



Standing United

to Protect the Rights of Immigrant Students and Their Families

Dear Educators,

It is more important than ever that we stand united to defend the rights of immigrant children to safely attend school. The increased community enforcement actions by U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement and the hostile rhetoric around immigration policy are threatening the educational success of millions of immigrant children.

AFT members who work in schools—teachers, school support staff, nurses, bus drivers and other school personnel—play a critical role in helping end the cruel criminalization, detention and deportation of students and families. Educators are often the first responders to potential threats in schools and are the frontline protectors of our students. And as such, we must work to ensure that schools remain safe havens, welcoming places of learning free from discrimination, hate and the threat of deportation.

Schools should embrace all students and families, regardless of citizenship and national origin, including undocumented and unaccompanied children, beneficiaries of Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals and Temporary Protected Status, and refugee children. It's not only our moral obligation as educators—it's the law.

The law is clear. Denying children who reside in the United States a K-12 public education based on their immigration status, or the immigration status of their parents or legal guardians, is illegal. K-12 schools may not do anything to deny, deter or chill children's access to education, including by reporting or threatening to report them to ICE. These principles were established by the Supreme Court in Plyler v. Doe and by federal laws, and cannot be changed by the secretary of education, the attorney general, states, local law enforcement, school districts, a single school or any individual.

If you become aware that a school district or employee is discouraging students from enrolling or attending school, collaborating with ICE in any way or taking any other action that makes immigrant students feel unsafe due to their immigration status, please contact the AFT's human rights and community relations department at afthumanrights@aft.org or contact the AFT's legal department at 202-393-7472.

It's critically important that educators, school support staff and service providers know the tools and resources available to help enforce *Plyler*, the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act and other federal laws that protect

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the rights of immigrant youth, and the resources available to help support children and families who have been impacted by ICE raids.

Raids take an emotional, psychological and physical toll on developing children, youth and entire communities. Raids and other immigration enforcement actions drive undocumented and mixed-status families (households with a U.S. citizen and undocumented immigrant) further into the shadows and erode the trust built between educators and the students they teach and families they serve. Educators know that circumstances outside the classroom and school grounds have a huge impact on the educational success of students. They see the impact of these out-of-school factors in homework assignments, grades, interactions in class and extracurricular activities. Educators bear witness to the chilling effects of raids, including the emotional toll, chronic fear, anxiety and stress that consume students and their families on a daily basis.

The AFT understands that educators want the knowledge and confidence to stand up for their students, but they may need some guidance. To help, the AFT has partnered with several community-based organizations to launch a new initiative, Standing United to Protect the Rights of Immigrant Students and their Families, to help enforce *Plyler* rights, FERPA and other federal laws to support immigrant students and their families.

We hope this toolkit gives you the confidence and knowledge to:

- Send a letter to your district officials to remind them of their obligations to educate all children.
- Propose that your school district adopt safe zone/sanctuary policies. These policies provide safeguards and protections for undocumented students, including clear guidelines for interacting with immigration enforcement agencies and providing support and resources to students, their families and their communities. Several AFT affiliates have been instrumental in moving their school districts to adopt these policies.
- Host “know your rights” trainings for educators, students and their families.
- Provide resources on Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals renewal, Temporary Protected Status renewal and other kinds of immigration programs.
- Negotiate contract language that protects immigrant employees.
- Connect with organizations and rapid response networks in your area that help support children and families who have been affected by ICE raids. These organizations can assist in verifying raid/enforcement activity and connecting those affected with emergency legal support and other services.

The AFT’s human rights and community relations department and the AFT’s legal department, in partnership with community-based organizations, stand ready to assist you in your local efforts to protect our students and their families.