Greetings,

Over the last couple of days there has been a lot of chatter concerning immigrant enforcement and rumors about people being *rounded up* to be deported or arrested. Having been raised by an immigrant mom, I can certainly relate to the angst this all causes. My mom always feared doing the wrong thing and deportation. She always reminded me to stay out of trouble, to keep my mouth shut, and to work twice as hard as my peers to ensure I'd be okay and accepted. This caused her to be very weary about government offices and in essence, she strived to be invisible. While my mom does not speak English, she'd always say in her accent - "*Mi record esta clean.*" All this and my mom had a Green Card.

Given all of the news reports, I get why so many people feel a bit apprehensive with regards to many of our families in our community, across the Island, state and country. I can also appreciate how rumours begin to swirl as we hear bits and pieces of news stories that get morphed into not so accurate accounts of what's actually taking place. There was even a rumor that Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) was in South Country! This, I can assure you, is not true. It's really critical, for the sake of our families and community, that we be clear on what is fact and what is fiction.

What is factual is that many members of our school community are feeling apprehensive about the potential for immigration enforcement in our schools and communities. To this end, New York State provided guidance to public schools that basically sums up the legal protections and provides clear guidance regarding the protocols we'll follow to address interactions with ICE officials. For example, if any ICE officials request access to school grounds, information, or interaction with students, staff, or families, they must be referred directly to my office. No access will be granted without my prior approval, *in my capacity as Superintendent*, and in consultation with legal counsel to ensure compliance with the law.

Additionally, if ICE presents a warrant, our administration has been instructed to immediately forward it to my office for review before any action is taken. Only valid judicial warrants can be honored, and determining validity requires expertise. This protocol ensures all actions are handled lawfully and with centralized oversight. Ultimately, our goal is to protect our school community and follow the law.

As the National School Superintendents Association (AASA) stated in a correspondence sent just this morning, our duty as school leaders remains simple and true: Provide every child, in every community, with a learning environment where they can feel safe, welcome and prepared for a bright and productive future. That is the beginning and end of it. All of the children in our school buildings deserve to feel safe and secure and no matter where we may fall in this debate, we must honor this. It's our fundamental duty as a public school community.

For those of us wishing to provide support for families who may be in distress, Neighbors Link has updated their website with information that can help interested families. Here is a link to

their website, which is both in English and Spanish: (Resources for Families)  Please take some time to review the information available on the site should you be interested.

If questions arise, please feel free to contact your building administration or my office for assistance.

South Country celebrates our diversity and continues to pledge our commitment to serving *all* students and community members. This is our North Star and what makes us special. Please be assured that we will get through this as a family and with the kindness, empathy, and support that defines us.

As always, it's a real privilege serving this community as your superintendent of schools. Have a great weekend and stay positive!

Tony Santana

#clipper**PRIDE**