

THE ALLIANCE TO RECLAIM OUR SCHOOLS

April 27, 2017

To: The Honorable Paul D. Ryan, Speaker of the House
The Honorable Nancy Pelosi, Minority Leader
The Honorable Mitch McConnell, Majority Leader
The Honorable Charles E. Schumer, Minority Leader
Members of the U.S. House of Representatives
Members of the U.S. Senate

We are parents, students, educators and advocates for public schools across the country. We strive each day to ensure that our schools are places where tolerance and democracy are taught along with reading and writing—places where children from all walks of life come together to learn, and where students and educators feel safe and supported.

Together, we represent 7 million Americans. On May 1st, the Alliance to Reclaim Our Schools (AROS) will be mobilizing our members, along with hundreds of thousands of others, to deliver a clear message to the nation, the Congress and the President: ***We will not be divided by hate and fear.***

Over the past 100 days, tens of thousands of U.S.-born children, DACA-mented individuals, immigrant children and families have lived with constant fear and insecurity caused by the President's targeting of Muslims, refugees and undocumented immigrants. His words, his initiatives and his policy proposals are eroding the trust built by educators, parents, law enforcement and communities over decades.

Today, and on May 1, we are asking Congress to stop the assault on our neighbors, our families, our students and our schools. We are calling on you to *build schools, not walls*.

This is personal. These are real people and this is real fear:

A teacher in Milwaukee said that one of her second graders crawled in to her lap crying. He told her, “I am so scared that somebody is going to take my daddy away.”

These are the words of a six year old child, crying and afraid in school.

His teacher says, “You can’t teach like that. You can’t learn like that.”

Yet classrooms are being impacted all across the country by stories like this. Our schools and communities are being permeated with fear.

Public schools are the cornerstone of our civic and economic infrastructure. Their work is already complicated enough. Yet schools in low-income communities, and in predominantly African American and immigrant neighborhoods have struggled for too long with a lack of resources. For decades, these schools have been asking for up-to-date technology and textbooks. Even on the most routine of days, we need more counselors, more social workers, more nurses. And now, on top of that, our schools are threatened with immigration raids and deportations. Teachers can’t teach like that. Students can’t learn like that. Parents can’t provide for families under these conditions.

Now, President Trump is proposing to build a 1,200 mile wall along the Mexican border—a boondoggle project that is unsupported by fact¹ and preposterous in its grandiosity. The Department of Homeland Security has projected that the wall would cost \$21.6 billion.² A new report released last week puts that figure at nearly \$70 billion.³

We unequivocally condemn this wall, and we unwaveringly denounce the politics of fear and division that have swept over this nation in the last 100 days.

Instead of separating families and building walls, we must invest in our schools as part of our nation's infrastructure. Stronger schools are schools where teachers have the tools they need to teach, students have access to a broad and rich curriculum, and where families and students are welcomed, supported, engaged and safe. Investing in our schools means making sure that every school—and every student—has access to this kind of learning environment. And it means lifting the cloud of fear that hangs over too many communities right now.

Nearly 100 school districts and over 200 institutions of higher education have passed resolutions declaring schools safe havens against ICE raids. These districts are standing up for their students. They are standing up for the 14th Amendment of the Constitution, and for the legal right each child has to an education. We stand with them.

We will be marching and rallying on May 1. *Join us* in our cities and states, and then *lead us* to a stronger, safer, unified nation.

- **Reject the wall.** Period. The nation can't afford to spend billions of dollars on a wall. Say no to the wall.
- **Stop the deportations.** Tell ICE to stay out of our schools. End the separation of families. Protect DACA and DREAMers. Refuse to spend the \$6 billion requested to triple the number of ICE officers. Provide real leadership by introducing legislation to fix our broken immigration system.
- **Protect funding for public education.** The President has proposed slashing \$9 billion from the U.S. Department of Education and ending federal funding for after-care programs, community schools, teacher training and other critical supports.
- **Invest in public schools,** particularly those serving African American and Latino children. AROS is demanding 10,000 sustainable community schools across the country—schools that have the resources and wraparound supports that children need to succeed.
- **Say no to vouchers.** We oppose public funding of unaccountable private and religious schools. Programs that funnel taxpayer dollars to privately managed schools siphon much-needed resources from our public schools.

Build Schools, Not Walls.

The under-signed organizations will be coming together with hundreds of others on May 1st to denounce the President's attack on immigrants. Our organizations will be calling on you – our elected representatives – to stop the deportations. Stop the wall, and instead invest in our classrooms.

Signed,

Keron Blair, National Director, Alliance to Reclaim Our Schools

¹ "Border Wall Could Cost 3 Times Estimates, Senate Democrats' Report Says," New York Times, April 18, 2017. Available at: www.nytimes.com/2017/04/18/us/politics/senate-democrats-border-wall-cost-trump.html

² "Exclusive--Trump border "wall" to cost \$21.6 billion and take 3.5 years to build: internal report," Reuters, February 9, 2017. Available at: <http://www.reuters.com/article/us-usa-trump-immigration-wall-exclusive-idUSKBN15O2ZN>

³ NY Times, April 18, 2017.

