

How You Can Help Protect Students from ICE's Cruelty

A guide to organize, build power, and strengthen your local school district's policies to keep ICE out of schools, and make sure immigrant New Yorkers in your community are as safe as possible.

Immediately after taking office, President Trump ended a policy that stopped immigration enforcement officers from entering "sensitive locations" such as churches, hospitals, and schools. The repeal of this policy has created fear, confusion, and anxiety among students, families, and educators, and led to a noticeable decline in attendance rates among immigrant students. In response, the NYCLU has created a model policy and accompanying tools. You can use these resources to advocate for stronger protections for immigrant students and families within your community.

We have received reports from across the state of ICE activity at or near schools. On the first day of the 2025-26 school year, ICE agents were spotted near Brentwood High School in Suffolk County, where they reportedly arrested an immigrant parent who was dropping off their 16-year-old child. ICE has also detained children and teens from their homes, immigration courts, and public locations. Each child taken leaves a classroom and a school reeling, sending fear and panic through the community.

The good news is you can take action. When communities come together to push back against ICE's campaign of terror, they get results. We have seen detained immigrant students and families released when a unified community of unlikely allies mobilized to act. Educators, elected officials, union members, faith-based organizations, and business leaders have collectively defended democracy and fought back against abuses of power by standing with unlawfully detained immigrants and rallying to demand their release.

You, too, can build power by coordinating and engaging networks of support in your community. And the NYCLU has your back.

We designed this toolkit for youth, parents, caregivers, school workers, and community members to organize. You can use these resources to defend your community against cruel immigration enforcement practices and to urge your school district to adopt a comprehensive policy for dealing with immigration enforcement. Our model policy affirms and strengthens the rights of immigrant kids to attend school and lays out a protocol to respond to requests from non-local law enforcement, such as ICE, for access to students or data.

First, read this [model policy](#) to protect immigrant students' right to attend school. This policy complies with New York and federal laws and includes best practices.

What is an ICE protocol and why do schools need one?

All New York residents aged five to 21 have the right to free public education, regardless of their immigration status or the status of their parents. This right is guaranteed and protected by the New York State Constitution. Additionally, all kids have the right to feel physically, emotionally, and psychologically safe while at school and on school buses. These rights are protected by New York laws, including our Human Rights Law and the Dignity for All Students Act.

We encourage school districts to use our model policy to create an ICE protocol (basically a list of procedures and policies) that protect these rights. That way, in an unexpected situation involving ICE, educators and school workers know what to do and can avoid harmful outcomes, such as a student being interrogated or detained by immigration agents on school grounds.

Having an ICE protocol reassures families, shields students from unlawful or unnecessary interactions with ICE agents at school, and limits ICE access to student data.

Ready to build power and make your school district safer for immigrant students?

Step 1: Find your School District's Immigration Enforcement and Student Data Protections

Read, review, and compare your district's existing local policies with the model policy. **As you locate policies and public statements online, take notes or paste links in the sidebar so you can come back to them easily.**

1. A school district's policies can be found on its website, under the tab "Board of Ed." They may be linked to a separate website named "BoardDocs," that stores school board agendas, minutes, and policies for access by the public.
2. To see if your school district has a policy on immigration enforcement, search "Policies" for these suggested terms:
 - a. Immigration, immigrant
 - b. Immigration enforcement
 - c. Unified immigration enforcement policy
 - d. Non-local law enforcement
3. If your school district does not have a specific policy on immigration enforcement, see if they have policies for when and how law enforcement can access the building.

