

March 2007,

Dear Congresswoman Woolsey,

Thank you for your attention to the recent Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) program *Operation Return to Sender* and your interest in its impact on our schools and school children. The disruption to the educational program was immediate and will have lasting consequence.

As trustees for San Rafael City Schools our charge is to provide a high quality equitable education for every child living in our districts without discrimination--without determining citizenship. Furthermore, we are responsible for the safety of every student—from the time they leave school until the time they reach their homes.

The ICE raids sent our schools into a state of emergency. Teachers, support staff, principals, and district administrators were placed on buses and at bus stops to make sure children connected safely with adults in their homes. Students were given the phone numbers for their school in case no adult was at home, and staff stayed late to answer phones.

Absentee numbers spiked as high as seven times the usual amount in one school and four times the normal rate at another school. Parents were afraid to walk with their children to and from the bus stops. Older siblings skipped sports, work and homework to tend to their brothers and sisters. Many students were and remain distracted from school work as they worry about their loved ones. Most of these children are by and large American-born, full-fledged citizens with a right to a quality education and to live in this country for the rest of their lives.

Consider one family Principal Juan Rodriguez visited during the raids when he learned a parent had been taken from their home. As he walked into the living room he noticed student work decorating the walls; he saw a desk with a light in the room; and he noted the lack of a television set. The mother described the family's nighttime routine: the children do their homework at a desk in a well-lit, quiet room; the father reads with the children every night; and, before they go to bed, they discuss the day at school. These are the practices that teachers and school staff request of families to promote academic achievement. This family follows every suggestion and is suddenly without a father. How will these children perform in school now?

Success in school depends on a three-way partnership between students, schools and families. The current environment strains the family partnership for documented and undocumented residents alike as the distinctions between the two are blurred by ICE tactics. People who look like they should have residency papers are lumped together with those who ignore deportation notices. It is hard for our teachers to assure children and their parents who are here legally that they are safe.

We are not in the position to solve the complex issues surrounding immigration, but these problems need to be addressed away from schools. There must be a better way to execute the federal mandate in a more targeted manner. Please explore solutions, continue to shine a light on this matter, and ask the tough questions, keeping in mind the children—those who are born here, those who will stay here, those who will be future workforce and leaders.

Sincerely,

Board of Education, San Rafael City Schools

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