

Student walkouts oppose Trump's vicious immigration policies

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About 200 high school students at Kingsbury High School in Memphis, Tennessee, walked out of school Tuesday, February 28, to demand equality and unity in support of the rights of immigrants.

Demonstrations such as these have continued around the country since the February 16 "Day Without Immigrants" protests. Many young people across the US, opposing the Trump administration's raids, roundups and arrests, have become outspoken in their defense of the democratic rights of all ethnicities and nationalities.

"The students who organized this protest today felt there was something that needs to be said and heard," said Kingsbury High School senior Olivia Opp, 18, to education blog Chalkbeat. "It's really important that I understand and am aware of everything going on, not only in the Hispanic/Latino community, but in the Muslim community, in the undocumented community.

"We all gathered in the auditorium and got to hear from students of different nationalities, from Honduran to African American to Mexican. That was powerful," she stated.

"Today I think we saw a group of people standing up for their rights," Amber Jones, 17, also told Chalkbeat, "It was interesting to see people talking about what they are going through. One girl talked about how she is afraid of losing her sister if she gets deported. I think this protest could impact Memphis in a good way because it shows our diversity. It was amazing to see the school come together as one, even though we're all different. We want to show our school leaders that."

Yusuf Safi, 18, also spoke with the education news site, "I saw a big group going toward the auditorium with different flags. There was a Honduran flag, a Salvadorian flag, a Mexican flag, all marching toward the auditorium. Everyone was calm and organized. It was pretty amazing.

"What I saw today showed me that when it comes to being serious, students at Kingsbury know how to act

about something they care about. The protest was very heartfelt. A couple of stories, personal stories that students told us, hit me deep. One student said that her father got deported. Her story will stay with me."

The peaceful protest began at lunchtime and was quickly surrounded by Memphis police and Shelby County campus security, but no students were arrested. Organizers told localmemphis.com they wanted to send a message about equality and unity.

Two weeks prior, large numbers of Kingsbury students stayed home to join the national protests, "A Day Without Immigrants."

Charlotte, North Carolina

For the second time in 10 days, Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools students also protested Trump's attacks on immigrants. Five hundred Garinger High students walked out last Friday, February 24, and held a protest on campus, with many returning to class afterward.

Approximately 100 students then marched through the city for seven miles to Zebulon B. Vance High School, waving flags from Honduras, El Salvador and Mexico. Along the route, five other schools were placed on "lock down" by school authorities as they tried to contain the protest.

Students told the *Observer* they were acting on behalf of undocumented family and friends who fear deportation for being in the country illegally. "There's kids that their parents have been taken away on their way to work. Nobody wants to listen to us. This is the only way people will listen to us," said Esbeida Mendez Diaz, who was brought to the US from Mexico when she was one year old.

Jose Flores, the son of parents from Mexico and El Salvador, carried a Mexican flag during the march and also spoke with the *Observer*, "Do we look like criminals to y'all? Do we look like rapists?" he asked. "We're afraid for our families. We're not aliens. We are human

beings,” added David Palacios, who is originally from El Salvador.

February 17, the day after the national “Day Without Immigrants,” hundreds of Charlotte students had also walked out and held protests. The school district e-mailed warnings to parents at South Meck, Olympic High, Martin Luther King Jr. Middle School and Cochrane Collegiate Academy, emphasizing that those students who “organized a walkout and left campus” would be disciplined according to the Code of Student Conduct.

Danbury, Connecticut

On February 23, 500 Danbury High School students walked out of school to protest the refusal of city authorities to arrest a Trump supporter who threatened immigrant students. It was also their second protest within two weeks in support of immigrant rights.

Student organizer Iman Farah, 16, told the *Danbury News Times* the school principal did not address student fears about their safety after the incident on Inauguration Day. The man, apparently visibly drunk, turned up in the school parking lot, waving a Trump sign and shouting obscenities including, “You’ll be out of the country, you f—— illegals,” according to the local *News Times*. Local authorities claimed the courts would not issue a warrant for the man’s arrest, angering students.

The students said the protest against harassment became a rally against President Trump’s fear-mongering, his promise to deport undocumented immigrants, and the “radicalization” of his followers, who students feared would return and harass students.

As administrators tried to convince the crowd to go back inside, an undocumented student urged his classmates on the football field’s bleachers to continue the protest, recounting his dread ever since Trump was elected, the *News Times* reported. “I love this country like a second mother, but I wake up every morning and go to bed every night afraid,” he told the group.

The city dispatched a heavy police presence to the school in response to the student action, reported the school newspaper *Hatters Herald*. Meanwhile, Principal Dan Donovan said he would “hold the organizers accountable” under the school’s Discipline Code.

Isaias Nuñez, a senior who participated in the walkout, was not intimidated. He explained to the *Herald*, “If we don’t do anything at all then it will send a message we don’t want, which is that we are tolerant of ignorance and disrespect.”

Madison, Wisconsin

On February 18, Madison high school students—from

East High, West High, La Follette and Memorial High—joined with workers from throughout the state in a massive display of pro-immigrant sentiment.

The crowds were estimated at 20,000 people, the largest demonstrations at the Capitol since the 2011 mass protests against the assault on workers’ benefits and collective bargaining rights in the state.

Students told the *Capitol Times* that they were marching both to oppose Trump’s ICE roundups and to bring attention to two reactionary bills in the Wisconsin Legislature. Assembly Bill 723 has passed the state senate and would drastically restrict towns and counties from issuing photo ID cards. This punitive measure would deny immigrants access to proof of residence as well as the ability to apply for any form of public assistance.

SB 369, passed by the state Assembly, would cut state funding from cities that don’t enforce immigration statutes in an effort to crack down on so-called sanctuary cities.

Popular chants were “Sí, se puede” (yes, we can) and “Wisconsin is not Arizona,” referring to Arizona’s draconian anti-immigrant regulations, the *Daily Cardinal* noted.

“We want to educate people about these laws and make them realize that immigrants are a very important part of the country,” Guadalupe Salmeron, a senior at East High, told the *Capitol Times*. “Especially in Wisconsin in the dairy industry, which is our biggest industry here.” Students from Green Bay, Milwaukee and Waukesha also joined the protesters at the Capitol.

“Most of the immigrants in this state hide in the shadows and now [if these bills pass] we would be afraid to leave our homes,” Madison West high school student Michael Portillo told the *Daily Cardinal*.



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