

Northern Valley SUBURBANITE

2 Thursday, April 13, 2017 Northern Valley Suburbanite 5

Tenafly provides safe zone for students

Approved resolution to take effect immediately

DEENA YELLIN
STAFF WRITER, @DEENAYELLIN

The Tenafly school district has declared its schools safe for all students, regardless of their immigration status or that of their families.

The Board of Education approved a resolution on April 5 by a 8-0 vote (and one abstention) pledging to protect students from threats of immigration enforcement authorities.

Under the new policy, which takes effect immediately, district staff is not permitted to ask about the immigration status of a student and cannot share information about a student's status to U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement, unless forced to by a court order or subpoena.

Tenafly joins school districts across the nation that have declared themselves sanctuary or safe schools in response to President Donald Trump's drive against illegal immigration.

"The board has taken note of recent political rhetoric targeting undocumented residents and various immigrant and



TARIQ ZEHAWI/NORTHJERSEY.COM

Tenafly schools are safe zones against ICE enforcement.

religious populations in our country. . . " declares the policy. "The Board adopts this policy to re-emphasize its commitment to provide equal and bias free access for all students."

School boards around New Jersey including Clifton, Paterson, and West New York — have approved similar measures to reassure students that they can attend their classes without fear of intrusion by federal authorities.

Tenafly's policy, however, goes a step further by providing clear protocols about what district staff should do if federal immigration officials enter the school or request student records.

Board of Education trustee Mark Aronson, a strong advocate of the policy, commended the board for approving it. "It sends a loud and clear message to the community and student body that the protection of our students is the most im-

portant thing," he said. "Hopefully it gives comfort to students who may be subject to immigration law these days that they have a safe space within our schools."

Superintendent Lynn Trager said that in addition to helping students feel safe, the policy will hopefully "show students that the district respects them for who they are and not where they came from or how they got here."

Several members of the public spoke out against the concept, asserting that politics has no place in the Tenafly school district.

Although some may think the board's action is largely symbolic in the upper-middle class school district, Aronson pointed out that a significant portion of the student body hails from Asia and other countries, and their immigration status is unknown. Students only need to prove Tenafly residency when registering for school, not immigration status.

"The policy is intended to provide clarification to the community regarding the ability of federal immigration officials to access student records or to speak to a student on school property," said board President Lynn Stewart. "It's

See SAFE, Page 11

Safe

Continued from Page 2

not something we are expecting to happen but this is a very new and unknown climate and we feel it's important to make a statement so that our students and community know what our stance is and they know that they are safe. Our job first and foremost is to ensure the safety of our children."

The policy makes it clear that ICE agents are prohibited from engaging in enforcement actions on school grounds. The board will not permit ICE agents onto school property unless there is a written authorization. If they attempt to enter school grounds without the requisite authority, they will be directed to leave immediately.

Alexandra Spyridaki, a former Board of Education member, said she applauded the measure. "I'm extremely proud of the resolution and what it accomplishes," she said.

Next, she and other residents are hoping the council will vote in favor of a similar resolution, which would make Tenafly a sanctuary city. That resolution will be considered at the April 20 meeting and has already been the subject of some discussion in the council chambers.

Lori Sackler, founder and president of Bergen Indivisible for Democracy and a longtime Tenafly resident, said she strongly supports that resolution because "Creating a sense of safety for all the members of our community is of paramount importance to us."