

Proposal to Make DC Public Schools and LEAs Operating in the District of Columbia Sanctuary Schools (Safe Zones)

February 14, 2017

To: The Honorable Muriel Bowser, Mayor of the District of Columbia
Jennifer Niles, Deputy Mayor for Education
Phil Mendelson, Chairman, Council of the District of Columbia
David Grosso, Chairperson, DC Council Committee on Education
Karl Racine, DC Attorney General
Antwan Wilson, Chancellor, DC Public Schools
Scott Pearson, Executive Director, DC Public Charter School Board
Hanseul Kang, State Superintendent of Education, OSSE
Karen Williams, President, State Board of Education
Joyanna Smith, Ombudsman, State Board of Education
Faith Gibson, Chief Student Advocate, State Board of Education

**“There comes a time when silence is betrayal.”
Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.**

Dear Mayor Bowser, Deputy Mayor Niles, DC Council Members, Attorney General Racine, and DC Education Officials:

In the current political climate in which the Trump administration is threatening to increase harassment of immigrants and deportations of undocumented immigrants, we must publicly demonstrate our commitment to all our students and families – especially those without legal documentation – by broadly publicizing that DC Public Schools and local education agencies (LEAs) operating within the District stand as sanctuary schools/safe zones.

There already are instances of D.C. students not attending school because they fear that U.S. Immigrations and Customs Enforcement (ICE) agents may appear at schools. **We offer this proposal in support of the immigrant youth, their educators, and supporters who want ICE banned from school grounds and want the targeting and criminalization of immigrants and young people to be stopped.**

While the District of Columbia has been proclaimed a sanctuary city, the Mayor, City Councilmembers, the Attorney General, and Education Officials should support and approve policies that will enact the principles of a sanctuary city. Many organizations across Washington, D.C. are taking steps to affirm the Mayor’s decision to demonstrate that institutions and people within D.C. will stand behind the city and its inhabitants, regardless of immigration status, when the expected backlash unfolds. The District is particularly vulnerable because of a lack of statehood. The importance of this demonstration of unity on this front cannot be understated given the pressure for the Mayor to agree to seemingly benign information sharing protocols between MPD and DHS. School districts in California, Nevada, Illinois, and across the country [are making public commitments to be safe zones](#) in order to bolster the sanctuary city declarations by city governments.

Teaching for Change, an organization based in the District of Columbia whose constituents include D.C. educators and immigrant families, adopted the proposed resolution using [tools from the National](#)

[Education Association](#) (NEA). The recommended policies for DC Public Schools and charter schools/LEAs were reviewed by the Washington Lawyers' Committee for Civil Rights and Urban Affairs, with added support from Amrita Wassan, a D.C. high school teacher, and Cathy Reilly of S.H.A.P.P.E. and the Coalition for DC Public Schools and Communities (C4DC). This effort was informed by SMART members of Many Languages One Voice (MLOV), a youth-led advocacy and organizing body in D.C., who will continue to press for a full ban of ICE from schools and other locations in which immigrants may be targeted.

We begin by acknowledging that that immigration and law enforcement officers harmfully disrupt the learning environment for all students, particularly students of color, regardless of immigration status.

Our immigrant students, their families, and their peers come to school every day with a heightened level of anxiety, and they now need us to model the values we want them to embody. Therefore, we propose for DC Public Schools and LEAs to:

- **Make a declaration of sanctuary:** Unequivocally declare our commitment to creating a safe and secure environment for all of our students.
- **Assign a unit to handle law enforcement:** Clearly establish a unit to engage with any law enforcement, review and verify legality of any requests, connect with advocates in the community and establish contact with family in case of a request.
- **Restrict access to school property:** Disallow immigration enforcement officials from entering the property of DCPS or an LEA operating in the District without review and verification of judicial warrant. In the event of the review and verification of judicial warrant, parents, guardians, and/or community advocates will be contacted and every effort will be made to have them present *before* officials are allowed to meet with any student.
- **Limit information collection and sharing:** No information will be collected about student's country of birth, date of migration, number of years in the U.S. or any information that would make the student vulnerable to profiling. Student privacy should be upheld to ensure compliance with the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA) and destroy any such collected information.
- **Establish a rapid response team:** A rapid response team will be established to ensure student safety in the event that a student is separated from their family or guardianship.
- **Review and uphold a bullying-free environment:** Policies and practices will be reviewed to ensure bullying-free environment is maintained between all persons present on the property of DCPS or LEAs operating in the District, especially as it pertains to immigration status and national origin.
- **Affirm the academic freedom of educators to discuss the sanctuary policy:** School employees must have the academic freedom to discuss the resolution in age-appropriate ways during class time and students are to be made aware that school counselors are available to discuss the subjects contained in the resolution.
- **Disseminate this document:** These commitments should be publicized to school staff, students, parents, and school-affiliated service providers in all languages spoken by students at home. Provide appropriate contact information so that school staff may faithfully and responsibly execute these policies.

Attached you will find model policies for adoption by DC Public Schools and LEAs. In line with the sanctuary city affirmations by both the Mayor and the D.C. Council, we expect that any final policies adopted by DCPS and LEAs in the District will contain the aforementioned policies and the protocols recommended in the attachments.

As the Mayor's representative on education-related issues, **we request that Deputy Mayor Niles issue a public response within 10 days, by the close of business Friday, February 24, 2017.** Please respond to the copied parties. We will update individuals, groups, and organizations who sign letters of support at www.teachingforchange.org/dcsanctuary.

Thank you for your attention to this important matter which will not only bolster Washington, D.C.'s sanctuary declaration and status, but also positively impact the daily participation of our students, their peers, families, and educators, in the pursuit of education and academic excellence in the District of Columbia.

Sincerely,

Teaching for Change: Allyson Criner Brown, Associate Director, and Deborah Menkart, Executive Director

Washington Lawyers' Committee for Civil Rights and Urban Affairs: Kent Withycombe, Director, Public Education Project, and Jonathan M. Smith, Executive Director

On behalf of countless D.C. students, families, educators, and residents