NOTES

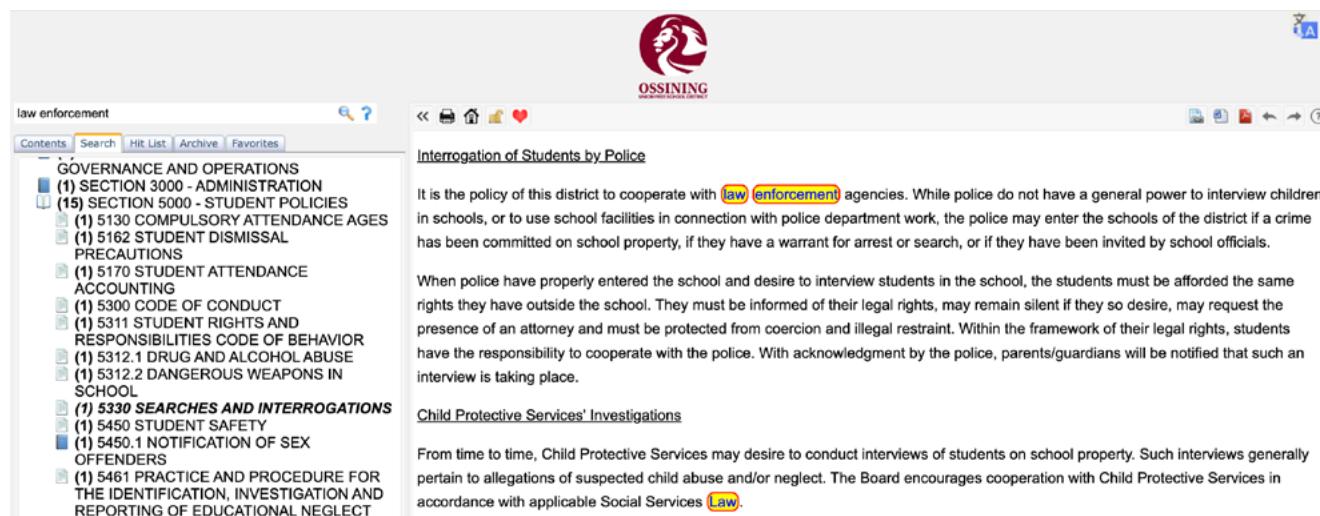
Try these search terms:

- a. Law enforcement
 - b. Police
 - c. Search
 - d. Arrest
 - e. Interrogate, interrogation
4. To find the school district's policy on student data protection, try these search terms:
- a. FERPA (Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act, a federal law that protects the privacy of student education records)
 - b. Student privacy policy
 - c. Directory information
 - d. Student data
 - e. Privacy and security for student data

Your district will have a FERPA policy or statement somewhere — but it may or may not specifically reference immigrant students and requests by ICE.

[Here is a good example of a comprehensive policy to protect immigrant students.](#) This policy is strong because it has a specific protocol for immigration officers. It follows New York State Education Department (NYSED) guidance and specifies that parental consent is required before law enforcement may have access to students or facilities, except in very limited situations.

An example of a New York school district with a troubling policy can be found [here](#):



The screenshot shows a web browser window with the Ossining School District logo at the top. The search bar contains the text "law enforcement". The search results on the left list various sections, with "(1) 5330 SEARCHES AND INTERROGATIONS" selected. The main content area displays the policy titled "Interrogation of Students by Police".

Interrogation of Students by Police

It is the policy of this district to cooperate with **law enforcement** agencies. While police do not have a general power to interview children in schools, or to use school facilities in connection with police department work, the police may enter the schools of the district if a crime has been committed on school property, if they have a warrant for arrest or search, or if they have been invited by school officials.

When police have properly entered the school and desire to interview students in the school, the students must be afforded the same rights they have outside the school. They must be informed of their legal rights, may remain silent if they so desire, may request the presence of an attorney and must be protected from coercion and illegal restraint. Within the framework of their legal rights, students have the responsibility to cooperate with the police. With acknowledgment by the police, parents/guardians will be notified that such an interview is taking place.

Child Protective Services' Investigations

From time to time, Child Protective Services may desire to conduct interviews of students on school property. Such interviews generally pertain to allegations of suspected child abuse and/or neglect. The Board encourages cooperation with Child Protective Services in accordance with applicable Social Services **Law**.

This policy, on the other hand, does not require parental consent before allowing law enforcement to interrogate students. It also explicitly notes that the district will generally cooperate with law enforcement agencies. This protocol is concerning because NYSED policy forbids law enforcement from interrogating students in schools about an issue that is not related to school without parental consent.

Strengthening Existing Policies vs. Creating New Policy

It's possible you won't have to start from scratch. Your school district leaders may have made public statements affirming their commitment to protect and welcome all students and families. But if their statements are not backed by written policy, you should share our model policy and urge them to adopt it.

Alternatively, you may find your district already has some policy on the books regarding immigrant students. If so, review your school district's policy, compare it to our model policy, and think about ways to strengthen it.

Some questions to ask when reviewing:

1. Do district policies explicitly direct school staff to cooperate with law enforcement and allow law enforcement to enter schools?
2. Does your district's ICE protocol include school buses?
3. Does your school district ask families to update their emergency contact information so that if a parent or guardian is detained there is another person designated to pick up the children?
4. Does your school have resources available for immigrant students and families, such as family preparedness packets with Know Your Rights (KYR) materials and legal resources in case parents or caretakers are detained by ICE?
5. Does your school administration provide adequate training to educators and school workers about the ICE protocol? To find out, ask educators and school staff: How was the training carried out? Was professional development provided, or was it just a flyer in your inbox?

