



Protecting Our Country's Proud Immigrant Tradition

RANDI WEINGARTEN, AFT President

THE CURRENT DEBATES over immigration are personal for me. Like many Americans, I am the granddaughter of immigrants. My mother's parents fled pogroms in Russia and Ukraine; my father's family had faced anti-Semitism in Austria. They worked hard as merchants in the Bronx and in Nyack, New York, and were proud of their children's military service and careers as engineers, teachers, nurses, and lawyers. My family's immigrant story connects me to other immigrants, whether they're from El Salvador, Syria, or Sudan. America would not be the country we know and love without our long and enriching immigrant tradition.

I have always been grateful to live in a country that welcomes the world's "tired and huddled masses." But our tradition of welcoming immigrants is threatened by lawmakers and xenophobes and nationalists who are spewing fear and hate. One of the most callous demonstrations of this was President Donald Trump's decision this fall to terminate the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) program that protects more than 800,000 young undocumented immigrants brought to the United States as children, many of whom know no other home.

The young people covered by DACA, appropriately known as Dreamers, are woven into our communities. Thousands are first responders, nurses, firefighters, lawyers, and community and union activists throughout the country. And 20,000 DACA recipients are filling critical teacher shortages as bilingual educators. Trump promised that he would treat Dreamers with "great heart." But terminating DACA is absolutely heartless and cruel.

We in the AFT feel this urgently. Our members who work in public schools educate children who carry with them constant, crippling terror and uncertainty because of their immigration status. Children should be free to learn and live

without fear, but that is not possible when they have to wonder who immigration agents will pick up next. And the AFT has members in each of our divisions who are covered by DACA but now live in fear of having their lives destroyed.

Jessica Esparza's parents brought her to the United States from Mexico when she was 11 years old. She did not have

reversal has thrust her back into the uncertainty she lived with for years as she pursued her American dream to become a teacher, despite her fears that her immigration status would make that impossible. DACA allowed her to realize that dream; it also made it possible for her to return to Mexico for the first time in 16 years to visit her grandmothers, one

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proper documentation, but she did have a passion to pursue her own American dream, to become a registered nurse. Jessica excelled in school, and in 2012, through DACA, she was granted a work permit and a Social Security number that allowed her to earn her nursing license and work as an RN. She is now a member of the Washington State Nurses Association and treats cancer patients and patients with chronic conditions. Jessica often translates for Spanish-speaking patients, who are clearly relieved to have such critical conversations in their primary language.

Lee-Ann Graham is a DACAmented paraprofessional in the New York City public schools and a proud United Federation of Teachers member. She's also a leader in UndocuBlack, a network founded by black undocumented immigrant youth that works to highlight and address the diversity of our undocumented population. Lee-Ann strives to transform learning environments to respond to the needs of undocumented students.

Areli Zarate is a high school teacher and department chair in Austin, Texas, and is on her way to becoming certified through the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards. Trump's DACA

of whom died months after her visit. Areli is awaiting a decision on her renewal and praying that she can continue teaching.

Without congressional action by March 2018, Dreamers will be deported or have to live in the shadows. We need to end the political gridlock and enact comprehensive solutions to our broken immigration system. That starts by providing pathways to citizenship for millions of students, families, and neighbors working and living alongside us who are at risk of being deported. Congress must pass the Dream Act—a clean version, not one that only protects Dreamers in exchange for funding for a border wall, increased immigration raids, detention centers, and policies that separate families and cause constant fear and uncertainty.

The AFT will continue to fight to protect undocumented students, refugees, individuals with temporary protective status, and their families from the threat of deportation. The United States' cultural, ethnic, linguistic, and religious diversity is an asset, not a liability. It is the wonderful realization of the "pluribus" in "e pluribus unum." A nation built by immigrants should welcome those in pursuit of the American dream, not pull up the ladder behind us.

You Are Welcome Here

Reassuring Immigrant Students and Families in Northwest Indiana



The photos in this article are from “Educating Students and the Community in an Age of Immigration Uncertainty,” a daylong conference held in August and sponsored by the Hammond Teachers Federation, the Hammond school district, and more than 40 organizations.

BY JENNIFER DUBIN

Words can inspire hope or they can instill fear. Speaking at the third and final presidential debate in October 2016, Donald Trump chose fear. “We’re going to secure the border, and once the border is secured at a later date, we’ll make a determination as to the rest,” he said. “But we have some bad hombres here, and we’re going to get them out.”¹

Shortly after Trump became president, a dozen seniors in a U.S. government class at George Rogers Clark High School in the Hammond, Indiana, school district rode a bus 160 miles south to Indianapolis, where they met with their state representatives and senators, observed committee hearings from the balcony of the General Assembly, and participated in a rally to support public education.

Jennifer Dubin is the managing editor of American Educator. Previously, she was a journalist with the Chronicle of Higher Education. To read more of her work, visit American Educator’s author index at www.aft.org/ae/author-index.

Kyle Kwasny, their teacher and chaperone, recalls that the field trip went well and that students learned a great deal. But another 10 students who had expressed interest in attending didn’t show up. The next day, Kwasny asked them what had happened. The students told him their parents were afraid to sign the permission slips. “Why?” he asked. Because their parents were undocumented immigrants, they said.

At the time, Trump had been president for less than two months. Cities nationwide were experiencing stepped up immigration enforcement, and Hammond was no different.

About 25 miles from downtown Chicago, the city of Hammond is one of 19 municipalities that constitute Lake County in northwest Indiana. The northern part of the county, where the Hammond schools are located, is home to a growing Hispanic population that has become increasingly fearful, given the nativist rhetoric emanating from the White House.

In January 2017, one week after taking office, Trump issued an executive order giving immigration agents greater leeway in enforcing federal laws and deporting undocumented immigrants.² In February, news accounts reported a surge in immigration raids in California, Kansas, New York, North Carolina, Texas,



PHOTOGRAPHS BY ADAM DERSTINE, ILLUSTRATIONS BY JING JING TSONG

and Virginia, resulting in hundreds of arrests.³ Raids also took place in Illinois, Indiana, Kentucky, Missouri, and Wisconsin. In Indiana, 52 arrests were reported.⁴

In March, video of a teenage girl sobbing as Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) agents arrested her father on the way to school in Los Angeles went viral.⁵ Throughout the summer, other harrowing stories continued to make headlines, including one of an undocumented high school student arrested by ICE days before graduation,⁶ and another of two undocumented brothers, both standout high school soccer players, who were deported after one of the boys voluntarily checked in with immigration officials to report that he had won a college scholarship and would be relocating.⁷

In August, the HTF partnered with the Hammond school district and more than 40 organizations to hold “Educating Students and the Community in an Age of Immigration Uncertainty.” The day-long event at Morton High School in Hammond was a success; more than 400 people attended.

