

To whom it may concern;

On January 22nd I was actively observing in my city in an area where ICE was known to target people near the bus stops where children get off the bus to go home to their apartment. My neighbor and I were both in my vehicle as I was driving through an apartment parking lot. We did see a heavily armed and masked agent hiding in a garbage area not far from the entrance where children would have to enter the building to get home. I will say that it wasn't my first encounter with federal agents as I also had seen them targeting people in a church lot in my community. But I will say that this time it was much much more alarming because the ice agents were hiding, masked and waiting for the buses full of students to arrive!

My initial reaction to this was to honk my horn in protest. A few seconds after we encountered federal agent more masked agents surrounded my car. They told me and my neighbor that we were obstructing their federal investigation. One of the agents was very forceful and was aggressively trying to intimidate us. We know that we were not intentionally obstructing any investigation. We were exercising our first amendment and hoping that parents could have the opportunity to protect innocent children from seeing this.

Just this school year we know there was a school shooting in Minneapolis and in our very own city, our elected officials were shot, and one of them along with her husband, died from a masked gunman. So an armed gunman especially with a mask on is something we need to protect the children from our community.

Please accept this as my testimony.

Thank you,
Heather Bassler Zemien

Submitted by Alex Vitrella, Education Evolving:

I serve as Executive Director of a Twin Cities charter school serving more than 400 students.

The first arrest of one of our parents related to immigration enforcement occurred on January 30, 2025. It has been a long year. Since that day, our families, students, and staff have lived with confusion and sustained fear, and with the constant presence of ICE in our neighborhoods — on corners, in alleys, near bus stops, and at times following our buses.

At the beginning, we questioned ourselves and one another. Did we really just see someone taken? Were those officers ICE, or were we imagining it? That uncertainty is gone. It is clear who they were.

For the past year, my role as administrator has been reduced to safety and security — monitoring enforcement activity and responding in real time to protect our school community.

Since December, our schools have operated in a hybrid model. Following the murder of Ms. Renée Good and after three students were nearly detained at a bus stop, our high school moved to 100% online learning.

In PK–8, about half of our students attend in person and half participate through distance learning. We anticipate a 20% enrollment loss this year.

For many families, getting to and from school is the most stressful part of the day. Our first pickup is at 6:28 a.m. ICE is already near apartment buildings and bus stops. The bus arrives — and no one gets on. Families freeze. Children stay home.

When buses arrive safely, we notify families with a simple message: “All buses are here.” Parents breathe, knowing their children are safe at school. For seven hours, our students can simply be children.

Then dismissal comes.

For about twenty minutes, fear takes over. Students wonder whether their parents will be home. Some cry. Some cling to teachers. Buses that once carried 25 students sometimes carry two. They ride in silence.

Two hours later, we send another message: “All buses are cleared.” Parents breathe again, knowing every child in our school community made it home safely that day. School leadership breathes as well. And we hope no one is taken that night. Since December, our community has lost someone nearly every day — a parent, a sibling, an uncle — someone, every day.

Inside the classroom, trauma shows up everywhere. We see withdrawal, depression, headaches, fatigue, and difficulty concentrating. Behaviors we had previously addressed, like vaping, have resurfaced. The impact is visible across our students — and our teachers.

At the high school level, we have lost nearly half of our enrollment. Some students are battling depression. Others are working to support their families.

We are fighting to keep our seniors on track. There are 21 of them. Last Monday, every one of them applied to a higher education institution. It required two counselors and one social worker focused almost entirely on that class. This is a pivotal year, and the work is exhausting.

Our teachers and staff are exhausted as well. They are supporting children who are afraid while managing fear in their own homes. Many reflect the same community. Half of our leadership team was not born in this country. They are teaching through trauma while carrying their own.

Yet we are still expected to produce standardized outcomes as if conditions are normal.

I respectfully ask this Committee to consider:

First, a temporary assessment moratorium or flexibility waiver for schools demonstrably impacted by Operation Metro Surge. Accountability systems assume stability. Our environment has not been stable.

Second, targeted funding for parent liaisons and community support staff to coordinate multilingual communication, crisis response, and attendance stabilization.

Third, sustained funding for integrated mental health supports embedded during the school day. Trauma is present during literacy and math instruction.

Fourth, targeted funding to reduce class sizes for multilingual learners in impacted schools. Students are acquiring academic content in a second language while experiencing sustained instability. If the state expects growth, it must resource the instructional intensity required to achieve it.

Fifth, schools will need flexibility from normal Average Daily Membership (ADM) counts. Enrollment numbers over the course of this academic year will not be a fair calculation for compensatory revenue given the absenteeism crisis that unfolded this year.

If the state expects academic outcomes, it must account for the conditions in which students are learning. Accountability systems are only as valid as the conditions under which data is collected.

Thank you.



January 15, 2026

As Minnesota education organizations, we write to emphasize the urgent need to reaffirm federal policies that protect student safety and ensure the stable operation of schools and other essential community institutions.

Since 1993, federal policy has limited immigration enforcement activities at sensitive locations, including schools, healthcare facilities, and places of worship, as well as their immediate surroundings. These longstanding protections established clear boundaries that safeguarded students, staff, and families while allowing critical community services to operate without disruption.

Recent federal statements have raised concerns that immigration enforcement may expand to include schools, hospitals, and churches. Minnesota school leaders report growing confusion and anxiety among parents, staff, and community members about whether enforcement actions could occur in school buildings, parking areas, or adjacent sidewalks.

Enforcement activity at or near schools causes student distress, disrupts learning, undermines a sense of safety, and places educators in roles beyond their expertise and responsibility.

To protect students and maintain safe, stable learning environments, we respectfully request the restoration of a clear, publicly affirmed federal standard designating schools as locations where immigration enforcement will not occur. Reestablishing explicit boundaries will reduce confusion, support coordinated responses, and allow schools to fulfill their core educational mission while respecting federal law.

Schools are the heartbeat of our communities. Families and employers depend on them to remain open and safe. Strong, clear federal safeguards are essential to preserving student safety, operational stability, and public confidence.

Thank you for your attention to this matter.

Minnesota School Boards Association (MSBA)
Minnesota Association of School Administrators (MASA)
Association of Metropolitan School Districts (AMSD)
Minnesota Administrators for Special Education (MASE)
Minnesota Association of Charter Schools (MACS)
Minnesota Community Education Association (MCEA)

Minnesota Association of Secondary School Principals (MAASP)
Minnesota Elementary School Principals' Association (MESPA)
Minnesota School Personnel Administrators (MASPA)
Minnesota Rural Education Association (MREA)
Minnesota School Public Relations Association (MinnSPRA)
Minnesota Parent Teacher Association (Minnesota PTA)

TO:

U.S. Reps. Brad Finstad, Angie Craig, Kelly Morrison, Betty McCollum, Ilhan Omar, Tom Emmer, Michelle Fischbach, Pete Stauber
U.S. Sens. Amy Klobuchar and Tina Smith

CC:

Gov. Tim Walz, MDE Commissioner Willie Jett
MN Rep. Lisa Demuth (Speaker), MN Sen. Mark Johnson (Minority Leader)
MN Sen. Erin Murphy (Majority Leader), Rep. Stephenson (DFL Caucus Leader)