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EDUCATION

## Collier teacher removed from school after Facebook post about deporting immigrants

ALEXI C. CARDONA  
USA TODAY NETWORK - FLORIDA

A Parkside Elementary School teacher was transferred to administrative duties Thursday after making a social media post celebrating mass deportations.

The Facebook post referenced the "A Day Without Immigrants" protest Thursday, which called for immigrants to stay home from school and work to underscore the contributions they make to the U.S. economy and culture.

The teacher, Veronica Fleming, shared a Chicago Tribune article about the protest and posted, "The funny part about immigrants staying home is the rest of us who pay for them are here at work like we've always been. Looks like less mouths to feed today. Have fun while you still can. So glad to hear about massive deportation. Let's make America great again. Thanks Donald Trump!!"

Fleming serves as an instructional resource teacher who runs a computer lab at the school and teaches students about technology, according to Greg Turchetta, a spokesman for Collier County Public Schools.

Parkside Elementary is in the Naples Manor community, and 96 percent of students are minorities.

"This is a very tight-knit neighborhood school that stands for inclusion," Turchetta said. "The teachers have nothing but love for these students. Anything else is not a reflection of the school."

Fleming has been reassigned to the district's administrative offices pending an investigation. Turchetta said the district believes she made the post during school hours, but that is being investigated.

Attempts to reach Fleming were unsuccessful Thursday.

Parents who saw the social media post contacted the school about Fleming's comments.

Gabriela Marquez has two kids enrolled at Parkside Elementary. She was on a lunch break at work when her sister



A Facebook post by Parkside Elementary teacher Veronica Fleming.

sent a message about the post. Marquez called the school and talked to the principal.

"The whole school was hurt about the comment," Marquez said. "Most of the students are Latinos. No one understands why she would comment something like that."

Marquez's kids told her the principal went on the school's afternoon announcements to tell the students that they were loved and that a teacher made a mistake. The principal had Fleming delete the comment from her Facebook page, Marquez said.

"My kids love this school. My husband and I love this school. We know the teachers love their students. This was just one bad teacher," Marquez said. "What hurts is that Ms. Fleming works at an elementary school. These are little kids. What is she teaching them? How was she treating them just because they're Latinos?"

Marquez said she would not want to keep her children enrolled at the school if Fleming were allowed to return.

An online petition created by parents on change.org calls for Fleming's firing.

"We understand that as a private citizen Mrs. Fleming should be allowed to express herself, however, as an educator at a school composed of predominantly Hispanic, Haitian, and students of other minorities, one should always be professional and behave as an impartial authority figure that is held to higher standards," the petition states.

## State brief

### Lawyer: Florida airport shooting suspect mentally competent

MIAMI - An Alaska man accused of killing five people and wounding six in a shooting rampage at a major Florida airport is competent to proceed with his court case despite indications of mental illness, his attorneys told a judge Thursday.

Esteban Santiago, 26, was treated briefly before the shooting at an Anchorage, Alaska, psychiatric facility after showing up at an FBI office and telling agents he was hearing voices and was under CIA mind control. He made similar statements about mind control after he was arrested in the

Jan. 6 shooting at Fort Lauderdale-Hollywood International Airport, authorities said.

Defense attorneys Hector Dopico and Eric Cohen, however, told U.S. District Judge Beth Bloom at a hearing that Santiago understands court proceedings, comprehends the charges against him and is able to assist in preparing a defense. They also said he is taking psychiatric medicine in jail for an undisclosed mental condition.

"We have met with him hours upon hours. We do not have a concern at this time," Dopico said. "One can be profoundly mentally ill, including schizophrenic, and be competent."

— Associated Press

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