



Researchers Urge ICE to Return to Guidance Avoiding Schools



A nonpartisan organization of education scholars drew upon research evidence to make the urgent case for ceasing federal immigration enforcement actions in and around schools.

“Educators are reporting plummeting student attendance, decreased enrollments, emotional withdrawal, and fear and trauma associated with enforcement actions, regardless of the students’ immigration status,” National Academy of Education (NAEd) President and NEPC Fellow [Alfredo J. Artiles](#) wrote in a February 17th [letter](#) to the U.S. Department of Homeland Security and U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE). Artiles is Lee L. Jacks Professor of Education at Stanford University, and the letter was sent on behalf of the board of directors of NAEd, a 61-year-old organization consisting of 350 education scholars nominated by their peers on the basis of their work.

The letter was written in the wake of the Trump administration’s 2025

rescission of a 2011 guidance issued during the Obama administration, instructing ICE to do its best to avoid conducting enforcement activities around sensitive locations such as schools, hospitals, and churches. Over the past year, ICE has engaged in multiple operations in and around schools, including [highly publicized recent incidents](#) in the Minneapolis area.

Focusing on the very real harms to children, the letter explains:

In addition to involuntary separations, persistent threats of separation have significant implications for the mental health of children and families, interfering with healthy development. For children, these mental health harms of forcible separation and the threat of separation include toxic stress, long-term risk for psychiatric disorders, chronic anticipatory anxiety, disengagement, and heightened emotional distress.

The letter points, for instance, to a recent study concerning raids in California's Central Valley, which "coincided with a 22 percent increase in daily student absences, with particularly large increases among the youngest students."

The NAEd letter intentionally does not address the policy judgments underlying the Trump administration's choice to dramatically increase ICE enforcement. Nor does it weigh in on the ensuing violence, abuses and cruelty. Instead, it focuses narrowly on the research concerning school-adjacent enforcement, making the following four recommendations to ICE:

1. Ceasing immigration enforcement actions at our near schools—"except under tightly defined exigent circumstances."
2. Defining what is meant by in or near schools. For example, are school parking lots included? Playgrounds?
3. Requiring supervisor approval and post-enforcement reporting if it does become necessary to conduct operations in or near schools.
4. Training agents to ensure actions are compliant and uniform.

The letter concludes:

Implementing [these recommendations] . . . will allow educators the ability to focus on their important work and not have to prepare for potentially disruptive and traumatizing enforcement actions in schooling spaces. Moreover, all children can attend schools and childcare facilities without worrying that they, their friends, or their family members will be targeted, and all parents can drop their children off at schools and childcare centers without worrying that they will be caught up in a law enforcement raid.

NEPC Resources on Immigration

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