

ICE arrests at Southern California schools terrorize students and parents at start of school year

Ivan Cardenas, Luis Marquez, Renae Cassimeda
26 August 2025

The new school year in Southern California has begun under extraordinary and deeply ominous circumstances. Within days of students returning to classrooms, federal immigration agents have carried out aggressive operations at and near public schools, targeting students and their families. At least ten documented cases near Los Angeles and San Diego schools have taken place since classes resumed.

The raids in Southern California are only one front in a nationwide campaign, building on last year's arrests of dozens of arrests of students, parents and teachers in schools across the country.

Todd Lyons, acting ICE director, explained to *NBC News* that enforcement around K-12 schools is part of an ongoing federal campaign, justifying future intrusion on school grounds whenever "special circumstances" or "exigent situations" arise. He also noted that, while ICE agents won't be seen on school campuses on the first day of schools in Washington DC Monday, they may be in the near future.

The terror being inflicted on immigrant families is part of an even broader repression. Trump has deployed the National Guard to Washington DC, with plans for further deployments to other states, and is conducting surveillance on tens of millions of visa holders. The targeting of immigrants functions as a pretext for the methods of dictatorship that are now being deployed against workers everywhere.

was parked outside of the school to enroll her daughter.

His mother recounted that armed agents, including one with a gun and another with a taser, surrounded their car. Baldemar was pulled from the vehicle, handcuffed, and questioned about someone he did not know. Both he and his mother repeatedly explained that he is a U.S. citizen and a minor, but were ignored until agents realized their error.

To underscore their cruelty, one of the agents said, "look at the bright side: You're going to have an exciting story to tell your friends when you go back to school." According to a statement by Carvalho, Border Patrol left bullets on the ground during the arrest and told the district "to keep the rounds and use them for target practice."

On August 8th, just days after he turned 18, Reseda Charter High student Benjamin Guerrero-Cruz was attacked by masked men in plainclothes who grabbed him while he was walking his dog in Van Nuys, and put him into an unmarked van. To add to the cruelty, the men unclipped the dog's leash and chased it off. ICE took custody of the student from these masked men, whom the teen said joked about being able to enjoy drinks over the weekend due to their \$1,500 payout for capturing him. Guerrero-Cruz was held in a crowded cell at an ICE facility for a week, during which he was not allowed to even shower, and has since been moved to a crowded cell in Adelanto Ice Detention Center, facing deportation to Chile.

Arrests at schools in Los Angeles

The scale of ICE activity in the Los Angeles Unified School District (LAUSD) is unprecedented.

August 14, the very first day of classes, federal enforcement was reported in the vicinity of four campuses: Bakewell Primary Center, Harte Prep Middle School, Cortines School of Visual & Performing Arts, and Victory Boulevard Elementary and STEAM Magnet. LAUSD officials scrambled to notify families, but Superintendent Alberto M. Carvalho downplayed the incidents, focusing instead on a 2 percent rise in attendance. He sought to assure parents that the first day of school went off without a hitch despite the visible presence of ICE around schools.

Baldemar Gutierrez, a 15-year-old student with special needs, was terrorized and mistakenly apprehended by federal agents on August 11, while outside of Arleta High School. He was with his mother, who

Arrests at schools in San Diego County

At least four separate arrests have taken place outside San Diego county schools over the past three weeks.

On August 20 near Park Dale Lane Elementary school in Encinitas, a man (who has yet to be identified) was stopped in his truck around 7:30 am and surrounded by agents. In a video taken by witnesses, the victim's wife can be heard pleading with agents to let him go, and to let the man say goodbye to his family.

On August 15, outside Montgomery High School in the Sweetwater Union High School District (SUHSD), ICE agents seized a student's father during morning drop off, according to district officials.

On August 13, ICE agents also seized Mexican national Juan Jose Martinez Cortes outside Linda Vista elementary as he was waiting to pick up his child, just minutes before the school day was to conclude. The arrest forced the district to release a nervous statement attempting

to assure families that schools remained “safe spaces”—an assertion utterly contradicted by events.