The HTF, with its 950 members, is among the smaller AFT locals. But the challenges facing immigrant students and educators in Hammond are no less formidable than the ones facing immigrant students and educators elsewhere. The success of this conference, both in terms of participation and collaboration, speaks to the power of this labor-management partnership and how the union and the school district galvanized a community to act on an issue as divisive and intractable as immigration.

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In Lake County, these accounts alarmed many residents, especially Hammond’s teachers, who say their students constantly worry their parents won’t be there when they get home from school. “Kids are asking, ‘Am I going back to Mexico? What’s going to happen to me?’” says Patrick O’Rourke, the president of the Hammond Teachers Federation (HTF). In his 43 years as president, O’Rourke had never seen such angst in his city. He and his fellow HTF officials couldn’t believe the element of fear pervading their schools. They were stunned to learn that parents worried that signing a school document, such as a permission slip, might invite unwanted questions about their immigration status. So erring on the side of caution, they kept their children home. O’Rourke says the fear was also making it harder for teachers to do their jobs. As educators know all too well, and as research shows, if children are scared, they can’t learn.⁸

In March, still seething at the idea that fear prevented students from participating in a field trip, O’Rourke read articles in the Spring 2017 issue of *American Educator* on the need to support Latino children and families.* He shared copies of the magazine with others in the district and also discussed the issue with Miriam Soto-Pressley, the HTF’s educational issues chair, whose first language as a child was Spanish. In the last few years, Soto-Pressley has traveled to Austin, El Paso, Miami, and West Palm Beach to help facilitate conferences, sponsored by the American Federation of Teachers, geared toward English language learners (ELLs) and their teachers. These conferences focused on how to apply for U.S. citizenship, understanding the federal Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) program, and sharing educational resources.

O’Rourke and Soto-Pressley decided the Hammond school district needed to hold its own conference to educate teachers and parents about the government’s authority and limitations with regard to immigration. The conference would also enable educators to reassure the Hispanic community that—in schools, at least—families had nothing to fear. So on a Saturday morning

A History of Ethnic Diversity

The northern part of Lake County, which includes cities such as East Chicago, Hammond, and Whiting, has long been a melting pot in terms of ethnic diversity. In the middle of the 20th century, the region’s once-vibrant steel industry attracted many immigrants with the promise of steady union jobs. The majority of these workers came from Eastern Europe, and a fair number also hailed from south of the U.S.-Mexico border. But more than 20 years ago, the number of jobs in the steel mills began to decline. And while Eastern European immigration had long since tapered off by then, immigration in the county began to increase among Latinos seeking a better life.

Today, 47 percent of the 13,868 students enrolled in Hammond’s schools are Hispanic. At Clark High School, where Kyle Kwasny teaches, that figure is 71 percent.

When Greg Ruiz first began working with English language learners in Hammond 25 years ago, only a handful lived in the district. Now, 10.7 percent of Hammond’s students are ELLs, and they attend each of its 23 schools.⁹ To put that figure in context, only 4.5 percent of students in the state of Indiana are ELLs.¹⁰

Two years ago, teachers in the district’s Language Development Program began holding a free English-language boot camp for parents and students during the summer. Ruiz teaches some of the four-hour sessions, held over 15 days, where breakfast and lunch, as well as child care, are provided. For parents, the classes also continue during the academic year, while their children attend school. About 30 parents and 60 children registered for the program this summer, paid for with Title I and Title III funds (federal funds targeted to high-poverty schools and schools with large numbers of ELLs, respectively).

While such classes show the district’s support for immigrants, many immigrants have remained skittish in the wake of the presidential election. Ruiz says a parent recently told him she was putting together a document—an agreement with family members—stating who would care for her children if she were deported. “With tears in her eyes, telling me that,” he says, shaking his head.

*The complete issue is available at www.aft.org/ae/spring2017.

Those outside the public schools have also noticed the fear among residents who may be undocumented. Frank Mrvan, the North Township trustee, a locally elected official in Lake County, says that many immigrants have receded from public life. He has seen a decrease in undocumented immigrants seeking help from his office, which provides emergency assistance to families when they can't pay utility bills or if they face eviction. Immigrants unauthorized to be in this country but who have lived and worked here for years are in increasing danger of being exploited, he says. "If a contractor says, 'Thank you for your work, but we're not going to pay you today,' what route does that individual have to recover that money? None."

For Mrvan, there's a big difference between protecting our country's borders and citizens from terrorists and violent criminals, and deporting law-abiding people. It's a difference our country's broken immigration system has yet to resolve. And it's at the heart of why Patrick O'Rourke and 20 others spent the summer organizing this conference in northwest Indiana.

Given their ties to the community, Mrvan and Ruiz agreed to help. So, one morning in July, they and other members of the conference planning committee sit around a table in the resource center of Morton High School to talk logistics. "My goal is to raise \$30,000 in the next two weeks to fund this," O'Rourke says to the group, adding that local radio stations have assured him they will feature spots leading up to the event. Theresa Mayerik, the school district's assistant superintendent, says the district will soon send home letters in English and Spanish encouraging families to attend.

Mayra Rodriguez-Alvarez, a graduate of Hammond High School and a recent graduate of Valparaiso University Law School, suggests asking immigration attorneys to volunteer at the conference to answer attendees' questions in a closed setting. She knows firsthand the complexities of immigration law, having helped her husband, who had been undocumented, obtain his green card in April. Members of the group nod enthusiastically at the idea.

César Moreno-Pérez, of the AFT's human rights and community relations department, however, cautions that might be too much to do in one day. Based on his work helping to plan other AFT-sponsored conferences, he suggests holding a follow-up conference strictly for people to consult with attorneys. "You don't want this to be a one-off but a foundation to build on," he says. To that end, the group agrees to create a sign-up sheet for those attending the conference to meet with lawyers at another time. (That meeting took place on a Saturday in September, where seven lawyers helped 25 people with their immigration paperwork free of charge.)

