

AN OPEN LETTER TO CALIFORNIA’S EDUCATIONAL LEADERS
For Public Release - November 28, 2016

(For more information, contact Betty Hung at bhung@advancingjustice-la.org)

We are members and allies of the College for All Coalition, a statewide multiracial coalition of community, civil rights, education, faith, and labor organizations that are committed to advancing educational equity and success for low income, underserved, and underrepresented students with an overarching framework of promoting social justice in public higher education.

In the midst of troubling reports of hate crimes, incidents, and bullying in K-12 schools and on college campuses since the election of Donald Trump, we write this letter with the fervent hope that California should be a beacon of diversity, inclusion, and justice for all students. We commend California’s educational leaders for issuing public statements affirming these values, and believe it is imperative that concrete and robust policies and resources be instituted to guarantee the safety and protection of students and their families and to ensure equitable learning environments.

Even before the November 8 presidential election, the Southern Poverty Law Center (SPLC) reported that more than two-thirds of 2,000 K-12 teachers surveyed nationwide said that students - mainly immigrants, children of immigrants, and Muslims - expressed concerns or fears about what might happen to them or their families after the election.¹ In the aftermath of the election, these fears have been exacerbated with widespread reports of a disturbing rise in the targeting of students of color and of immigrant, Muslim, differently-abled, female, and LGBTQ students in schools and on college campuses across the nation and in California.

In a mere three days following the election, the SPLC counted over 200 incidents of hateful harassment and intimidation across the nation and found that the **most commonly reported locations of harassment were K-12 schools.**² California is not immune. News outlets have reported hate crimes and incidents against students in California, including:

- Latino high school students in Redding were handed mock “deportation letters” by another student;³

¹ <https://www.splcenter.org/20160413/trump-effect-impact-presidential-campaign-our-nations-schools>

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<https://www.splcenter.org/hatewatch/2016/11/11/over-200-incidents-hateful-harassment-and-intimidation-election-day>

³ <http://www.latimes.com/local/lanow/la-me-ln-trump-students-targeted-20161110-story.html>

- A middle school teacher in South Los Angeles was caught on audio telling sixth graders that their parents would be deported;⁴
- A hijab-wearing Muslim student at San Diego State University was robbed in an incident that university police are investigating as a hate crime;⁵ and
- A Muslim student at San Jose State University was choked and had her hijab pulled off in a campus parking lot.⁶

At this pivotal moment, the state’s legislative leaders have stated, “California was not a part of this nation when its history began, but we are clearly now the keeper of its future.”⁷ Our collective future depends at its fundamental core on protecting the safety and well being of all California students and ensuring that K-12 schools and college campuses are free from bigotry, discrimination, harassment, and assault. This holds especially true for vulnerable students who are being targeted in this current climate, particularly students of color and immigrant, Muslim, LGBTQ, differently abled, and female students.

Accordingly, we urge California educational leaders to take the following steps to guarantee safe, inclusive, and equitable educational environments for all California students enrolled in K-12 public schools and the state’s public higher education institutions by:

- ***Designating All K-12 Public Schools and Colleges and Universities to be Sanctuary Schools and Campuses*** - California is home to the largest immigrant population in the nation. Protecting and promoting the safety, well being, and educational opportunities of immigrant students is essential to securing our state’s future. Given recent announcements that indicate undocumented immigrant students and their families face increased risk of imminent deportation, we ask for an unequivocal and public declaration that all K-12 public schools and all colleges and universities in the state be designated as sanctuary schools and sanctuary campuses.

Every school and higher education institution should refuse to comply with immigration authorities regarding deportations and raids, and also should refuse to allow any

4

<http://www.nbclosangeles.com/news/local/Teacher-President-Election-Donald-Trump-Deportation-Immigration-400851681.html>

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https://www.insidehighered.com/news/2016/11/11/students-many-colleges-reporting-ethnic-or-racial-harassment-election-day?utm_content=bufferf0c78&utm_medium=social&utm_source=facebook&utm_campaign=HEbuffer

⁶ <http://www.latimes.com/local/lanow/la-me-ln-trump-students-targeted-20161110-story.html>

7

<http://sd24.senate.ca.gov/news/2016-11-09-joint-statement-california-legislative-leaders-result-presidential-election>

immigration agents onto school or college campuses unless there is a judicial warrant. In addition, schools, colleges, and universities must guarantee privacy and refuse to release information regarding the immigration status of students, staff, and community members. Campus police also should not act on behalf of federal agents to enforce immigration laws. It also is critical that resources and services such as immigration legal assistance, mental health counseling, and undocumented student support programs be provided.

While President-elect Trump has stated that he will cut federal funding to sanctuary cities, we call upon California educational institutions to perform their essential role of educating California's diverse students regardless of immigration status. Only by designating all schools and higher education institutions as sanctuary schools and campuses can we guarantee safe and equitable educational environments for immigrant students.

- ***Allocating Adequate Resources and Support to Promote Diversity, Inclusion, and Positive Intergroup Relations*** - California's K-12 and public higher education institutions should provide the necessary tools and resources to support educators, students (and parents/caregivers in the K-12 context) in creating and promoting learning environments that are free from bullying and discrimination. Innovative models and best practices should be identified and shared with schools and colleges to increase their capacity to develop and implement pedagogies and strategies that reduce prejudice, address implicit bias and stereotyping, and promote positive intergroup relations. As organizations that have experience engaging in this type of work, we offer our partnership and assistance to help identify these resources. Finally, robust state and local funding should be allocated to implement these programs in schools and on campuses and to offer professional development opportunities and support for educators.
- ***Protecting All California Students from Being Bullied, Intimidated, Harassed, or Discriminated Against on the Basis of Protected Categories*** - Under state and federal laws, California public schools must prevent and protect students from bullying, intimidation, harassment, or discrimination on the basis of protected categories, including actual or perceived immigration status, race, ethnicity, religion, disability, gender, gender identity, gender expression, and sexual orientation. California higher education institutions also are required to ensure and maintain learning environments free from discrimination and harassment.

Especially in this current climate, California's public schools and universities must vigorously uphold their legal obligations to ensure safe educational environments. A strong message should be sent by every K-12 school and every college and university to

all stakeholders affirming values of diversity and inclusion and making it clear that prejudice and hate will not be tolerated (*e.g.*, each K-12 school should send a letter to parents/caregivers and school staff to set the tone and expectations). If and when such incidents of bullying, intimidation, harassment, or discrimination do occur, schools and colleges must take prompt action to ensure accountability and justice through restorative justice and other approaches that focus on repairing the harm caused to the victim and the wider community. Counseling and other supportive services should be provided, not just to survivors and victims, but also made more broadly available to students. Schools and universities should compile data on every incident of bullying, intimidation, harassment, or discrimination on the basis of the protected categories listed above and make such data publicly available, while also safeguarding the confidentiality and privacy of any identifying information especially from federal immigration officials.

We in California have not only an opportunity, but also an obligation to counter bigotry and hate. By protecting the safety and well being of our diverse students and their families, we can ensure equitable learning environments and, in so doing, uphold our state’s values of multiculturalism, inclusion, and equity. California’s diversity is our strength, and it is time to “go all in” on putting those words into action for our state’s students and their families.

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