

Limiting ICE Enforcement at Schools and Colleges: Educational “Safe Spaces” and California Law

One of the policy changes under the second Trump Administration that has caused the most concern is around immigration enforcement (arrests, detentions, deportations) on or around schools. This document describes the current policy regarding immigration enforcement at schools as well as the California laws that limit this enforcement. Several bills are pending at the California state legislature that would reiterate and expand protections at schools.

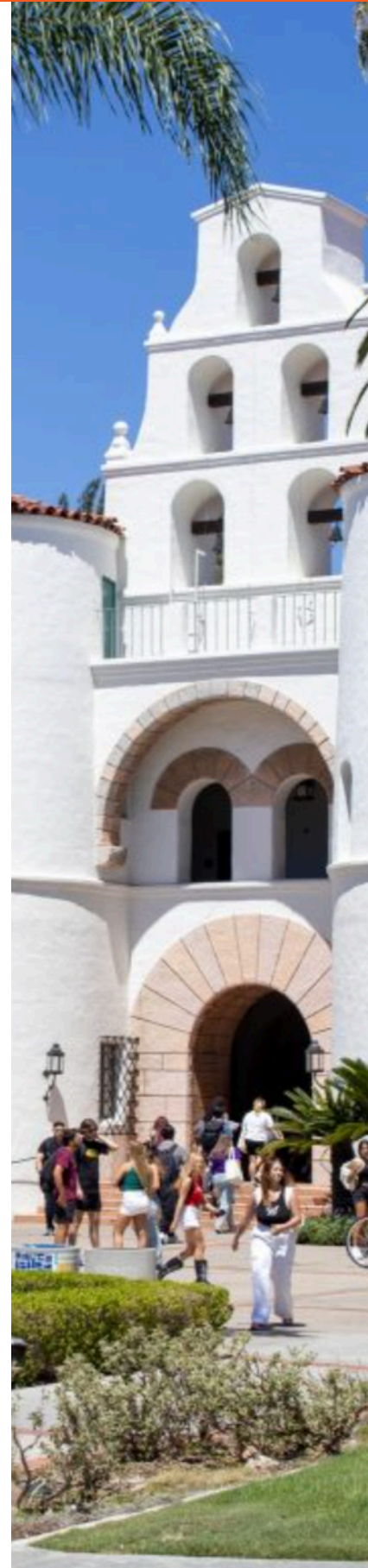
Background on Sensitive Locations

Previously, the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) had internal policies limiting immigration enforcement at places considered “sensitive locations.” The [DHS Sensitive Locations Memo](#) is a policy document issued in 2011 to outline how and to what extent Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) can take immigration enforcement actions at locations such as schools, places of worship and hospitals. Schools included all levels from preschool through college, as well as vocational and trade schools. In 2021, DHS issued a [new memo](#) limiting ICE as well as Customs and Border Protection (CBP) enforcement actions at “protected areas,” stating that to the greatest extent possible, enforcement actions should not take place in or near a location that would restrain people’s access to essential services or engagement in essential activities.

These policies helped to reassure immigrants that they could seek life-saving health care, request essential social services, practice their faith, and attend or drop their children off at school without worrying about being arrested by ICE.

One of the first actions that the Trump Administration took after inauguration was to [rescind the 2021 guidance](#). At the same time, the Administration has undertaken mass raids in neighborhoods and workplaces. These cruel actions are designed to create fear and to intimidate immigrants from going about their everyday lives.

While the rescission of the 2021 guidance means that ICE can now enter places such as schools, there are still important Constitutional, state and local protections in place. Immigrant communities and immigrant-serving organizations in California have responded by engaging in community education and continuing to defend immigrants from inhumane federal policies. California already took important steps to safeguard schools from immigration during the first Trump Administration, and several bills pending in the legislature would expand school-related protections for immigrants.



California Laws and Policies that Limit ICE Enforcement at Schools and Colleges

SB 54, The California Values Act

Senate Bill 54 (De Leon, 2017) is also known as the state “sanctuary” law, was enacted into law on January 1, 2018. While SB 54 curtails state and local law enforcement agencies from using local and state resources to assist in immigration enforcement, it does NOT prohibit immigration agents, such as ICE, from entering California or making an arrest of a person in California.

SB 54 does, however, take steps to limit immigration enforcement activity at sensitive locations in California by requiring officials at schools, health care facilities and courts to adopt and implement policies to limit participation with immigration enforcement, such as requiring a warrant from ICE agents before they enter or attempt to interrogate or arrest anyone. Former California Attorney General Xavier Becerra released model policies and guidance in 2018.

California Attorney General Rob Bonta recently updated the [guidance and “model policies”](#) to inform what public schools, colleges, universities, health care facilities, courts, libraries, and shelters can and cannot do under state and federal law. Essential components of the policies for [K-12 schools](#) and [colleges and universities](#) include keeping immigrant students and families’ data private, protocols on when to allow an immigration enforcement officer to enter a campus, and how to respond to an inquiry from an immigration agency. By adopting these policies, schools and other institutions can be prepared for immigration enforcement actions.

