

Statement By Dr. Judy Berry, Interim Superintendent, Tukwila School District, on the Educational Needs of Forcibly Removed Immigrant Children, and the Role of Tukwila School District

This is not a game. The wellbeing of children are at stake and this is very serious. Upon hearing how thousands of families claiming to be on the run from violence and oppression in their countries of origin were getting to the borders of the United States and Mexico and then being faced with even more oppression and arguably psychological violence, hurt me to my soul. Separating parents and children of any age in the middle of an already scary and precarious set of circumstances is especially harmful to the future health and long term stability of the child. We serve no greater good to any one by then holding the entire family hostage and using their pain as a tool for political advantage. This practice is inhumane on its deep surface, and absolutely impractical at its center and needs to be stopped immediately.

The lives of the families who traveled across barren wastelands lands, and faced unimaginable terror should not make their way to our doors just to be subject to conditions made worse by callous heartlessness. We are indeed a nation of laws, and no one is above them, but it is not unthinkable to act with a moral conscience while balancing the art of American compassion. We have learned through science and history that irreversible harm can be done to children who undergo a traumatic experience. The Centers for Disease Control cited 2005 research from the National Scientific Council on the Developing Child that stated that “Children are unable to effectively manage [toxic] stress by themselves. As a result, the stress response system gets activated for a prolonged amount of time. This can lead to permanent changes in the development of the brain.” The study also found that developing brain circuits can be damaged and high levels of cortisol—a stress related hormone—are elevated leaving children (and adults) vulnerable to a lowered immune response, a lower capacity for learning, adding to an increased learning deficit that lasts into adulthood. This in turn puts students at a disadvantage both academically and physically, and with that the cycle of a lifetime of challenges begins. Increased time away from school equals hurdles to stay afloat academically, which leads to self-esteem issues, which in turn leads to more stress, bringing the student back to toxic stress level on the rise and back again. This creates not only challenges for the student but strains the already narrow overextended resources of American schools.

We in the Tukwila School District are proudly tasked with the challenge of educating the world’s smartest children. We have students from every corner of the globe, and literally speak their languages. We have seen firsthand how compassion and education can work symbiotically to build a better mind, an outstanding future, and world-ready child from preschool to college. It is with the recipe of using compassion, our hearts, and our heads that our curriculum works to broaden our students’ horizons. The only politics we use to guide our decisions are cultivated in our Student Governments within the halls of our schools. Our leaders are being groomed to wear caps and gowns, not handcuffs. They are should not pawns in political games being unfairly played by adults, they are people! Regardless of their nation of origin, race or religion, they are worthy and deserving of respect at all costs. We do not consider them a liability or an obstacle to our way of life.

The United States of America has a long, sad history of forcibly separating families for political and financial gain. The African-American Research Collaborative recently tweeted, “Until 1865, rip African American children from their parents. From 1870s to 1970s, rip Native American children from their parents. Now, rip children of immigrants and refugees from their parents.” I want to know when

the assault will end. When will our ghosts of the past find a final resting place? There is no positive end game to the destruction of a family.

We are very well prepared to help any displaced child in any way that we can. Our district is armed with uniquely specialized resources that can help educate the particular needs of immigrant children and we are willing and ready to do so at a moment's notice. **Enrollment and education could be arranged immediately when called upon.**

It is my sincere hope and the sincere hope of every employee, and family represented by Tukwila School District that there is a swift and amicable solution to the separation of families. We stand to offer our resources as a school district to aid educationally and emotionally in any way we can.

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*Tukwila School District is one of the most diverse school districts in the country. With 80 languages spoken among our 3,000 students, our diversity is our strength and our asset. **One student at a time:** Each of our students graduates ready to succeed in post-secondary education, career, and citizenship. "A world of possibility" awaits each student here.*