not be presented in the school. Those are issues that should be decided by the students parents. If parents want their kids to see this speech then they can show it to them. And for those parents that don't have the internet maybe the schools can set something up to present this after or before regular school hours. School is for math, science, reading, etc. - not politics. All it takes is one teacher to show this presentation and then feel the need to fill their students heads up with nonsense.

jla 2 hours ago  Report Abuse


LOL! Play the race card! Nonsense!

daviss13 2 hours ago  Report Abuse

How pathetic. Now Republicans can't even stand the president talking to their kids. What's next?

Rollie 2 hours ago  Report Abuse

I wish I could agree that race is not a factor, but for a portion of our public it is. Regarding politics in schools, it is very difficult to study the history of our country or review current events without talking about politics. The problem would be if the teacher pushed a particular political view rather than lead students as they explore the issues. I don't believe the President is pushing a political agenda, but rather encouraging the students to be responsible students. I am not sure how that message can be a bad thing. I guess the fact that the President is the one delivering the message and many in our conservative area disagree with the President about other issues is the problem. I guess if we disagree with one issue he is a bad man and we don't want anyone to think he also has some good ideas.

Phil Bayster 1 hour ago  Report Abuse

Conservatives have done a fantastic job of undermining Obama's credibility, and this is another great example.

While conservatives are suggesting that Obama might brain wash the children, the real brain washing is being done with the very implication that children should be 'protected' from hearing Obama. Everyone of those kids is now going to believe that Obama is somebody to fear.

When people won't allow the leader of their country to speak to its children, that country is in real trouble.


Our country is witnessing a new low, I shudder to think how much farther this is going to go.

BC 1 hour ago  Report Abuse

Obama is just one of a long line of presidents to make a speech to our school children. The teachers have had access to the content for the down loading for quite a while. The whole nonsense about this was started by some of the conservative talk show hosts and the regular media picked it up. Sort of blows the 'liberal press' claim out of the water doesn't it! Not a peep was made when the speaker was a republican president, the kids watched the speech. Show the speech, if they keep their kids home fine. Treat it as an unexcused absence. Sensible people of both parties aren't complaining. Limbaugh, and his ilk, have a mindless core of worshipers, they are the whiners. Limbaugh himself once said the republicans depended on him to do their dirty work. This isn't race it's pure politics.

SD 1 hour ago  Report Abuse

This whole thing is entirely insane. This man, whether we like him or not, is the freely elected leader of this country. He is our President. As for teaching math, english and such in school, we also teach history and civics and that is political whether you like it or not. How are the future citizens of our country going to learn how to run this country if they don't learn how politics works? The president is saying that he wants to encourage children to stay in school and learn all that they can to ensure a good future for them and for our country. I don't care if the man/woman is pink, purple, blue, black or white. Whoever it is, they are the President of our country and has the right to address the citizens of this country and that includes children. We have an amendment that says we have the right to free speech and that is exactly what he is doing. He is doing his level best to encourage education and those that are denying their children this pat on the back of encouragement are not giving their children a fair chance to see how great this country is and how great it can be in the future. Get behind the President and lets get things working in the proper order. Stop all this negativity just because you don't happen to like the person. This is from an old white lady and I support our President and I'm not a Democrat or Republican. I'm an Independent.

G\_man 45 minutes ago  Report Abuse


It would be irresponsible of a school district to not provide the opportunity. It is an outstanding learning experience. Like him or not, he is the President of the United States. His message is for the students of the nation. A school is the perfect forum for this event. And then followed up with a discussion at home. What are the protesting parties afraid of - That their child might begin to think? That their child might disagree with them? That discussion may occur rather than fear-mongering shouting? That their child is so feeble minded they could be brainwashed by a talking head on the television?

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