Jose Bustos is pleased that free legal consultations (which can cost as much as \$1,000) will eventually be offered. "The fear and anguish that exists in our communities is tremendous," he tells the group. A former union organizer with the Service Employees International Union in Chicago, Bustos now works at the Immigrant Support and Assistance Center in East Chicago. The organization, where Rodriguez-Alvarez volunteers, has received many calls from immigrants too scared to go outside their homes, Bustos says. Recently, a woman called his office after unsuccessfully trying to get food assistance from the local Salvation Army. She said the receptionist questioned her about her halting English and her



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immigration status, prompting the woman and her children to quickly leave, not only without the food they needed but also scared that immigration authorities would be called. “What can I do to protect me and my kids?” she asked the center.

Moreno-Pérez says that Steven Monroy, a legislative staff attorney at the Mexican American Legal Defense and Educational Fund (MALDEF), has agreed to give a presentation on knowing your rights and how families can protect themselves during an ICE raid at home or work. MALDEF has given similar presentations in conjunction with the AFT since the Obama administration first announced DACA in June 2012.

In addition to focusing on legal questions, Moreno-Pérez suggests the conference in Hammond also highlight AFT resources such as

munity Committee, Catholic Charities, and the Hammond Education Foundation, line the hall outside the auditorium. Inside the school’s resource center, volunteers provide free child care. They supervise more than 80 young children, whose parents have dropped them off to read books, watch movies, and play games.

Before the workshops begin, attendees find seats in the auditorium to hear from a range of speakers. Walter Watkins, Hammond’s superintendent, reassures families that administrators and staff members will do what they can to help. Dale Melczek, the recently retired bishop of the Catholic Diocese of Gary, reaffirms the church’s support for refugees and leads the audience in a prayer. Anna Mamala, the vice president of the Hammond Board of School Trustees, reads a resolution the board passed in March

A resolution the school board passed in March reaffirms the district’s “commitment to creating a safe and supportive learning environment for all students regardless of immigration status.”



Colorín Colorado, a website for teachers and families of ELLs, available at www.colorincolorado.org. “Parents have to see that the teachers union is at the intersection of this work,” he says. To emphasize that point, the group decides they will ask Mary Cathryn Ricker, the executive vice president of the AFT, to speak at the event.

O’Rourke then mentions the need to include a session on how residents can advocate for welcoming city ordinances, which various city councils have passed in recent years. The ordinances, which fall just short of declaring that they are sanctuary cities (that is, cities that limit their cooperation with federal immigration enforcement), are meant to reassure undocumented immigrants that city resources will not be used to enforce federal immigration law. So far, Gary is the only city in Lake County to have passed such an ordinance.¹¹ But O’Rourke hopes the rest of the county will follow its lead.

At some point in the discussion, committee members feel compelled to ask a basic question, given the climate of fear: Should the conference require registration? Doing so would certainly help them plan for the appropriate number of free lunches and backpacks with school supplies to distribute at the end of the day. But asking an already nervous population to submit their personal information seems unwise. So they ultimately agree that registrations aren’t necessary and decide to accept both walk-ins and registrations online.

Though the group has successfully addressed that concern, another one hangs in the air: What if the individuals this conference is meant to help are too afraid to attend?

A Day Devoted to Immigration and Education

On August 5, committee members are visibly relieved to see that their concern has proven unfounded. By 9 a.m., the parking lot of Morton High School is nearly full, and the building inside buzzes with activity as 60 volunteers wearing bright orange T-shirts welcome families to the conference.

Resource tables piled high with free children’s books, handouts, and school supplies, and staffed by representatives from various sponsoring organizations, such as the Hammond Hispanic Com-

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The morning’s most high-profile speaker is Carolyn Curiel, a native of northwest Indiana. A 1972 graduate of Morton High School, Curiel served as the U.S. ambassador to Belize under President Bill Clinton and is now the founder and executive director of the Purdue Institute for Civic Communication at Purdue University in West Lafayette, Indiana.

In her speech, Curiel briefly recounts her career as a journalist, her immigrant grandparents’ experience, and the challenges that immigrants, undocumented or not, currently face. “In our time now with immigration policy in question, there are a lot of people fearing an ultimate rejection,” she says. “They’re concerned for their futures, their well-being, and the well-being of the people they love. And I want everyone here who is in a precarious position like that to look around the room and realize that you have a lot of help.”

For the rest of the morning, that help takes the form of nine conference workshops held in classrooms throughout the school. For instance, Miriam Soto-Pressley, from the HTE, gives a presentation on helping parents become more involved in their children’s education. And Joanne Anderson and Ingrid Miera, ELL trainers with the AFT, lead a workshop on how educators can support immigrant students and families.

Meanwhile, in the auditorium, Steven Monroy, from MALDEF, holds two sessions, one in English and one in Spanish, on how families can protect themselves from an ICE raid. “A warrant should be no older than three months,” Monroy says. He points to a photograph of an actual warrant that he shows on a screen. A warrant must also have a judge’s signature, he adds. And he emphasizes that during a raid, people have the right to videotape the police.

Meanwhile, the AFT’s César Moreno-Pérez gives a presentation titled “Protecting Our Children & Families from the Threat of Deportation.” Standing in a room filled to capacity with educators, Moreno-Pérez rattles off some statistics: There are 43 million immigrants in this country.¹² Eleven million of them are undocu-

mented.¹³ More than 5.9 million children live in mixed-status households.¹⁴ Between 54,000 and 68,000 children in Indiana have at least one parent who is undocumented.¹⁵

He reminds participants of the need to transform classrooms and schools into sanctuary places of learning free from racism, discrimination, bullying, and the threat of deportation. Then he briefly explains the relationship between schools and immigration enforcement. First, thanks to the 1982 U.S. Supreme Court case *Plyler v. Doe*, all students, regardless of immigration status, have the right to a public education. Second, the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA) prohibits schools from sharing students' personal information with anyone, including ICE. Moreno-Pérez also explains that a Department of Homeland Security memo governing where ICE activities can take place makes clear that ICE cannot be present at schools, hospitals, churches, demonstrations, or funerals, unless there is an immediate threat to national security or a signed judicial warrant.

