

THE INFORMED DEMOCRAT OF SWFL



Children Should Not Have to Face the Power of the State Alone

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By Michael Andoscia

A little over a month ago, I read in the news that the Trump Administration ended the special status of schools, hospitals, and churches with regard to his plan to deport undocumented immigrants. The consequences of this executive overreach is dire for public schools. I immediately sent an inquiry as to how the Free State of Florida and the Lee County School District were planning on responding to this authoritarian display.

It did not surprise me that the overall policy response from the state and the district was to comply with “lawful warrants” should ICE or other federal law enforcement show up at the schoolhouse door. It did, however, surprise me to learn that such agents were empowered to request to interrogate children without a parent or any other supportive adult in the room to guide the suspect child with regard to their Constitutional Rights. In fact, administrators are instructed that they are to comply with a request that parents not even be notified of their children’s plight until after the interrogation is complete.

Now, if this policy were in reference to adult suspects, it would constitute a bold rejection of everything we believe a free society should represent. That the suspects are children is a violation of all values of human reason and decency. Teachers would respond to this by helping children gird themselves against trespasses on their rights.

That’s when I heard from a number of my former teacher peers. They informed me that they are being instructed by their administrators not to teach their students about the Constitutional rights, including but especially their rights to remain silent.

Appalled by this I put together a script designed to help students at the secondary level (6th grade and higher) to assert their right to remain silent should they find themselves facing a federal investigator by themselves. It is designed to help children remain calm and to assertively, but appropriately, demand a parent and/or a lawyer before they reveal any information. I posted these scripts in English, Spanish, Haitian Creole, and Brazilian Portuguese, on my erstwhile classroom website, Mr. Andoscia’s Classroom ([You Have a Right to Remain Silent! – Mr. A's Underground Classroom](#)) which I have reconfigured into Mr. A’s Underground Classroom.

The scripts have been saved as downloadable PNGs that can be accessed and saved by anyone. There is a black background version that is visually appealing on a cell phone or tablet screen. I also have white background versions that are easier to print and distribute physically. The Purple Group has taken the initiative to turn the scripts into cards along the

lines of the famous “Red Cards” being handed out by other activist organizations. Please feel free to do the same.

Mr. A’s Underground Classroom has been reconfigured as a free resource for teachers, students, and parents. The goal is to post lessons on topics that teachers in authoritarian states like the “Free State of Florida” are afraid to teach or are forbidden to teach. I’m a sociologist and a former social studies teacher, so my initial focus at this point is on building a complete sociology course. I am also posting social studies lessons in sociology, government, economics, and philosophy that can be used to help any student, regardless of age, access what I refer to as “Dangerous Knowledge” or knowledge that challenges established authority. If you are a teacher or former educator who has a lesson, you would like me to include, please feel free to reach out and share using the website’s “Teacher Corner” page.

Michael Andoscia is a former teacher from Lee County with 30 years of experience who now advocates for public school teachers.