

Teachers face illegal reprisals over support for student walkouts against ICE

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27 February 2026

As anti-ICE student walkouts continue and communities mobilize against the construction of concentration camps, the Trump administration is being joined by state and local politicians—both Democratic and Republican—in trying to criminalize the growing opposition.

Across the US, teachers and school staff are facing investigations, discipline and firings over even perceived support for anti-ICE protests. On February 25, the Federal Bureau of Investigation raided the headquarters of the Los Angeles Unified School District and the home of Superintendent Alberto Carvalho, an outspoken critic of Trump and ICE raids.

These actions are intended to send a clear political message: no criticism of US imperialism and its alliances will be tolerated in academic spaces. Outlined below are some of the recent attacks on freedom of speech, assembly and the right to protest affecting K-12 educators nationally. The widespread and courageous protests by students have clearly helped to galvanize a broadening opposition in the working class, and struck fear in the ruling elites.

Texas

After hundreds of students in Houston, San Antonio, Austin and the Dallas-Fort Worth area participated in the national student walkouts on January 30 against ICE, the Texas Education Agency (TEA) issued a statewide bulletin threatening teachers for their support. The bulletin said that educators who “aid” or “encourage” students to leave class for anti-ICE protests would be investigated and could face sanctions, including the loss of their license.

On February 16, Attorney General Ken Paxton opened formal investigations into Austin ISD, Dallas ISD, North East ISD (San Antonio), and Manor ISD, demanding internal emails, policies, and communications to see whether administrators or teachers “helped organize” anti-ICE protests.

“I will not allow Texas schools to become breeding grounds for the radical Left’s open borders agenda,” Paxton said in a statement. “Let this serve as a warning to any public school official or employee who unlawfully facilitates student participation in protests targeting our heroic law enforcement officers: my office will use every legal tool available to hold you accountable.”

Governor Greg Abbott publicly labeled schools and staff who “permit” walkouts as “co-conspirators” and threatened funding cuts and other penalties for districts seen as facilitating protests.

The American Civil Liberties Union denounced the actions, stating:

Government officials should not intimidate students and educators for exercising their constitutional rights, nor can they punish students disproportionately for walkouts compared to other types of absences. Boycotts and walkouts are one of the oldest and most peaceful forms of protest in our democracy—and the Supreme Court has continuously recognized that students and teachers do not shed their constitutional rights at the schoolhouse doors.

California

Available coverage indicates that tens of thousands of students have walked out in California to protest the violent seizures and mass deportations by ICE. This included thousands of students in the East Bay, across roughly a dozen schools, with multiple San Francisco schools also participating. Local new media LAist reported that about 4,500 students from two dozen Los Angeles schools walked out, with the *Los Angeles Times* citing “throng[s] of students” protesting from Long Beach to Pasadena. Students walked out in classrooms across Orange County, with marches in Santa Ana and Capistrano Valley.

The massive community outrage and the growing demands for a general strike have prompted authorities in the Democratic Party-dominated state to try to intimidate students and workers.

In the Fresno area, Clovis and Sanger police, in coordination with Clovis Unified School District, stated that they would seek misdemeanor charges of “contributing to the delinquency of a minor” against adults identified at student walkouts protesting ICE deportations. They said at least two adults had already been identified and that others were being investigated.

Ricardo Lopez, an AP US History teacher at Synergy Quantum Academy in Los Angeles, was summarily fired and escorted off campus after opening a locked gate so students leaving for an anti-ICE walkout would not injure themselves climbing the fence.

Lopez told CBS News: “My number one priority as an educator is to create a safe space and try to protect my students. In that moment, I just tried to protect them.”

Within the hour, the school administration fired Lopez for “insubordination” and escorted him off campus. He called the punishment “very unfair” and “very unjust.” “I felt like a criminal,”

Lopez said. Community groups have shown their support for Lopez, and hundreds have signed an online petition calling for his reinstatement. The United Teachers Los Angeles (UTLA) has failed to issue a statement in Lopez's defense.

