

Immigrant Letters of Support: One District's Approach

When immigrants are detained or must prepare for court hearings, their lawyer may ask them to collect letters of reference to demonstrate the good character of the person and/or family. In the case of letters for children in school, these are meant to show that the child is well-established in a learning community and that the parents are important to the stability of the child's life. Although the outcome is not guaranteed, these letters can make a difference in how the case proceeds.

Leaders in one Midwestern district were receiving multiple requests for such letters; sometimes they came from the same families who had children in different schools and who were asking a number of educators to provide letters at the same time.

After extensive discussion with leaders across multiple departments, the superintendent decided that the district would provide these letters when appropriate because it was a way to support families staying together – which has a direct impact on students' learning. The EL Administrator's Office came up with the following memo laying out guidance for writing such letters. This memo can be used as a model for other districts that wish to clarify or formalize their position regarding these kinds of letters. A sample letter is included below.

Learn more about this topic from the following resources:

- [Finding Answers for Our Immigrant Students and Families: An ELL District Leader's Perspective](#)
- [Share My Lesson Webinar: How School/District Leaders Can Provide Social and Emotional Support for Immigrant Students](#)
- [Video Clip: Writing Letters of Support for Immigrant Families featuring Principal Nathaniel Provencio from Prince William County, VA](#)

Note: Principal Nathaniel Provencio, who is from a different district and state, decided that he would always be the one to write and sign letters since they are legal documents, rather than giving teachers and staff the option to provide the letters.

**Immigrant Letters of Support
Sample Guidance Provided by District**

Our district's guidance for staff writing support letters for immigrant families:

Teachers and staff can write a letter of support for the family when requested, although it is their personal choice and they can decline as well. There is a possibility that the staff member could be called to testify at the hearing, but it is very unlikely. It is possible the staff member would receive a phone call to verify the information. For that reason, the letter information should focus on more objective and factual information that could be supported with evidence if need be. Remember that this letter is a legal document.

Things to include in the letter:

- **Social grade from report card:** Share this list with teachers so they can pick from the list. Add bullet point list that teachers can just check and then leave a space for additional comments.
- **Academic programs:** College readiness, mentorship, or other programs in which the student participates
- **How long you've known the child and/or family:** "I have known this child (and/or family) for three years in my role as _____(teacher, counselor, etc...)"
- **How you know the child:** "He is in my third grade classroom."
- **The attendance of the child:** "John Doe has near perfect attendance."
- **Any statement that you could support in a court hearing:**
 - "The parents attend all conferences and support their child to succeed academically."
 - "John Doe works hard and earns good grades."

The letter should be brief and avoid generalized, subjective statements. For example, avoid statements such as, "He is a good parent." This type of statement isn't very meaningful and is based on an opinion.

If the student has not had a strong academic background or has been challenging, the staff member can write statements about the child's non-academic strengths. For example:

- "Jane Doe collaborates with classmates."
- "She has shown a lot of growth in writing."

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Coordination of support letter writing and collection:

Because families may have multiple children enrolled in the school district, they may be seeking letters from a variety of staff members. To simplify the process and avoid confusion, any staff member who has been asked to write a support letter should contact a cultural liaison who speaks the language of the family. The cultural liaison will contact the family and be the main contact for coordinating letter communication and collection for the family.

The cultural liaison will inform the EL Program Administrator who can provide guidance and district-level support if needed.

To finalize the letter:

Print the letter on letterhead and the staff member signs it. Final version should be in a PDF if shared electronically.

[Staff member keeps a copy for their own records.](#)

The cultural liaison will make arrangements for the family member to pick up the letter or will collect it on their behalf.

Note: Your district should have a form that parents sign to give the district permission to share their child's data with another agency, just as when you share medical records. Filling out this form may not be necessary if the letter is given to the parent; they can share it with whomever they choose. However, if you are sending it to a lawyer or another agency, you would want the parent sign the release form.

Contact information for our staff: (Fill in appropriate contact)

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Letter of Support Checklist

Make a fillable PDF on letterhead from district.

[Date]

Introductory sentence: How you know the student

Pick two or three positive comments about the student, such as:

- Student is growing academic skills**
- Maintains effort in academic tasks**
- Follows directions**
- Stays on task**
- Organizes time and materials**

- Physically and verbally appropriate**
- Cooperates with others**

- Attends school regularly**
- Finishes assignments**

If applicable:

- Parents attend conferences/school events**
- Student participates in special academic programs**

Closing

Sincerely,

[signature]

Typewritten name

Job title

**Immigrant Letters of Support
Sample Guidance Provided by District**

School

Sample Letter of Support

[Date]

To whom it may concern:

John Doe is a student in my third-grade classroom at **Central Elementary School** in **Riverside, CA**. John attends school regularly and works collaboratively with classmates. He turns his assignments in on time and he is caring towards other students. I have observed him sharing his school supplies and helping other students with assignments. I have met John's mother and father at conferences and talked with them at school events. They support John and are involved with school activities.

Sincerely,

Teacher Name

Third Grade Teacher
Central Park Elementary School