Moreno-Pérez then quickly recaps DACA, the federal immigration program that gives undocumented immigrants who meet certain requirements a reprieve from deportation as well as the opportunity to obtain a Social Security number and a renewable work permit. At the time of the conference, Trump had not yet announced his plans to rescind the program.¹⁶

As part of this presentation, Karen Reyes, a DACA recipient and teacher from Austin, Texas, shares her story. At age 2, her mother brought her to this country from Mexico. In high school, she realized that pursuing higher education as an undocumented student

would be a challenge. But with the help of guidance counselors and teachers, she persevered. She applied to college, secured scholarships, and earned both an undergraduate and a graduate degree.

Because of DACA, Reyes, now 29, was able to apply for and accept her dream job: teaching preschool students who are deaf or hard of hearing. As a "DACAmended" teacher, she is active in her union, Education Austin,* which she says recently held a citizenship drive that helped 112 eligible permanent residents fill out their applications.

Reyes then reminds educators of their power. She urges them to lobby their legislators in favor of DACA and the Dream Act and to reject any anti-immigrant legislation. "Be an active advocate," she says. "Don't just say I support the immigrant community."

At the end of her presentation, audience members give Reyes thunderous applause. They had listened to every word with rapt attention.

"The Best of Us Will Triumph over the Worst of Us"

Throughout the day, conference-goers hear of the many positive steps Lake County officials have taken in recent years to support the immigrant community. Long considered a blue dot in a red state, Lake County is one of only four in Indiana that went for Hillary Clinton in the presidential election. So the audience is hardly surprised to hear Frank Mrvan, the North Township trustee, praise a couple of well-known progressives in attendance.

*For more on Education Austin's work supporting the immigrant community, see <http://go.aft.org/AE417link1>.



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First, he mentions the work of his father, Indiana state Senator Frank Mrvan. In 2013, Senator Mrvan, a longtime Democrat, tried to introduce legislation allowing undocumented immigrants with tax identification numbers to apply for driver's licenses, but the idea never got a hearing. He is now trying to introduce legislation to allow undocumented students in Indiana to pay in-state, rather than out-of-state, college tuition. Currently, at least 18 states allow in-state tuition rates for undocumented students. Indiana, however, is one of three states that prohibit it.¹⁷

After recognizing his father for his efforts, the younger Mrvan asks Calvin Bellamy to stand. Fifteen years ago, as president of Calumet Bank, Bellamy "took the courageous move," Mrvan says, of allowing people with tax identification numbers to open up

13-year-old, who has autism, became terrified that his father would be deported. "He worries so much," Christian says, putting his arm around him.

Christian says he often tells his children not to worry, but he admits that if he's driving and sees a police car right behind him, he gets nervous. "If anything happens..." he says, as his voice trails off.

"I work hard," he says. "I pay my taxes. I tell my kids, if I get my papers today, I will join the National Guard tomorrow. That's how much I love this country." Tears well up in his eyes, and to comfort him, his wife rubs his arm.

Christian is proud that his family's pastor, Steve Munsey, of the Family Christian Center, a megachurch in Munster, Indiana, spoke at today's conference. (O'Rourke invited Munsey after the

State Senator Frank Mrvan is trying to introduce legislation to allow undocumented students in Indiana to pay in-state, rather than out-of-state, college tuition.



bank accounts so they could avoid paying exorbitant fees when cashing their checks elsewhere. O'Rourke later tells me that not everyone in Lake County applauded the move; many vehemently opposed it. But in allowing undocumented immigrants to open accounts, Bellamy enabled them to save their money and build credit. As Bellamy rises, the audience loudly applauds, just as it had done minutes ago for Mrvan.

Toward the end of the conference, Mary Cathryn Ricker, the executive vice president of the AFT, thanks everyone for attending and strikes a reassuring tone. "This is an age of immigration uncertainty," she says. But "by coming here today, those of us in this room are certain about something. We are certain that the best of us will triumph over the worst of us."

Such words are exactly what many in the audience wanted and needed to hear. Still, conference attendees are reluctant to speak with me for this article. Several decline, even when Greg Ruiz, from the school district's language department, offers to translate as they share their thoughts.

A family of four, however, is among the few who agree to be interviewed. To protect their privacy, I tell them I will not publish last names. Sitting in the high school cafeteria eating the free lunch provided, Christian, 43, says he found out about the conference thanks to a phone call from his oldest son's school; he came to learn more about immigration. Originally from Panama, he moved to this country in 1989 to escape the violence that broke out when the United States invaded Panama to oust Manuel Noriega.

Although he has a Social Security number and a driver's license, Christian is not a citizen. He says he came to the United States on a special visa he received when his uncle worked for the U.S. Air Force. Because his immigration status is murky—he says he's not sure if the visa is still good—he is working with a lawyer in Chicago.

An electrician who earns about \$50,000 a year, Christian says it will probably cost him \$4,000 in legal fees by the time he becomes a citizen. He pays taxes and owns his home. But the house is in his wife's name, since she recently became a citizen.

Their two sons, 13 and 12, were born in this country and attend Hammond public schools. During the presidential campaign, his

pastor asked him in July to promote the conference to his congregation of 30,000 members, many of whom are Hispanic.) Christian found Munsey's words of welcome reassuring and is pleased that his pastor is becoming more involved in issues related to immigration.

As his sons quietly eat, Christian says that immigrants, like him, just want to make a living and a better life for their kids. "That's all we want."

His family is grateful for all the supports the school district has put in place for his autistic son. In his class of 25 students, there are two teachers and two assistant teachers, and his son works with a paraprofessional who shadows him all day long. "I love Hammond because I know where my taxes go," Christian says—to his sons' terrific public schools.

A week after the conference, O'Rourke is proud of how it all turned out. "I've got businesses that have called me and said, 'What's the next step? How can we help?'" he says. He adds that the chair of the Lake County Democratic Central Committee has also assured him that the organization is going to focus more on immigration as a matter of social justice.

But the most moving experience for O'Rourke happened on Monday morning, two days after the conference. As he drove to the union office, his cell phone rang. In halting English, a woman told him she had attended the conference and wanted to thank him for organizing it. "I feel loved, and I feel more secure," she told him. O'Rourke thanked her for coming. When he asked if he could get in touch with her again, she told him no. She preferred not to give her name or information. O'Rourke understood. "I have a feeling she was undocumented."