AB 699, Safe Schools for Immigrant Students

Assembly Bill 699 (O’Donnell; 2017) requires all local educational agencies (including schools districts) in California to implement protections to ensure the educational rights of all students, regardless of immigration status.

AB 699 prohibits schools officials and employees from collecting information or documents regarding the immigration status of students or their families; instructs schools on how to protect students’ private records from immigration enforcement; requires public schools to pass policies that limit assisting with immigration enforcement agencies; and prohibits discrimination, harassment, intimidation or bullying based on immigration status.



AB 21, Access to Higher Education for Every Student

Assembly Bill 21 (Kalra, 2017) requires the California State University Trustees, the governing boards for the California Community Colleges, and qualifying independent institutions to refrain from releasing personal information about students, faculty, and staff (except under some limited circumstances) and to set out a process to advise all students, and require all faculty and staff to follow protocol, should law enforcement entities enter the campus to execute a federal immigration order. Additionally, it requires those institutions to maintain a contact list of pro bono immigration legal service providers and to adopt and implement the model policy developed by the Attorney General by March 1, 2019. It also assigns staff to serve as a point of contact for people who may face immigration actions. The University of California Regents were requested - not required - to take the above actions.

Local Policies

Educational institutions can go further than the above laws and enact additional protections for immigrant students and staff, as well as provide resources for immigrant students. The “safe spaces” policies adopted by many school districts across California include: restricting ICE from entering schools without a judicial warrant, not asking for data related to immigration status, offering Know Your Rights resources, referrals to partner community-based organizations, assistance with developing family preparedness plans, and providing a range of educational and wraparound services to all students regardless of immigration status. Some examples of strong local policies include:

- **Los Angeles Unified School District (LAUSD):** LAUSD developed the [LA Unified 2025: We Are One](#) campaign to provide multilingual information resources to students and parents regarding immigration protections. In February 2025, the school district created a [Reference Guide](#) to further operationalize the “LAUSD Campuses as Safe Zones and Resource Centers” policy that they adopted in 2016.
- **Fresno Unified School District:** Through its adoption of [Board Policy 5145.13](#) and [Administrative Regulation 5145.13](#), the district affirmed it will not solicit or collect information about the citizenship or immigration status of students or their families, nor will it assist with immigration enforcement at school sites. The district also has a landing page with [immigration supports and workshop information](#).
- **San Francisco Unified School District (SFUSD):** The School District created a website containing [resources for immigrant students and families](#) and passed a [sanctuary policy](#), stating that SFUSD is a safe haven for all students regardless of citizenship status.
- **Berkeley Unified School District:** In February 2025, the Berkeley Unified School District board approved a [resolution](#) reaffirming its commitment to making its campuses “safe zones” for immigrant students and families.
- **Oakland Unified School District:** The district adopted a [Sanctuary Resolution](#) in December 2016, affirming that they will do everything possible to ensure students and families are safe at school regardless of immigration status. Its [website](#) contains a range of resources, including a local hotline and training opportunities.

¹ A qualifying institution includes a California public postsecondary educational institution as well as the other ones listed in the California Education Code, section 69432.7, subd. (l)(1).

Education Safe Spaces Bills Introduced in 2025

Since the legislature reconvened on January 6th, 2025, a number of bills have been introduced both in anticipation, and in response to, increased immigration presence and arrests at schools and other sensitive locations. These bills are aimed at strengthening California's ability to provide a safe and supportive learning environment for students, regardless of their immigration status. The following is a list of bills pertaining to immigration enforcement at schools:

- **SB 48** (Gonzalez): Would create a one-mile "safe zone" around schools by establishing a one-mile radius around a school site where California law enforcement agencies will be prohibited from colluding with, or providing any information about a pupil, pupil's family and household, school employee, or teacher, to immigration authorities. This bill would also prevent a local educational agency (LEA) and its staff from granting an ICE officer permission to access a school campus without a judicial warrant. Additionally, SB 48 would prevent LEA personnel from disclosing education records or any information about a pupil, pupil's family and household, school employee, or teacher to an ICE officer without a judicial warrant.
- **AB 49** (Muratuschi): Would prohibit immigration officers from entering a school site for any purpose without providing valid identification, a written statement of purpose, a valid judicial warrant, and approval from the school district's superintendent. If approved, an ICE official's access would be restricted to school areas where students or children are not present.
- **AB 419** (Connolly): Would require the governing board or body of a local education agency to post "Know Your Rights" information in the administrative building and on the website of the local education agency in English and Spanish.
- **SB 98** (Perez): Would require school districts, county offices of education, and charter schools to notify students, parents, faculty, staff, and community members whenever immigration enforcement officers are on a school site.

Additional Resources

- National Immigration Law Center, [Factsheet: Trump's Rescission of Protected Areas Policies Undermines Safety for All](#), Feb. 26, 2025
- Californians Together, [What's Next? California Districts Can and Must Ensure Schools are Safe and Welcoming Environments for All](#), Jan. 22, 2025
- Presidents' Alliance on Higher Education and Immigration, [Immigration Enforcement on Campuses: What You Need to Know](#), Feb. 6, 2025

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