New York

In New York City, the City Council is considering "buffer zone" legislation, part of a "five-point action plan" on "antisemitism"—in reality, protests against Israel's genocide in Gaza—introduced in January. Sponsored by Democratic Bronx Councilmember Eric Dinowitz, a right-wing Zionist, the bill would formalize the NYPD's authority to establish police-controlled perimeters around educational institutions during protests, extending to entrances and exits and applying to both public and private property.

This has provoked opposition from the ACLU, and a joint letter signed by nearly 100 organizations. They warn that the proposed legislation would create "protest-free zones" where police have broad discretion to decide which demonstrations can approach schools and under what conditions.

The bill is being promoted by Zionists seeking to ban protests over the Gaza genocide, but it will inevitably be used against student and teacher opposition to deportations and other government crimes.

Florida

Anti-ICE walkouts also took place in Florida, a state with a large immigrant population. Local sources report hundreds of students walking out in several metro areas (Tampa Bay, Brevard/Space Coast, South Florida, Central Florida). At least several thousand Florida students have participated in the past month.

In response, Education Commissioner Anastasio "Stasi" Kamoutsas sent a memo titled "Student Protests, Student Safety and Instructional Time" to all district superintendents, that any staff who encourage or promote student protests could face disciplinary action.

He followed up at a Florida Board of Education meeting on February 19 saying that "educators who choose to share negative opinions of law enforcement with students, distribute anti-law enforcement flyers while on school property, encourage students to protest or push an ideology on to students in any way, shape or form, will be investigated and held accountable," directly in response to anti-ICE walkouts after the killings of Alex Pretti and Renée Good and the detention of five-year-old Liam Ramos.

Arizona

In Arizona, a mass "sickout" by students and teachers closed 20 schools in Tucson, in solidarity with the "National Shutdown" anti-ICE movement. In response, Republican legislators have advanced a bill to ban teachers from striking or engaging in any organized work

stoppage, with violators stripped of civil service and reemployment rights and other benefits. HB 2313 spells out that teachers may not "strike or engage in an organized work stoppage" against a school district or charter school.

Republican Rep. Matt Gress emphasized the political opposition developing among educators, supporting the crackdown. The sickout "was not a traditional strike over pay or contract. It was a coordinated work stoppage tied to a political protest against ICE," he was quoted as saying by KNAU NPR.

Oklahoma

In Oklahoma, Republican lawmakers have demanded that the state schools' superintendent investigate teachers suspected of promoting or facilitating student walkouts, calling for disciplinary action and raising the possibility of revoking their certificates.

At the same time, local authorities and school administrations are moving to criminalize protests themselves. Many districts have responded by threatening students with unexcused absences, suspensions, loss of extracurriculars and other penalties, insisting that walkouts will be treated as truancy rather than protected political expression. This has created a climate of fear, especially among immigrant and mixed-status families, who warn their children to avoid protests out of fear that any contact with police or immigration agents near schools could result in detention or deportation.

The ability of the school districts to threaten teachers is above all due to the refusal of the American Federation of Teachers (AFT) and the National Education Association (NEA) to defend their own members. The union bureaucracy has responded to the wave of student walkouts and teacher sick-outs by instructing educators to "obey now, grieve later," enforcing back-to-work orders and collaborating with administrations to maintain "order" in the schools.

Rather than mobilizing their millions of members against the ICE raids, the anti-democratic laws and the investigations targeting educators, the AFT and NEA are blocking strikes, thus shielding the fascists from any challenge from below.

The bipartisan drive to criminalize student walkouts, silence educators and cordon off campuses with police "buffer zones" is part of a nationwide attack on basic democratic rights in the service of Trump's anti-immigrant campaign and US imperialism.

Defense of teachers and students cannot be entrusted to the Democratic Party and the union bureaucrats. What is required is the independent political mobilization of the working class—educators, school staff, parents, logistics, healthcare and industrial workers—uniting US workers with their brothers and sisters internationally in a common struggle against deportations, police-state measures and the capitalist system that produces them.



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