



**ADVANCEMENT
PROJECT**

Sanctuary Schools Toolkit

Who We Are: JUNTOS is a community-led, Latine, immigrant organization in South Philadelphia fighting for our human rights as workers, parents, youth, and immigrants. We believe that every human being has the right to a quality education and the freedom to live with dignity regardless of immigration status.

JUNTOS combines leadership development, community organizing, and focused collaborations with other community-based and advocacy organizations to build the power of our community members so they may be active agents of change and work against their own oppression.

Campaign Description

JUNTOS' Sanctuary Schools Campaign is grounded in a legacy of directly impacted, member-led organizing for educational justice, specifically tackling school closures, budget cuts, and calling for community control of our schools and the elimination of systemic and linguistic barriers that limit both youth success and parental involvement. Since our founding in 2003, JUNTOS has been committed to ensuring access to high-quality education for the Latine immigrant community in South Philadelphia. Schools are a cornerstone for our community, with education a top priority for immigrant families, but numerous obstacles hinder access to the supportive, inclusive education all students deserve.

Our Sanctuary Schools campaign emerged as a direct response to recurring instances of harm and inaction by the Philadelphia School District. When a newcomer mother was detained at a South Philly public school, the District provided no formal response or protocol for immigration enforcement in schools. JUNTOS led the charge to win the unanimous Sanctuary Schools resolution, working with the District in 2022 to develop initial training and protocols. This step, however, marked only the beginning; key pieces of the resolution—like a raid response protocol and community engagement table—remain unfulfilled, and ongoing advocacy is essential to ensure these protections take root in every school and that every staff member participates in the training.



ADVANCEMENT PROJECT

Background: Recent Campaign Shifts

In 2023, following the installation of initial protocols, JUNTOS focused internally, supporting immigrant community members through our casework program. Trends emerged showing troubling rights violations—such as language access gaps and inadequate support for newcomers—that underscored the District’s inconsistent application of the Welcoming Sanctuary Schools resolution, leaving many students vulnerable to ongoing harm. In one incident, a principal threatened deportation against a newcomer student seeking support for bullying. JUNTOS, along with the Advancement Project, facilitated a settlement for the family that mandated quarterly meetings with JUNTOS to design a more comprehensive Newcomer Program.

Key Context

- [Migrant students in Philadelphia aren’t getting the support they need, advocacy group says](#)
- [After being bullied, a Philly student was threatened with deportation by his principal. Here’s what happened next.](#)
- [How Philly Educators Perceive Welcoming Sanctuary Schools & Existing Newcomer Supports](#)

Key Issues

Immigrant students and their families lack the dedicated support and protection necessary for their success, leading to repeated incidents of rights violations, harm, and isolation. Compounding these issues are staff shortages and limited resources, overburdening an already strained District staff.

Issue: Insufficient Access to Newcomer Programs. The District must widen program access to better serve immigrant youth and families, adjusting eligibility criteria to ensure all students in need can benefit from the program.

- **Lack of Meaningful Support:** The District’s shift away from the Multilingual Assessment Center has placed immigrant family enrollment responsibilities solely with the Office of Student Enrollment and Placement, creating barriers to access and impacting adequate screening for newcomer students.



ADVANCEMENT PROJECT

- **Limited Definition of Newcomer:** Current definitions restrict the number of students eligible for support. Language learning, a foundation for educational and social success, should be supported from kindergarten through high school. Moreover, social integration requires extended time, so the “arrival window” should be widened to accommodate the adjustment process.
- **Program Access Gaps:** Presently, only Franklin Learning Center and Frankford High School offer newcomer programs for high school students. In 2023, only 70 of 1,032 newcomer students were enrolled in such programs, with 120 available seats going unused. These programs are also located outside of neighborhoods where immigrant and newcomer youth call home, and do not include programming for middle school aged youth.

[JUNTOS Newcomer Program Proposal](#)

Issue: The School District of Philadelphia has not fully implemented the Sanctuary Schools resolution. The resolution, intended as a first step in broader systemic change, has not been faithfully implemented by the District. The District should recommit to a vision of truly welcoming schools by implementing all parts of the resolution, including training, rapid-response protocol, and a community table and immediately the attached proposal for the expansion and enhancement of newcomer programs.

- **Inconsistent Staff Training:** Many District staff members have yet to complete necessary training on supporting immigrant and newcomer students. Continuous development opportunities are needed to foster a welcoming environment.
- **Incomplete Implementation:** Critical elements of the resolution, such as the rapid response plan and community table, remain unrealized, weakening the protections the resolution was meant to provide.

[Resource: Educator Survey on Welcoming Sanctuary Schools & Newcomer Program](#)



ADVANCEMENT PROJECT

Action Steps for Strengthening JUNTOS' Newcomer Program Campaign

1. Sign-On to Our Newcomer Program Proposal

Show your support for immigrant youth in Philadelphia by signing onto our Newcomer Program proposal, which we will share directly with City Council members and School Board leaders. This proposal demands a comprehensive Newcomer Program to guarantee access to critical resources, support services, and culturally competent education for every immigrant and newcomer student in our city. By adding your voice, you amplify the call for a school district that respects and uplifts immigrant youth as they build their futures.

