

School District of Philadelphia Board Meeting February 27, 2025

Testimony of Education Law Center PA

Good afternoon. My name is Kristina Moon, I use she/her pronouns. I am a district parent and a senior attorney at Education Law Center where I respond to concerns from people across the state concerned for the safety of our immigrant students whose access to education is threatened in this political climate.

Over the past few weeks many educators and advocates across the city have been calling for more explicit commitment and clarity from the district to ensure all the staff in our schools understand the law and our students' rights. I appreciate yesterday's announcement that all staff will now be required to complete a training about the ICE protocol and students' rights. I appreciate that the district has identified an approach for absences based on safety fears or anxiety in this context.

Unfortunately, these issues can be complex and the rights and consequences at stake are extraordinary – so we still need:

- continued support and information-sharing with staff beyond a 30 minute recorded training,
- we need all principals to actually check the understanding of their staff, for example to ensure nobody is asking questions about absences probing immigration status,
- and we need the district to support teachers who are trying to coordinate rights trainings for students and families in our schools.

Throughout all of this, we need the district to DO BETTER with language access for all our families that are not fluent in English. ELC has raised this issue countless times with the district and we continue to hear from families that have never received a phone call or message from their child's school in a language they understand. Schools are required by law to engage with families about their child's attendance, academics, special education, discipline, opportunities – everything – in a language they understand. And I know the district has processes for this – so it is unacceptable that this is not effectively implemented at ALL our schools for ALL our families. Now more than ever, we need effective clear messages from our school leaders to all families that our children are safe and supported.

Separately, but related because all our rights are intertwined, ELC applauds the district's recent public commitment to Policy 252 affirming the rights of trans students which is still required by federal and state law – because executive orders do not carry the force of law and cannot undo the Pa Human Relations Act, or Title 9 and the many court decisions finding trans students have the right to play.