

# Akron Beacon Journal

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## EDUCATION

# Akron schools will cooperate with ICE only with a warrant or court order, district says

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Akron Public Schools will allow Immigration and Customs Enforcement into schools, but only with a warrant, and will not release any children into ICE custody until the district's legal team is consulted, according to new guidance from the district released Thursday.

The district emailed to the public a four-page document outlining the procedures in place for school-based staff when dealing with ICE or any other law enforcement agency.

It states front-office staff should ask for identification and credentials of anyone seeking to enter the building. If their credentials are verified, they are to be escorted to a private room, where an administrator will speak with them and ask to see a warrant or court order. If they do not have either, the administrator should ask them to leave and then contact the district's legal office.

If they do have a warrant or court order that seeks to remove a child from school, the administrator is to scan the document or take a picture of it and contact the district's legal services.

While the district does not have in-house counsel, Director of Communications Stacey Hodoh said in an email Thursday the administration is working with its legal partners to be ready at any time to address a concern from a staff member about a law enforcement or other government official who shows up at a building.

Hodoh said there would be an "expectation to respond to the ICE agents in a reasonable timeframe once a valid court order is provided, so we have a small team in place prepared to support our building principals as needed."

Schools and churches have previously been understood to be off-limits to immigration agents, but President Donald Trump's administration has authorized ICE, under the Department of Homeland Security, to conduct raids at schools and places of worship. It's not clear if any raids or arrests have happened at schools or churches since the president signed the executive order, but raids have been reported across Northeast Ohio in restaurants and other public places within the last week.

Earlier this week, rumors spread of ICE agents coming to several Akron schools, especially those in neighborhoods with high immigrant populations. One school locked down briefly due to reports of ICE agents in the area, but it wasn't clear if that was based on the same rumor. Akron police said that day they had no knowledge of ICE working in the area, but local police are not always told if ICE will be within their jurisdiction. Akron schools confirmed no ICE agents ever came into a school.

That day, the district released a statement saying it would be "restricting access" to buildings, but did not clarify how, or to what extent.

"APS has established clear procedures to guide staff interactions with law enforcement, prioritizing all student safety, privacy, and well-being," the statement said. "These procedures emphasize maintaining a calm and professional environment, protecting student information, adhering to established protocols, supporting displaced students, and connecting families with community resources.

"While the district recognizes that the DHS and US Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) agencies recent directive may impact families' sense of security, APS is committed to addressing these concerns and has implemented policies restricting access to school facilities to protect the educational environment."

Monday night, district officials said at a board meeting that guidance had been created for schools staff in the case of an ICE agent coming to a school, but hadn't yet distributed it publicly until Thursday.

The document outlines how administrators should act, including not physically impeding law enforcement from doing its job, but also provides several checks to make sure people and documentation are who and what they report to be.

"Remain calm and professional," the guidance says. "No school personnel should disclose any information regarding the student or family in the absence of legal advice. For the safety of the student and the family, confidentiality must be strictly maintained."

After legal advice is obtained, a student's emergency contact should immediately be notified, the guidance says.

If an ICE agent makes contact with a bus or other school vehicle, the guidance states, the bus is considered school property, but a bus stop is public. If ICE is seeking a student who is already on a bus, the bus should drive to the school. Once the student is taken into the school, the same procedure should be followed as if the student were already at school. If they have yet to board the bus, the driver should contact radio dispatch, which would contact the school building's administrative team.

The document also provides guidance for what school staff should do if a child returns to school after going home and finding their house unexplainably empty. They should attempt to reach the child's family at least three times, then call any other emergency contact the family or guardians provided. If that is unsuccessful and there is reason to suspect an emergency, staff should reach out to a supervisor, then the district's safety and security team, and Children and Family Services.

The document notes the district has not received any guidance from the state, and the document could be updated after further guidance has been issued.

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