He reminded her that if she or anyone she knew needed to speak to an attorney about any situation happening in their lives, they could do so for free at another conference he was helping to organize. This one would be at Morton High School on Saturday, September 23.

"Thank you. Muchas gracias," she said warmly and hung up. □

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Fully Realizing the Civic Potential of Immigrant Youth



BY REBECCA M. CALLAHAN AND
KATHRYN M. OBENCHAIN



Over the course of a few cold days last February, immigrant families and their allies in Austin, Texas, were shaken by a series of raids as immigration officers descended upon the city. After all was said and done, Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) officials arrested 51 undocumented immigrants, most of whom had no criminal record.¹

As the community raced to respond to the shock, teachers sought to protect their students. Reports flooded in of children being returned to school when bus drivers found no one to pick the students up at their stops, of teachers waiting with children until late into the evening when a relative was finally identified, of empty classrooms over the next several days, and of students who would never return. Families hurried to sign guardianship papers to protect their children in case they were ever detained or deported.

Educators saw an increase in students from immigrant families both wanting and needing emotional support; many students who came to school were distracted and worried, anxious that their parents wouldn't be there when they came home. Grades began to slip, and attendance began to drop. In a matter of days, numerous immigrant children and children of immigrants,* many of them U.S. citizens, were withdrawn from school or simply stopped attending—their parents, fearing deportation (for AFT resources, see page 12), retreating from public view.

In the following weeks and months, school communities responded by identifying and providing resources to advise families about their legal rights and to help them navigate the system should they be faced with immigration officers and/or deportation. Educators' mobilization efforts and outreach provided the basis for a

communication network focused on immigrant families' safety and well-being.

Teachers concerned about the psychological well-being of immigrant families at one school shared with us a guide to creating an emergency student action plan that they sent home with their students to help prepare families if confronted by ICE officials. With room for the names and phone numbers of teachers and other important adults in children's lives, the guide prompts families to gather key documents and information in one place. The very act of creating this action plan also helps families take comfort in being proactive and planning ahead to ensure that someone will care for their children.

In this article, we step back from the immediate aftermath of those ICE raids—in Austin and numerous other cities around the United States—to consider the role U.S. schools and educators play in the civic growth of immigrant youth. Our purpose is to show educators how to build on the civic potential of immigrant youth and prepare them for an active role in public discourse, or what has been called “enlightened political engagement.”

Professor Walter Parker suggests that enlightened political engagement is a core goal of education. Specifically, he frames democratic enlightenment and political engagement as two distinct and necessary dimensions to enlightened political engagement. Democratic enlightenment encompasses the knowledge of democratic traditions, principles, and political institutions; a commitment to justice; and the disposition for tolerance. Political engagement, on the other hand, refers to the actions and activities found in civic participation. According to Parker, the synthesis of these dimensions promotes “wise participation in public affairs,”² or what he terms enlightened political engagement. To ensure that future generations actively and wisely participate in American democratic traditions, teachers of today's immigrant students will want to focus not only on democratic ideas and knowledge, but also on civic activities and actions.

*We define immigrant youth as all children of immigrant parents, both those children born outside the United States (first generation), and those born in the United States (second generation).

Fostering Civic Voice

Since the earliest one-room schoolhouses, a core purpose of American education has been to create a well-informed citizenry,³ yet political forces often limit schools' ability to work toward this goal.⁴ We developed this article, in part, in response to the challenging political context in which we find ourselves—both as researchers invested in American students' civic education and as teachers of immigrant youth.

As educators, we take our charge to nurture students' democratic dispositions seriously. In doing so, it is essential to consider the growing diversity of the U.S. student population, where children in immigrant families now account for one in four K–12 students.⁵

The social studies curriculum is one space where students learn about those democratic dispositions, and the rights and responsibilities of citizenship in the United States. This overarching purpose is present in civics, economics, geography, and history content, all part of social studies. Researchers have found a strong relationship for immigrant youth between taking social studies courses and voting in young adulthood, but not for children of U.S.-born parents.⁶ In addition, other work has found patterns of limited social studies enrollment overall, especially in honors and Advanced Placement classes, among immigrant youth, which we hypothesize prevents many of these students from realizing their full civic potential.⁷

Most social studies content incorporates American sociocultural and historical narratives that may be less familiar to the children of foreign-born parents.⁸ For instance, when immigrant students learn the history of Martin Luther King Jr., Rosa Parks, and Malcolm X, they come to understand that the legacy of slavery continued to affect race relations long after the end of the Civil War, and still does so today. Manifest Destiny and American exceptionalism are associated with particular narratives that frame the United States in a specific and positive way.

Teachers will want to be aware that these “familiar” narratives may not be familiar at all to their students' foreign-born parents, who may or may not have been socialized into these particular perspectives. Explicit experiences with and knowledge of these narratives better positions immigrant students to navigate the civic contexts of their new homeland, actively engaging in public discourse and championing the rights of their communities. Knowledge of these narratives does not necessarily produce unquestioning acceptance; rather, it provides background information to better

Rebecca M. Callahan is an associate professor of bilingual/bicultural education at the University of Texas at Austin College of Education and a faculty research associate in the university's Population Research Center. Kathryn M. Obenchain is the associate dean for learning, engagement and global initiatives and an associate professor of social studies education at the Purdue University College of Education.

understand the perspectives that these narratives may foster.

Given the significant relationship between academic attainment and civic involvement, secondary school teachers and counselors can help to ensure that immigrants are appropriately enrolled in challenging social studies courses. Immigrants' access to rich social studies content in honors and Advanced Placement courses will help ensure that democratic traditions not only survive but thrive.

observe and internalize how their parents are treated outside the home.

