



Safe Zones for Learning Frequently Asked Questions

What does it mean for our district to create a “Safe Zone” for students?

First and foremost it means that we’re telling our students, regardless of their immigration status, or the status of their parents or family members, that we have their backs. We want them to know that their school is a safe and welcoming place to learn, and that teachers, school employees, and the school district are ready to stand by them, and that we’re going to do everything in our power to support and protect them and their right to an education.

Who has a right to a public education?

According to the U.S. Supreme Court, ***every child has a right to a public education regardless of immigration status.*** In *PLYLER V. DOE*, the Court ruled that states cannot withhold state funding for K-12 Education of undocumented students or allow districts to deny enrollment based on immigration status.

If that’s the law, then why is there a problem?

In a few cases, immigration officials have shown a willingness to skirt both this law and current federal enforcement guidelines to find ways to go into our schools and round up and deport undocumented students and/or their family members. Although these cases have been the exception rather than the rule so far, it’s not safe to assume that a new federal administration will act with the same restraint. For example, immigration officials could begin routinely demanding access to school enrollment records to target students and their families. Districts need to be clear that they will use every tool legally available to them to resist these and other attempts to turn school enrollment or attendance into a trap for undocumented kids.

What’s the first step in creating a Safe Zone for students in our district?

The first step is for our school board to pass the TSTA “Resolution Regarding the Board’s Commitment to a Safe Zone for Learning.” The resolution makes a clear statement, on behalf of our entire educational community, that we put our commitment to every student’s right to an education first. It recognizes that a safe, secure learning environment is integral to that right. The resolution also includes instructions from the board to district leadership and employees on concrete measures they should implement to put that commitment into action.

Isn’t immigration a federal issue? Why are we asking our local school board to act?

For us, this is an education issue, and our school board is primarily responsible for education policy in this district. Our students aren’t just a federal policy problem or pawns in a political game. They’re kids entrusted to our care who need to know that we will stand up for them. Federal immigration policy will ebb and flow with political tides. Our responsibility to nurture and protect these children is rock solid and doesn’t change.

Is this issue only about our undocumented students and their families?

No. At a time when we have an increasing number of examples of leaders and political movements trying to divide our communities along racial, ethnic, religious, and other lines, our students look to educators to set an example of how to respond. We need to show our students who might be swept along in the momentary tide of bullying, intolerance, and division that there is a better way.