- a. To review the full sign-on letter, please follow this link: <https://bit.ly/3Xez16F>
- b. To review the full proposal, please follow this link: <https://bit.ly/4gdmk4m>
- c. To sign-on, please follow this link: <https://bit.ly/3YKoPEW>

2. Raise Your Voice at Upcoming School Board Hearings

Testimony is a powerful way to spotlight the urgent needs of immigrant families and students. We invite you to join us and share your story at these important School Board hearings:

- **Thursday, November 21, 4 pm – 7 pm**
- **Thursday, December 5, 4 pm – 7 pm**

Speaker registration is for members of the public and current Philadelphia School District or charter school students who would like to speak at a monthly Board of Education Action Meeting.

- *Individuals may register to speak by submitting the speaker request form or by calling 215-400-5959 to register with Board staff.*
- ***The speaker registration line and request form will open at 4 p.m. on the Monday preceding each scheduled Board meeting.***
- *Registered speakers will be permitted to attend either in person or remotely.*
- *Within 24 hours of completing the form, you will receive an email confirmation.*



ADVANCEMENT PROJECT

- *Please note there is a limit of 30 public speakers and 15 student speakers on each action meeting agenda and they will be filled as described in the [speakers' procedures](#).*

[Public Sign-Up](#) | [Student Sign-Up](#)

Whether you are a student, educator, family member, or community ally, your presence speaks volumes. By standing together, we show the District the weight of this issue—how critical it is for them to meet the full needs of newcomer students, implement their existing commitments, and build schools where immigrant youth can feel safe, seen, and valued.

3. Join the Sanctuary Defender Committee at JUNTOS

Educators, we invite you to be part of a growing network committed to creating schools free from criminalization—spaces where immigrant and newcomer students feel safe, supported, and valued. Our Sanctuary Defender Committee is an essential part of JUNTOS' Sanctuary Schools Campaign, a community-driven vision to build schools that welcome and protect all students.

As a Sanctuary Defender, you will:

- **Promote the Welcoming Sanctuary Schools Protocol:** Help ensure your school upholds the protections established by JUNTOS in collaboration with the District to safeguard students and their families from ICE presence and data-sharing requests.
- **Advocate for Compliance and Accountability:** Connect with JUNTOS to report any compliance gaps or support needed to enforce these protections.
- **Expand Sanctuary in Schools:** Work with us to expand the definition of sanctuary to include culturally responsive pedagogy, restorative practices, and community-centered policies.

Members of the Sanctuary Defender Committee receive ongoing updates from JUNTOS, resources to support immigrant and newcomer families, and regular organizing tools to help foster a school environment where all students can thrive.

[Sign Up | Sanctuary Defender](#)



ADVANCEMENT PROJECT

4. Submit a Written Testimony

If you are unable to sign up to speak at the monthly Board of Education Action Meeting you can submit a written testimony

- Written comments must be received no later than 4:00 p.m. on the business day immediately preceding the meeting or public hearing. A copy of properly submitted and timely received written comment will be provided to all Board Members, included in full in the record of the meeting or public hearing, and a summary of the comment will be read during the meeting or public hearing.

Subject: Support for Sanctuary Schools and Immigrant Student Protections

“Hello [Recipient's Name],

My name is [Your Name], and I am writing from zip code [Your Zip Code] to support JUNTOS' Sanctuary Schools campaign. Philadelphia schools should be safe spaces for all students, especially immigrant youth, free from discrimination, systemic harms, and the threat of immigration enforcement.

JUNTOS' Sanctuary Schools campaign led to the 2022 resolution, setting vital protections for immigrant families in schools. However, many of the protections JUNTOS helped win—such as a raid response protocol and comprehensive staff training—the school district has not implemented faithfully, leaving students at risk. JUNTOS' casework has shown patterns of harm and rights violations due to inconsistent support, such as a principal's threat of deportation against a newcomer student. These incidents reveal a need for immediate action to ensure the safety and dignity of immigrant students.

JUNTOS' Key Demands

To create a safe, inclusive school environment, JUNTOS calls on the School District of Philadelphia to:

1. **Implement JUNTOS' Newcomer Program Proposal** for a comprehensive Newcomer Program to guarantee access to critical resources, support services, and culturally competent education for every immigrant and newcomer student in our city.



**ADVANCEMENT
PROJECT**

2. **Commit to Welcoming Sanctuary Schools** by implementing all parts of the [Welcoming Schools Resolution](#) that the City Council committed to in 2022, including training, rapid-response protocol, and a community table.

Philadelphia's immigrant families want schools to be places where their children can learn without fear. I stand with JUNTOS in urging the District to fully implement all Sanctuary Schools protections to make our schools genuinely welcoming for all."