Immigrant parent engagement can be as simple as providing translators and services in families' native languages, outreach to the communities where parents live and work, and support for teachers to connect with parents on their terms.[†] This includes hiring immigrant educators in leadership positions and providing professional development opportunities for teachers to understand immigrant families. Together, these actions

leadership skills. Extracurricular activities place students in contact with a variety of peers and adults as they engage in academic competitions (e.g., science, math, engineering, and technology challenges, National History Day), service organizations (e.g., Key Club, 4-H), and speech and debate clubs. In addition to contributing to the development of civic identity, these interactions promote civil discourse and problem solving,¹⁴ essential skills for democratic citizens. Just as important, educators can foster immigrant students' civic voices by drawing on their inherent strengths. More than two decades ago, researchers coined the term "immigrant optimism" to explain the academic advantage children of immigrant parents repeatedly demonstrate relative to their peers, pointing to immigrant parents' relatively high expectations.¹⁵ Likewise, advocates for bilingual education have long cited research documenting a bilingual advantage among immigrant youth.[‡]

Well-developed bilingualism and biliteracy are linked to numerous academic, cognitive, and professional advantages,¹⁶ similar to the ability of immigrant students to navigate and negotiate two or more cultures and perspectives.¹⁷ Teachers can



Even in this precarious time, with nationalism on the rise, we believe that educators and schools are well positioned to foster civic participation among immigrant youth.

Even in this precarious time, with nationalism on the rise, we believe that educators and schools are well positioned to foster civic participation among immigrant youth. Strong civic actors recognize their own abilities to *act on* their communities in public and productive ways and to the benefit of the public or common good.⁹ Without this commitment and a deep knowledge of American history, even the strongest of republics will eventually crumble. As educators, we miss an opportunity to strengthen and fortify our rich democratic traditions when we fail to recognize the civic potential of immigrant youth to fully engage in and commit to our republic.

Ensuring Cohesive School Communities

Together, teachers and administrators set the tone of the school community. School leaders not only can provide clearly articulated policies and procedures to engage immigrant families, but also can model inclusiveness for all faculty, staff, and students. Making immigrant parents feel welcome at school is critical,¹⁰ as children

validate immigrant parents and help incorporate them into the school community.

Both studying academic subjects such as reading, writing, math, social studies, and science, and forging bonds with adults and peers, are part and parcel of what we do in school. They form the center of a student's educational universe, especially during adolescence, when academics and social involvement coexist. Extracurricular experiences contribute to students' educational success,¹¹ with evidence to suggest particular relevance for Latino and immigrant youth.¹² In fact, immigrant youth may be particularly predisposed to volunteer in their communities and take on leadership positions.¹³

Educators can actively recruit and support immigrant youth in extracurricular activities, where they can develop a sense of belonging and commitment, as well as

capitalize on these immigrant advantages in their instruction. The ability to make sense of diverse perspectives is a core tenet of American democracy, and immigrant students experience this firsthand as they encounter diverse perspectives in their daily lives.

A strong civic identity includes a sense of membership in and commitment to improving one's community.¹⁸ Simply living in a particular country or community guarantees neither a robust civic identity nor a connection to that place in particular.¹⁹ One need look no further than the anti-immigrant rhetoric that has driven many notable state and local education policies²⁰ to understand that immigrant students' educational experiences are shaped not just by curriculum and instruction, but also by the current political climate.

(Continued on page 41)

[†]For more on parent engagement, see "Connecting with Students and Families through Home Visits" in the Fall 2015 issue of *American Educator*, available at www.aft.org/ae/fall2015/faber.

[‡]For more on the history of bilingual education, see "Bilingual Education" in the Fall 2015 issue of *American Educator*, available at www.aft.org/ae/fall2015/goldenberg_wagner.

Creating Sanctuary for Students Fearful of Deportation

WHILE MOST SCHOOL-AGE CHILDREN of immigrants are U.S. citizens, many live in households that include people with various immigration statuses and fear that they or their family members will be deported. The AFT has been hearing from members all around the country that children are showing signs of social-emotional stress as a result of being undocumented themselves or knowing that a family member is undocumented.

Deportations separate families and leave many more in fear of separation. Teachers, counselors, and other school personnel are often the first to address the mental health concerns of their students regarding immigration, and have witnessed firsthand the negative impact on students' ability to focus in school.

Children involved in or fearing deportation raids may experience emotional and behavioral changes, sleep and eating disturbances, excessive crying, anxious behavior, nightmares, aggressive and withdrawn behavior (especially in older youth), poor academic performance, and social withdrawal and isolation.

Schools should be safe havens for all students and families, including unaccompanied and refugee children, regardless of citizenship status and national origin. To ensure that all children feel safe, welcomed, and supported—no matter where they or their parents were born—educators can do the following:

- Make students feel comfortable by talking to them with a colleague who can help with counseling needs one-on-one, away from peers.
- Offer students the chance to express themselves privately through drawing, artwork, or writing. This can be an important safety valve during particularly stressful periods and also can provide a way for students to respond to events in or beyond the classroom.
- Give students strategies to manage stress: ask what they do when they feel stress, anger, sadness, or other difficult emotions. They may never have thought about it before! Offer some additional ideas for managing difficult emotions, such as taking a couple of deep breaths, sitting in a quiet corner to calm down, drawing or writing, exercising, or talking to a friend or trusted adult. Consider inviting a school counselor into the classroom to lead a discussion and share strategies.
- Contact local and national organizations, such as the National Immigration Law Center, United We Dream, and First Focus, that support and provide resources for immigrant families. The Immigration Advocates Network offers resources by state: www.bit.ly/2zJdBK.
- Ensure the classroom atmosphere is nonthreatening. Find ways to involve apprehensive students, such as by creating a buddy system so that peers make students feel welcome and by introducing them to supportive and helpful personnel in the building. Just as important, reach out to families through an interpreter or materials written in their home language.