Here's a [sample survey](#) to give educators and school staff to find out whether the district has an ICE protocol and what training if any school staff has received on it.

Step 2: Identify Changemakers

Who holds decision-making power in your district? Who in your community can influence those leaders?

Principals, superintendents, and other district personnel could be your allies – or they may be the focus of your advocacy. Do as much research as you can to understand the positions of relevant leaders.

School Boards in New York are elected bodies responsible for hiring and supervising the superintendent, approving the budget that will go to voters, and adopting policies for the district. Being a board member is a non-partisan, unpaid position. School board elections are typically held in May, and the boards usually meet publicly about once a month. In many districts, the board has a policy committee that reviews proposals before they go to the full board.

Who are the members of your school board? Write their names and anything you learn about them.

Superintendents are the day-to-day leaders of the school district. These are paid professional positions, often highly compensated, that require specific experience and education. The superintendent works for the school board and is responsible for hiring principals and district personnel, making high-level decisions for the district, and preparing the budget each year for the school board.

Who is your Superintendent? What have you learned about them?

Step 3: Identify Allies, Build Power, and Start Outreach

Once you have identified your goal (implement a new policy or improve existing policies) and the changemakers who can get it done, it's time to build your power.

As a first step, share the model policy with your school district. If you know someone on the school board or a school leader personally, this can be as easy as handing them the model policy. If you don't know them, we recommend you send a formal email, using the template on the following page.

[Date]

[Name of School Board President], School Board President

[Name of School District]

[Address]

[Email Address]

Dear [Name of School Board President],

I write as a concerned [student/parent/community member] to ask that the [Name of School District] School Board adopt the model policy on Protecting Immigrant Students' Right to Attend School developed by the New York Civil Liberties Union ("NYCLU").

In light of the federal government's rescission of the "sensitive locations" policy, which previously limited immigration enforcement in schools, I urge the [School District Name] to take immediate steps to formally protect immigrant students' right to attend school without fear.

The model policy fully complies with guidance from the New York State Education Department and Office of the New York State Attorney General and reaffirms immigrant students' right to attend school.

Key provisions of the model policy include:

1. Ensuring enrollment access for all students without requiring immigration-related documents;
2. Prohibiting ICE and other non-local law enforcement from accessing school property or student records without a judicial warrant or exigent circumstances verified by district counsel;
3. Limiting the collection and disclosure of sensitive student data;
4. Updating emergency contact procedures in the event of the detention or deportation of a student's family member; and
5. Developing partnerships with legal services and advocacy organizations to provide Know Your Rights resources and support.

[Explain here why this issue matters to you and why you think it is an important issue in your district.]

Our school district has a responsibility not only to educate but also to safeguard the well-being of all children entrusted to its care. By adopting the NYCLU's model policy, [School District Name] can send a clear message to immigrant students and families that they belong here.

As a [student/parent/community member], I urge you to consider adopting the NYCLU's model policy. If you have questions or concerns, you can contact the NYCLU via email at schools@nyclu.org.

Thank you for your leadership and for considering this important step. I appreciate your time and concern, and for all you do to ensure that students in our district receive an excellent education. I would welcome the opportunity to speak further or support implementation in any way I can.

Sincerely, [first, last name]

If the district ignores you or is hostile to your request, you can start thinking about ways to increase pressure.

A campaign plan can help you strategize ways to get your district to take action. Think about what is important to school board members in your community and how you can speak to these interests to reach your goal.

- Is the school board generally sympathetic to immigrant communities, or hostile? Are immigrant communities represented on the board? Are school board meetings multilingual?
- Moving changemakers to act requires building power. You will need to partner with others who share the same values.
 - Which parents, caretakers, and community members in your immediate circle can you mobilize? Keep in mind that the most directly impacted community members may not be safe in public spaces right now and will need to rely on U.S. citizen allies to stand up for their rights.
 - Are there social justice, charity, faith, or community organizations that could support your advocacy?
 - Are there business leaders who care about these issues? Noncitizens are customers, employees, and clients of local businesses. If people are afraid to leave their homes, businesses will suffer.

Make a list the names and contact information of friends, family, local organizations, and business leaders you want to contact. Make a plan for how to get in touch. Can a mutual friend introduce you? Or can you visit their office one day?

Organize and Attend Public Forums

If you're having trouble getting the attention of your school board, identify public forums where you can directly address the people who can make the change you're seeking. This will most likely be a school board meeting.

