

# Students defy right-wing death threats to protest ICE in Battle Creek, Michigan

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On February 20, hundreds of students walked out of class at 1:25 pm at Lakeview High School in Battle Creek, Michigan to participate in a planned protest of Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE).

The day before the protest, 57-year-old Mark Hendricks from the neighboring community of Galesburg was arrested by the Battle Creek Police Department (BCPD) and Michigan State Police on a charge of “making threats to commit violence against students with a firearm.”

Screenshots posted by community members show that Hendricks responded on social media to someone saying “This is going to be awesome” about the planned protest. His response said, “yes, **AWSOME!! (sic) WHEN YOU COMMUNIST ILLEGAL ALIEN PEDOPHILE PROTECTING PIECES OF SHIT GET WHAT YOU HAVE COMMING!! (sic) WE WILL DESTROY YOU ALL!!**”

Another post by the fascist Hendricks stated “All Maga Patriots!! Come to Battle Creek! Come armed! Be ready to fight and destroy **ALL COMMUNIST ILLEGAL ALIEN PEDOPHILE PROTECTORS! THEY DONT DESERVE TO LIVE!!**”

News Channel 3 reported that BCPD Sergeant Chris Rabbit said “the threats through the social media platform implied bringing weapons to the protest. ... Our response was heightened today in response to the threats. We had 15 officers deployed.”

Despite the threat, hundreds of students gathered at the school’s stadium for student speakers and then marched along the adjacent Helmer Road to the intersection with Business Loop I-94 in front of a Meijer supermarket.

The decision by the students to go ahead with their protest at this high traffic location, after receiving death threats, demonstrates their strong conviction to oppose ICE and the increasingly fascistic actions of the Trump administration.

One of the student speakers said “this entire country is turning into a dictatorship, and no power of hate is greater than love. ... I do not see any immigrants as any sort of threat because they are here to survive. I know a couple of kids who need to stay here because they have medical issues and if they go back to where they come from, they’re going to die. I want everybody to be with me in this. I love this country and I can’t let it be like this.”

The handmade signs held by the students contained messages like “We’re Not Animals We Are Not Aliens We Are Humans” and “If This Was Really About Getting Rid Of Criminals Then Why Did You Elect One As President.”

The action by the students at Lakeview High School are part of a growing movement of students across the US. In Michigan, the walkouts have taken place in the Detroit-metro area, which contains almost half of the state’s population, as well as many other communities.

In the Grand Rapids area, there have been many walkouts involving hundreds of students. Students walked out at Northview High School January 30, Lowell High School February 3, Grand Rapids Public Museum High School on February 4, Wyoming High School on February 6, Southwest Middle High School February 13, Grandville High School on February 13, and Innovation Central High School February 18.

Grand Rapids is the second-largest metropolitan area in Michigan, and ICE recently leased office space in the Waters Center downtown. On February 3, 28-year-old Ecuadorian asylum seeker Byron Martinez was stopped in the Burton Heights area by an unmarked car. Agents pushed him down into the snow as he reportedly said, “I can’t breathe.” While Grand Rapids police officers provided crowd control, Martinez was detained and transferred to the North Lake Processing Center (NLPC), the facility where detainee Nenko Gantchev died on December 15.

In Lansing, the third-largest metro area in Michigan, students walked out at East Lansing High School on January 9, Waverly High School on January 20, Eastern High School on February 3, and Sexton High School on February 3.

Smaller communities have also seen student walkouts, including Traverse City on January 30, Muskegon High School on February 16 and Hart High School on February 18.

Battle Creek, located in Calhoun County, has a population of 52,000 people and is halfway between Chicago and Detroit. The Calhoun County political establishment has long-standing ties with ICE. The 600-bed Calhoun County Correctional Facility (CCCF) was built in 1994 with excess capacity to rent beds to other jurisdictions, including ICE.

Until the Trump administration added the NLPC in Baldwin, Michigan, the CCCF was the largest of four detention facilities in the state. In 2024, the average daily population used by ICE was 124. In 2025, that increased to 159. In 2026, that has increased again, to 175 so far.

Battle Creek has a sizable and established immigrant community, including a large Burmese population estimated at around 3,000 people in the city and nearby Springfield, as of 2024. Many arrived as refugees and now work in local industries and run

businesses. The city is also claims immigrants from Cuba, Haiti, Iraq and Somalia.