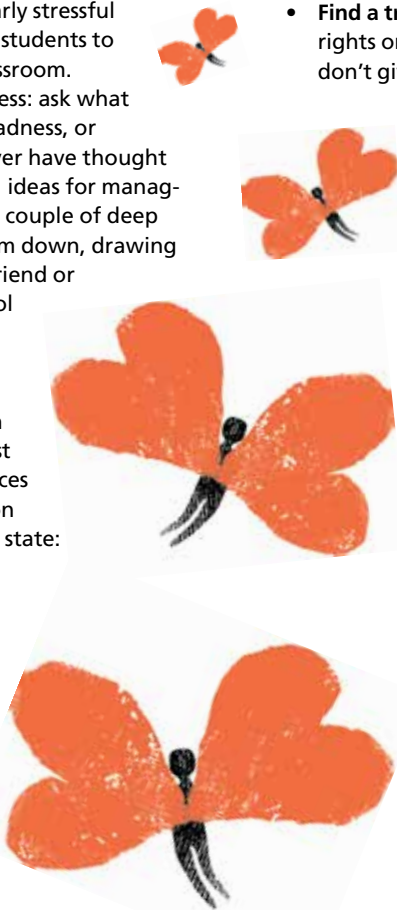
What Educators Should Know about the Rights of Immigrants and the Threat of Deportation

Under federal law, all children, regardless of their citizenship or residency status, are entitled to a K–12 education. Unless the Department of Homeland Security's sensitive locations policy is reversed, it will continue to limit immigration enforcement from taking place at "sensitive locations." These include schools, licensed daycares, school bus stops, colleges and universities, educational programs, medical treatment facilities, and places of worship. Under the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA), schools are prohibited, without parental consent, from providing information from a student's file to federal immigration agents if the information would potentially expose a student's immigration status. School districts are responsible for ensuring the safety and well-being of all students.

What Students and Families Should Do If ICE Authorities Come to Their Homes

- **Do not open the door** without them passing a signed warrant under the door.
- **Do not say anything** beyond "I plead the Fifth and choose to remain silent."
- **Do not sign anything** without speaking to an attorney.
- **Document and report the raid** immediately to the United We Dream hotline (844-363-1423). Take pictures, videos, and notes. Write down badge numbers of agents and exactly what happened.
- **Find a trustworthy attorney** by contacting a local immigrant rights organization. If detained, you may be able to get bail—don't give up hope!

—AFT EDUCATIONAL ISSUES DEPARTMENT



AFT Resources on Immigrant Rights

Immigration: Protecting Our Students
<http://go.aft.org/AE417tft1>

Know Your Rights
<http://go.aft.org/AE417tft2>

School Response Plan (scroll down to "Threats to Immigrants")
<http://go.aft.org/AE417tft3>

A Guide for Educators and School Support Staff
<http://go.aft.org/AE417tft4>

Serving and Supporting Immigrant Students: Information for Schools
<http://go.aft.org/AE417tft5>

Celebrating the Voices of Immigrant Students



Professional educators—in the classroom, library, counseling center, or anywhere in between—share one overarching goal: ensuring all students receive the rich, well-rounded education they need to be productive, engaged citizens. In this regular feature, we explore the work of professional educators—their accomplishments and their challenges—so that the lessons they have learned can benefit students across the country. After all, listening to the professionals who do this work every day is a blueprint for success.

BY MARY ANN ZEHR

Stories matter. They illustrate our successes and failures, joys and heartbreaks. Telling our stories helps us understand ourselves and each other, and build community. That’s why storytelling belongs in the classroom, especially mine. All of my students are English language learners (ELLs), and many have experienced trauma in the process of immigration. Telling their stories helps them to heal and to understand who they are. That, in turn, helps make them resilient and, no less important, helps them progress academically.

Mary Ann Zehr is in her seventh year teaching English language learners in the District of Columbia Public Schools and is a member of the Washington Teachers’ Union.

My school’s leaders stress that I need to teach my students how to write analytically. They ask teachers of all disciplines for samples of formal “evidence-based writing” several times a year to ensure students can produce such work. I agree that high school students need to learn how to write analytically so they can succeed in college and careers, and so I assign my students several analytical essays each year. But to support them in their social and emotional development, I give them opportunities to tell their personal stories too.*

In doing so, my students realize they don’t experience the angst of immigration and adolescence alone. They see that many of their peers have also survived trauma or have had similar difficulties adjusting to a new school or a new language and culture.

*For more on social and emotional development, see the article on page 16.

Sharing in this way also can improve their fluency in English and lets them see themselves as writers, which builds their confidence and builds community as well. I hope this article encourages other teachers to assign this kind of writing, too.

I teach English and history in the International Academy at the Francis L. Cardozo Education Campus in Washington, D.C. The academy, part of the Internationals Network for Public Schools, enrolls students who have arrived in the United States in the last several years. Many crossed the U.S.-Mexico border as unaccompanied minors, coming from El Salvador, Honduras, or Guatemala, but some come from other countries, such as Eritrea,

I began to incorporate storytelling during my first year at Cardozo in classes for 9th- and 10th-graders. For a unit on immigration, students read excerpts of the book *Enrique's Journey: The Story of a Boy's Dangerous Odyssey to Reunite with His Mother*, by Sonia Nazario. Spanish-speaking students who had just arrived read the excerpts in Spanish as well.

The book tells the true story of an impoverished teenager from Honduras who rides freight trains across Mexico and crosses the Rio Grande to reach his mother in the United States. Enrique's journey is treacherous. While Enrique is riding a freight train, some men beat him up badly enough that he almost dies. Eventually, he recovers from his injuries and reunites with his mother in North Carolina, after not seeing her for more than a decade.



Telling our stories helps us understand ourselves and each other, and build community.

Sierra Leone, and Vietnam. My students' lives in this country are not easy. Quite a few juggle work and school. And those who are undocumented feel especially isolated amid the current anti-immigrant rhetoric.

When I first started working at Cardozo's International Academy in 2015, I hesitated to ask students to share their stories. I worried it might create distrust in the classroom or cause them to relive trauma. But when I eventually—at first, cautiously, and then, over time, more confidently—provided open-ended opportunities for them to talk about their lives, they responded positively.

Writing stories has played a powerful role in my own life. One of the reasons I majored in English in college was to explore my identity through writing. I was raised as a Mennonite, and some of my family's cultural practices differed from those of my peers in the public schools I attended. My elementary and secondary teachers did not create opportunities for students to write and share their stories. Nevertheless, as a child I kept personal journals, and in college I had chances to write and reflect on my life in assignments. Writing helped me decide which parts of Mennonite culture to keep and which to discard. I want to give my students, who may feel torn between cultures, an opportunity to sort out their identities through writing.

After earning a bachelor's degree in English and a master's degree in journalism, I became a journalist. For 14 years, I wrote for *Education Week*, a national publication focused on schools. There, I interviewed young people to illustrate how education policy plays out in practice. For more than a decade, I specialized in writing about ELLs, and it was their stories that prompted me to become a teacher. One student I recall meeting was Morry Bamba, a teenager from the West African nation of Guinea. Bamba, who hadn't attended school in his home country, began to learn English—and even how to read—at the age of 15, after moving to the United States and enrolling in a New York City public school. He expressed immense gratitude for how his teachers had helped him, and I wondered if I too could make a difference in young people's lives through teaching. In 2011, I became a teacher of English as a second language in the District of Columbia Public Schools.

