

Juntos

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Hello my name is Karla Rojas, I'm a graduate of the Philadelphia school system, I'm currently attending community college of Philadelphia as well as being a youth leader at Juntos. I am an undocumented youth and I came to this country when I was 7 years old. During my junior year of high school I learned that I was undocumented. I was scared and confused because I did not know my rights as an undocumented young person. I had no hope in going to college because everyone told me I wasn't allowed to, so I dropped out. Fortunately I was able to get help and get myself together and graduate.

My story is just one many stories out there in Philadelphia. I was able to graduate but a lot of students aren't able to graduate because of the lack of hope of not going to college, fear that society is not going to accept them because of where they come from, fear of being treated different, fear of the police that walk the halls of our schools. When did we get to this point? Why should we put fear into our students? The main excuse is that we have no money, right? Then why are we investing more money in prisons than on our students? We spend about \$10,000 per year on a student but spend more than \$40,000 per year on our prisoners. Then we wonder why our dropout rate is so high. The dropout rate in Philadelphia is around 43% and close to 50% for young Latino men. We have set up our students to fail. This is the famous school-to-prison pipeline.

How are we helping these students by making them feel like they are in prison when they are in school? Putting bars in the school windows and being put through metal detectors the moment they step foot in school. Why are we building more prisons instead of schools? Why are we closing our schools? Why are we shutting down education for our youth? We are the future.

For my community, the school to prison pipeline is also the school to deportation pipeline. Once the police get involved in a young person's life, that information is shared with ICE, and arrests lead to deportation. Everybody makes mistakes but they also need second chances. The way the system is set up students are just being funneled into prisons, and for undocumented youth we are getting deported and losing our chance to turn our lives around.

The moment police and deportation agents get involved in our schools, we are setting up our students for failure. If students get punished already for misbehaving in schools there is no need to punish them twice. Many of these students come from abusive homes, live in poverty, or may be struggling with disabilities. Instead of giving them help we kick them out and let them fall apart. For our communities, if a child makes a mistake this includes deportation and permanent separation from your family. Many people in our communities came to this country to give their family a better life, a better education. Why are we attacking our hard working communities? Because they came to this country and are undocumented? You consider this a crime, like a threat to society. We give our communities ICE Holds and make them pay for their mistakes twice. We need to stop attacking our community, our kids, our schools, our people. They are our future!

Because when our communities are under attack, what do we do? Stand up and fight back.....we stand up and fight back against any ICE Hold in the city of Philadelphia. Thank you

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