On August 6 outside of Enrique S. Camarena Elementary school in Chula Vista, masked and armed ICE agents arrested Korean immigrant Kyungjin Yu in front of her children as school was starting. Yu, like countless other victims of the ongoing ICE raids, faces state persecution and deportation not for any crime, but simply for residing in the United States on an expired visa. District officials later admitted parents had been calling in fear, with some saying they were afraid to send their children to school at all.

On social media, teachers are documenting the cascading impact on families and school communities. One San Diego teacher reported a heartbreaking case in which a parent, fearing deportation, chose to self-deport in order to accompany their child, who faced removal proceedings. Entire families are being broken apart in what amounts to state-organized terror—designed not only to punish individuals, but to sow insecurity and paralysis among millions.

The response of ICE to the San Diego attacks has been one of willful dishonesty and calculated evasion. An ICE spokesperson arrogantly insisted, “The truth of the matter is that ICE San Diego has not conducted enforcement at schools, and suggestions to the contrary mislead the public and create unnecessary fear.” The statement cynically omits the fact that the attacks have all taken place within sight, sound, and oftentimes mere steps from school grounds—targeting parents, students and staff, and directly traumatizing children, families and educators.

Teachers, parents, and students have continued to rally and protest, and have developed community networks to share information and reports of ICE activity. Recently in San Diego, ICE agents in two unmarked vehicles were driven out of the parking lot of Herbert Ibarra Elementary School by community members. There is no question that the desire to resist these brutal actions runs deep within working-class communities.

But this instinctive militancy faces an immediate obstacle: the stranglehold of the Democratic Party and the trade union bureaucracy, which seek to politically disarm workers with safe, symbolic gestures, and prevent opposition from developing into a genuine mass struggle.

It is necessary at the outset to warn workers and students: the campaign to oppose ICE must not be subordinated to the initiative of Democrats or their allies in the teachers’ unions. These institutions defend the capitalist system that breeds repression, and they will stop at nothing to smother independent, class-based opposition.

What is needed is the formation of independent rank-and-file committees of workers not just in education but in every sector and industry of the economy, politically independent of the trade union bureaucracy and its Democratic handlers, to coordinate with one another for the creation of a mass strike movement.

Trump’s Democratic enablers

Democrats throughout the Southern California and the state continue to promote the illusion that “sanctuary city” laws will protect families from Trump’s ICE Gestapo. But throughout California and the nation, these laws, always limited in scope, have been rendered meaningless, as police join federal immigration agents in terrorizing immigrant

communities. The start of the new school year in the Los Angeles Unified LAUSD makes this betrayal painfully clear.

The teachers’ unions, including United Teachers Los Angeles, the San Diego Education Association and the Chicago Teachers Association, have gone to great lengths to channel the anger of educators into symbolic protests and appeals to superintendents. Teachers have rallied to demand the release of detained students, but only by urging district officials to intervene, never calling for united and militant action by all educators.

Even as nearly 80,000 California teachers languish under expired contracts and the CTA trumpets its “We Can’t Wait” campaign, the unions refuse to call for strike action or collective resistance to ICE raids. Instead, they stage rallies and publicity stunts, pressuring superintendents for better safety policies while avoiding any confrontation with the capitalist state.

This refusal is not an accident. The unions and the Democratic Party are bound by a common political function: to suppress the working class and prevent any struggle that would reveal the inseparable link between deportations and police repression and the capitalist system itself. Their role is to serve the interests of the ruling class and defend the regime of austerity and state violence. They cannot be reformed, pushed to the left, or compelled to fight. As history and present experience demonstrate, any movement that places its hopes in these organizations will only face deeper attacks and more brutal repression.

The scale and brutality of these operations make clear the urgent need for conscious, independent organization of workers against the escalating assault on immigrants and democratic rights. To defeat this fascistic wave of terror and dictatorship—whose source lies in capitalist rule—the working class must harness these instincts through the immediate formation of rank-and-file committees in every neighborhood, school and workplace, preparing for a general strike that can wield its immense power as the majority and true productive force in society.



To contact the WSWS and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:
wsws.org/contact