Note that the process for speaking during public meetings varies. In some places, only residents of the district may be allowed to speak.

- Mobilize people to attend school board meetings and bring signs (if permitted) or wear t-shirts.
- Attend and speak at Parent Teacher Association meetings (PTA) and local town, county, or city council meetings if you think they will support your goals and can influence the school board.
- Attend town halls organized by local elected officials – or organize your own and invite elected officials to hear from constituents.
- Send a letter to the editor of your local newspaper.

Step 4: If Necessary, Increase Pressure on the Board to Adopt Stronger Policies.

If the school district is resistant to changing policy, you may need to take further steps to convince them to take action. Here are some strategies you could use to build power and visibility in order to pressure your school board. Always think about changemakers' interests and what is most likely to persuade them.

- Organize phone banking. Ask your friends and family to call the school district, or other changemakers you have identified, and ask for stronger policies.
- Circulate a petition. Ask people to sign their names to demand a protocol that protects students. Use the petition to identify supporters.
- Hold a community meeting or host a house party to talk about the purpose of having a protocol to protect students from ICE.
- Organize a rally, a press conference in front of the school, or a public forum. Bring signs.
- Recruit community members to run for seats on the school board.

Presenting Your Ideas for Change

Use this [Model Policy Training Presentation](#) to give a presentation about protecting immigrant students' right to attend school and implementing the model policy in your community.

Know Your Rights Materials

If you are hosting or attending any events, please share these materials:

- [Immigrant Students' Rights in New York](#)
- [Derechos de los estudiantes inmigrantes en Nueva York](#)

Check out this [organizing toolkit](#) for more ideas on creating your campaign plan to get your school district to keep ICE out of schools.

Would you like to brainstorm together about your campaign? **Reach out to us at schools@nyclu.org.**

Additional Tools for Protecting Our Immigrant Neighbors

Rapid Response Tools

If ICE shows up at or near a school in your area, it helps to have a plan in place. Here are some suggestions:

- Team up with your neighbors to create an ICE Watch Network, essentially a group of people who are on the lookout for ICE activity in your area. There may already be one in your area. If not, you can simply organize a phone tree to share information about ICE officers' whereabouts.
- Always exercise caution in filming police and ICE. You have the right to film public officers as they fulfill their duties – but stand clear and do not put yourself in danger.
- Be judicious about anything you write in a text or email. Messaging apps, including Signal and WhatsApp, are far less secure than you may think. In-person communication is best, followed by voice calls.
- Assist your neighbors by driving or walking children to school.

Encourage at-risk individuals to sign a release form with your congressional member, Senator Gillibrand, or Senator Schumer. This form will allow the elected official to access their information and potentially visit them if they are detained. It can be a lifeline.

Note: When warning people about ICE activities, it is important not to spread fear or panic. You should make sure the information you share is specific and verifiable. Here is an ICE checklist that can help you identify the steps you should take during an ICE sighting.

If a community member is detained:

- Organize your community to demand their release. Write letters to state, local, and federal elected officials.
- Reach out to your local member of Congress and notify their constituent services staff that a constituent has been detained.
- If the detained person has a release form on file, let elected leaders' offices know this as well.
- Use social media to amplify your demand – but know that in-person actions can be more powerful. Can you organize a rally, press conference, or gathering in your community?
- Reach out to local media to tell the story of the person who has been detained.

Family Preparedness Packets

A family preparedness plan can be a form of reassurance for immigrant students and parents in case ICE detains a family member or caregiver. This plan may include Know Your Rights materials, legal support hotlines, and emergency contact information.

Be sure students' emergency contact information is updated every school year.

Consider the different types of guardianship that meet the needs of the family. The following guardianships involve the day-to-day care of a minor:

Designation of a Person in Parental Relationship

- Does not require going to court but does require a notary.
- Requires form OCFS-4940 from the New York State Office of Children and Family Services.
- Can be triggered by the detention and deportation of a parent.
- Allows parents to give a trusted person limited power to make decisions regarding the child's daily routine, education, and healthcare.
- Can be changed or cancelled at any time.

Designation of Standby Guardian

- Requires going to family court. Only a court can appoint a standby guardian.
- Is a more permanent arrangement. The standby guardian becomes the full legal parent.
- Gives the guardian full authority to make educational decisions, authorize medical treatments, and approve a child's travel arrangements.

[Here are more resources for making sure families are prepared in case of an immigration-related emergency.](#)

This toolkit is not a replacement for legal advice.