In response to the readings, I asked students to share with the class something that happened on their trip to the United States. Quite a few said that, like Enrique, they had traveled on freight trains to cross Mexico, on their way to the United States. Although some chose to relay details as unrevealing as "I ate Mexican food," others discussed their journeys at length. One student recalled the three hours he traveled while crammed inside a box in the luggage area of a bus. Another student captivated us with his story of a Mexican cartel kidnapping him and demanding a ransom. His parents, who lived in the United States, sent money to the kidnappers to attain his release. Given that he had survived this harrowing experience, he relished the chance to share it. This student often wasn't engaged in class, but I was struck by how animated he became while telling his story. When he and his peers shared such traumatic experiences, I listened respectfully and always made sure to tell each one of them, "I'm sorry that happened to you, and I'm glad you are now safe."

Based on *Enrique's Journey*, I asked students to write an essay on whether, given the myriad risks, immigrants should come to the United States. Everyone in the class wrote that immigrants should come. Many shared that immigrants from Central America leave their countries because they feel as if they have no choice: they are poor and want a better life, or they fear gang violence. In assigning the essays, I gave students the option not to share their own stories if they felt uncomfortable doing so; they could write about their own experiences or those of classmates they had interviewed, or they could use information about immigrants from other sources.

The following school year, I switched to teaching English to 11th- and 12th-graders, and I incorporated another project to engage students in writing their stories. I called it a "collective diary." I particularly liked how this project enabled students to reflect on any aspect of their lives. While some students chose

to write about immigration, others wrote about completely different topics, such as their experiences working in D.C. restaurants.

Seniors kept diaries in class about daily events. They also studied those written by other teenagers. They read diary entries collected by Alexandra Zapruder in the book *Salvaged Pages: Young Writers' Diaries of the Holocaust*. I asked students to reflect on this essential question while reading: "How do the diary writers express their humanity?" After we finished the unit, I "published" diary entries from 46 seniors in a collective diary titled "Everyday Cardozo."

How did I ensure this unit was challenging? For one, the diary entries included sophisticated syntax and vocabulary. Students had to look up new words and learn how to use them. Also, I engaged students in discussions as part of a Socratic seminar.

"You may not think your lives are interesting, but they are," I told them, urging them to imitate the writers of *Salvaged Pages* by sharing facts, emotions, and opinions. "What do you want to tell the world?" The deep reflections of the teenagers from this book inspired my students to engage in some deep reflection of their own.

"I want Americans to know that as an immigrant, I also have feelings," one of my students wrote. "I can feel the pain of being far away from my family. I also get scared, knowing I can be deported to my home country. People in this country don't know that if we come here it is because we don't have other options."

As was true of the diary writers from *Salvaged Pages*, my students didn't sugarcoat their experiences. In the book, Moshe Flinker, who was living in exile in Belgium after fleeing his home country of Holland, wrote, "During recent days an emptiness has formed inside

me. Nothing motivates me to do anything or write anything, and

no new ideas enter my mind; everything is as if asleep."

With a similar melancholic tone, one of my students wrote about his feelings: "Some days I feel sad to be in this country. I feel alone. I miss my family a lot. When things get hard I just want to talk with somebody. ... I feel really tired many days but I have to work. I have to do something. Bills won't get paid by themselves. I really wish my real family could be here with me. I am really sure that could help me a lot."

Some diary entries were lighthearted. I learned that a common experience of my students who work as food runners in restaurants is to accidentally take a plate of food to the wrong table. Some managers take such mistakes in stride. Others don't.

Zapruder visited my classes through the PEN/Faulkner Writers-in-Schools program,* and students discussed the book with her. They shared that they could identify with the fear and uncertainty expressed by some of the diarists during the Holocaust because they also feel uncertainty and fear about their future. (Zapruder visited in February 2017, when students were hyper-aware of President Trump's anti-immigrant rhetoric.)

For the collective diary, I asked each student to submit three entries, and I chose one or two from each person to publish. I gave students a draft copy and asked for their approval to publish it. I wanted students to feel safe in sharing, so I didn't include their names. When one student decided he didn't want to have a diary entry published, I honored his request. I made 70 copies of the publication and slipped each one into a shiny pocket folder provided by my administrators. My students agreed I could invite teachers and staff in our school to open houses for readings of "Everyday Cardozo."

On open-house day, I set out juice, cookies, and muffins and displayed the publication on a table dressed up with a tapestry from Guatemala and a bouquet of red-orange roses. Attendance by the seniors on that day was stronger than it had been for a couple of weeks. Some students chose to read aloud their own diary entries, but most read entries written by others. Several visitors, including the principal, attended.

I could tell students were excited at the prospect of sharing their work. During the open houses, they used formal manners, introducing themselves before they read, applauding for each other, and listening attentively. No one refused to stand up and read a diary entry, and no one betrayed to the visitors who had written what. To me, that signaled their respect for the stories and for each other. When one staff member visited a class after the students had completed their readings, the students volunteered to repeat the program just for her.

After the open houses, every student took home a copy of "Everyday Cardozo." Over the years, I've noticed that if students don't care about a text or handout, they "accidentally" leave it behind. But that didn't happen this time. Some students even asked if they could take home individual roses from the bouquet on the publication table, and of course I told them they could. I could think of no better way for them to capture the moment. To me, the flowers fittingly symbolized their budding recognition of the beauty of their own self-expression. □

*For more about this program, see www.penfaulkner.org/writers-in-schools.



You Are Welcome Here

(Continued from page 9)

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Engaging Immigrant Students

(Continued from page 11)

In fact, the large-scale immigrant rights marches of 2006 were organized and run largely by U.S.-born children of immigrants, frustrated with the virulent anti-immigrant sentiment aimed at their parents.²¹ It is in the best interest of our nation, our communities, our schools, and our students to nurture a healthy civic identity in immigrant youth. If, as a nation, we frame our demographic diversity as a strength rather than as a liability, we can fully realize the civic potential of immigrant youth and, ultimately, of our republic.

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