And the following organizations:

482 Forward, Detroit
Abriendo Puertas/Opening Doors
Action NC
Action Now Institute (IL)
AFT - Maryland
AFT Connecticut
AFT Local 212/Milwaukee Area Technical College
AFT New Jersey
AFT Pennsylvania
Alliance for Education Justice
Alliance for Quality Education, New York State
Alliance of Californians for Community Empowerment (ACCE)
American Federation of Teachers
American-Arab Anti-Discrimination Committee
AMOS
Arab American Association of NY
AROS Houston
Asian Americans Advancing Justice
Asian Pacific American Labor Alliance AFL-CIO
Baltimore Teachers Union
Boston Education Justice Alliance
Boston Teachers Union
Bridging Cultures Group Inc., New York
Brighton Park Neighborhood Council, Chicago
CASA
Center for Community Change
Center for Popular Democracy
Chicago Jobs with Justice
Chicago Teachers Union
Churches United for Fair Housing, New York City
Cincinnati AFL-CIO Labor Council
Cincinnati Black Lives Matter
Cincinnati Federation of Teachers Retired
Cincinnati Interfaith Workers Center
Cincinnati Education Justice Coalition
Cincinnati Federation of Teachers
Cincinnati Interfaith Workers Center
Citizen Action New York
Communities United, Chicago
Concerned Citizens Coalition, Paterson
Democratic Socialists of America
Dialogue on Diversity
Education Law Center
Education Rights Network
Fair Immigration Reform Movement
Faith Community Alliance
Fannie Lou Hamer Center for Change, Euphoria, MS
First Focus Campaign for Children

For Our Future Fund
FRESC - Good Jobs, Strong Communities
Gamaliel
Grassroots Education Movement (GEM), Chicago
Greater NYC for Change
Greater Santa Cruz Federation of Teachers 2030 CFT-AFT
Harlem Renaissance Education Pipeline C2C
Highlander Research and Education Center
Hispanic Federation
Illinois Federation of Teachers
Immigrant Dignity Coalition
In the Public Interest
Jefferson Elementary Federation of Teachers, AFT 3267 (Daly City, CA)
Journey for Justice Alliance
Justice League CA
Justice League NYC
Kenwood Oakland Community Organization, Chicago
Labor Council for Latin American Advancement
Lawyers Committee for Civil Rights Under Law
League of United Latin American Citizens (LULAC)
Logan Square Neighborhood Association, Chicago
Los Angeles College Faculty Guild, AFT Local 1521
Make the Road CT
Make the Road NJ
Make the Road PA
MANA - A National Latina Organization
Massachusetts Education Justice Alliance
Massachusetts Jobs with Justice
Metropolitan Organizing Strategy Enabling Strength (MOSES)
Mexican American Legal Defense and Educational Fund
MN Neighborhoods Organizing for Change
Montclair Federation of Adjunct Faculty, Local 6025
MPower Change, New York City
Muslim Community Network, New York City
National Association for Bilingual Education
National Committee for Responsive Philanthropy
National Education Association
National Immigration Law Center
National Latina Institute for Reproductive Health
National Nurses United
Neshaminy Federation of Teachers, Local 1417, Pennsylvania
New York Civil Liberties Union
New York Communities for Change
New York Families
New York Immigration Coalition
New York State United Teachers
NoIDCNY
Northern Kentucky Labor Council
NYC Coalition for Educational Justice

One America
One Pennsylvania
Oregon Education Association
Organize Florida and Organize Florida Education Fund
Organizing in the Land of Enchantment, New Mexico
Our Community, Our Schools, Dallas
Parent Leadership Institute, New Jersey
Parents Advocated for Children's Education, Paterson
Partnership for Community Action - New Mexico
Paterson Education Fund
Philadelphia Federation of Teachers
Pittsburgh Federation of Teachers Local 400
Planned Parenthood of Cincinnati
Professional Staff Congress/CUNY
PULSE NJ
Rochester Teachers Association
Rutgers AAUP-AFT
Sanctuary Rapid Response Team
SEIU Local 1
Service Employees International Union
Socialist Alternative
St. Paul Federation of Teachers
Teaching for Change
Texas AFT
Texas New Era
Texas Organizing Project
The Black Institute, New York
Toledo Federation of Teachers
Tri-State Free Thinkers
UFCW Local 75
United for a New Economy
United Parent Leaders Action Network (UPLAN)
United States Hispanic Leadership Institute
United Teachers of Los Angeles
United University Professions, California
United We Dream
Urban Word NYC
Urban Youth Collaborative, New York City
Virginia Coalition for Immigrant Rights
Voto Latino, Virginia
Warren Simmons, Senior Fellow, AISR
Washington State Parent Ambassadors
Worker Defense Project, Texas
Workers Center for Racial Justice-Chicago
Youth On Board, Boston