The Battle Creek area is also home to a significant layer of manufacturing workers in food production and auto. While jobs at Kellogg's and Post have sharply declined over the past 40 years, the auto and other sectors are expanding, and these workers now make up more than 20 percent of the local workforce.

In 2021, 1,400 workers went on strike for 11 weeks against Kellogg's across four plants before being betrayed by the union bureaucracy. The contract accepted by the Bakery, Confectionery, Tobacco Workers and Grain Millers International Union (BCTGM) leadership was virtually identical to the one workers overwhelmingly rejected three weeks prior. The agreement expanded the two-tier wage system rammed through in the previous contract in 2015, removing all caps on the number of so-called transitional workers the company can hire.

The deal contained only a single small wage increase in the first year of the five-year agreement for first tier "legacy" workers, with only cost-of-living adjustments for the remaining four years.

"Those stupid simple bastards [in the union] sold us out," one worker at the Battle Creek plant told the WSWS. "I just feel the fight has just begun," another Battle Creek worker said. "We didn't even get half of what we went out for. It's just disappointing."

In October 2023, Kellogg's was split into WK Kellogg Co. for cereal production and Kellanova for snacks. In 2024, the two companies had revenues of \$2.7 billion and \$12.7 billion, respectively.

In September 2025, the Italian headquartered multinational Ferrero Group completed its \$3.1 billion acquisition of WK Kellogg Co., which has about 850 workers in Battle Creek. In December 2025, the US-headquartered multinational Mars, Inc. completed its \$36 billion acquisition of Kellanova, which has about 600 workers in Battle Creek.

The 2021 contract expires in October 2026. The company already announced in 2024 that it planned to close a plant in Omaha, Nebraska at the end of 2026, which would result in a loss of 550 jobs.

The threat of violence against students in Battle Creek cannot be explained as merely the deranged ranting of a single individual. Across the country there have been physical attacks and threats directed against students participating in anti-ICE demonstrations.

On February 20, students in Quakertown, Pennsylvania were assaulted by the borough's police chief and borough manager, Scott McElree. Five students who acted to defend themselves from a sudden attack were arrested and now face felony aggravated assault charges, which, if they are tried as adults, carry a statutory maximum of up to 20 years in prison and a fine of up to \$25,000 in Pennsylvania.

Video of the incident shows McElree approached students while in plain clothes, shoving one and placing another—now identified as a 15-year-old girl—in a chokehold before taking her to the ground. Startled students surrounding the man sought to physically prevent the assault.

State and local politicians in Quakertown—both Democratic and Republican—are also threatening the growing opposition by trying

to criminalize protest actions by students and teachers. The WSWS has reported that across the US, teachers and school staff are facing investigations, discipline and firings over even perceived support for anti-ICE protests.

This climate of violence is being deliberately cultivated by the Trump administration and broad sections of the ruling class as part of their drive to establish a presidential dictatorship. Following the killing of 37-year-old Rene Nicole Good in Minneapolis, Vice President JD Vance declared that the ICE officer responsible was protected by "absolute immunity."

None of the immigration police involved in the killings this year—including those responsible for the deaths of Good, Alex Pretti, Geraldo Lunas Campos and Keith Porter Jr.—have been charged with a crime. In several cases, the government has withheld basic information from the public. The Homeland Security Investigations agent who shot and killed 23-year-old US citizen Ruben Ray Martinez in Texas last year has still not been identified, and it took months before authorities even acknowledged that the killing had been carried out by a federal agent.

The defense of students' democratic rights is inseparable from the struggle of workers in Battle Creek and across the country to defend their jobs, wages and living standards. The same corporations that have eliminated thousands of jobs over the past decades—while enriching themselves—are backed by a political establishment that is expanding its police state to wage war against immigrants, students and workers who oppose its agenda.

Students courageously protesting the ICE raids must turn to workers in Battle Creek's factories and workplaces, including those at Kellogg's, Ferrero, Mars and throughout the region's manufacturing sector. The working class is the only progressive force in capitalist society. Through its labor—and its collective power to withhold that labor—the working class alone has the ability to halt the ruling class's drive toward dictatorship, stop its illegal wars abroad, and defend jobs, living standards and democratic rights at home.



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