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How to Support Immigrant Students and Families

Strategies for Schools and Early Childhood Programs



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Great Public Schools for Every Student

About This Guide

This Colorín Colorado guide presents more than 50 strategies that educators in schools and early childhood settings can use and share with colleagues, families, and community partners. Educators can use a number of these ideas with a broader population as well.

Viewing and sharing the guide

Summary and highlights

- [Download the summary](#) >
- [Ten Strategies for Supporting Immigrant Students and Families](#) >

Complete guide

- [View the guide online](#) >
- [Download the PDF](#) >

About the strategies

Each strategy includes features such as:

- **Why this matters:** An overview of how the topic relates to immigrant students/families
- **Tips for getting started:** Specific, concrete ideas targeted for educators
- **Recommended resources:** Guides, books, articles, research reports, and other materials
- **Recommended videos:** Video clips that can enhance staff training
- **Examples from the field:** Brief anecdotes and quotes from a 2017 [audience survey](#), news items, and communication with our audience, partners, and advisors

Seeking legal guidance

This guide includes numerous resources that provide useful information for educators. While some of those resources include advocacy information, Colorín Colorado and our parent organization, public broadcasting station WETA-TV-FM, do not take political positions or participate in political advocacy. **In addition, the information in this guide should not be interpreted as legal advice.** Any individual or organization seeking legal advice related to immigration issues should consult with the appropriate attorneys, local government officials, or non-profit organizations specializing in immigration law. **We also remind educators not to provide legal advice.**



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- [Connecting Immigrant Families with Legal Resources](#)

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Strategy list

See a [complete list of strategies](#) by topic in the Appendix.



Introduction

We are trying to find answers for students and families we care deeply about.

– [Kristina Robertson](#), English Learner Program Administrator, Roseville Public Schools (MN)

Across the country, educators are looking for ways to support immigrant students and families facing great uncertainty. In some cases, these efforts have started at the top with district leaders, school board members, school principals, and early childhood program directors. In other cases, the efforts have been smaller and quieter, taken on by a single individual whose actions ripple outward in meaningful ways.

Since educators and parents of English language learners (ELLs) — many of whom are immigrants, refugees, and unaccompanied minors — are the heart of our audience, we have been tracking these issues very closely. This guide highlights strategies educators can use to ensure that schools and early childhood settings remain safe, welcoming places for all children. Our recommendations are based on input and examples from:

- the American Federation of Teachers (AFT) ELL Educator Cadre
- our network of National Education Association (NEA) educators
- our national audience
- related news stories, research reports, and resource guides.

We also include responses to a [survey we conducted in 2017](#) and [research from the UCLA Civil Rights Project](#) on the impact of immigration enforcement on schools. You can learn more about this research from [our webinar](#) with Dr. Patricia Gándara and Shena Sanchez. In addition, we include resources created and compiled by numerous organizations.

The examples throughout the guide showcase schools and early childhood centers that are striving to become more welcoming, build bridges with families, and create new leaders. It is our hope that other educators will find inspiration from their stories.



Who are immigrant students?

Immigrant students may include:

- Recently arrived newcomer students
- Refugees
- Students with interrupted/limited formal education
- Unaccompanied minors who came to the country without their parents
- Children of migrant farmworkers
- Children who are undocumented
- Children who have been separated from parents/family members at the border
- Immigrants with [Temporary Protected Status](#)
- DREAMers (young people eligible for Deferred Action for Childhood Arrival, or [DACA](#))

You can read more about these populations in [Colorín Colorado's related resource sections](#), as well as in [How are English Learners and immigrant-origin students related?](#) from Re-imagining Migration.

It is important to remember that a large share of children that are affected by immigration issues are themselves U.S. citizens. All children born in the United States — including children of undocumented immigrants — are citizens. In these “mixed-status” families, at least one member of the household is undocumented, while others are U.S. citizens or authorized immigrants. In their research on the [impact of immigration enforcement on schools](#), The Civil Rights Project at UCLA shares the following data:

- It is estimated that about 88% of children of immigrants were born in the U.S. and are therefore U.S. citizens.
- There are 4.5 million children with at least one parent who is undocumented; 1.6 million of those children are under the age of five.
- As of 2017, there were an estimated 600,000 children and youth in the U.S. under the age of 18 who are undocumented (Gándara & Ee, 2018a, p. 3).

Californians Together reports that in the state of California:

- half of all children have at least one immigrant parent.
- nearly two million children live in “mixed-status” households.
- at least one in eight students have at least one undocumented parent (Californians Together, 2017).



Immigration policies have the potential to affect millions of students in U.S. schools and early childhood settings, particularly when taking into account the combined impact of intensifying immigration enforcement measures, travel restrictions, changes to Temporary Protected Status programs and DACA, and changes to U.S. visa programs or rules regarding immigration status.

How do these issues affect students?

All students in public K-12 schools have certain [educational, civil, and privacy rights](#) regardless of immigration status. It is critical for schools and districts to understand what those rights are; to review whether their policies protect those rights for all students; and how those policies are being implemented throughout the district.

At the same time, changes to federal immigration policies have resulted in two trends that this guide addresses:

- Schools are looking for guidance on how to respond to questions from students, families, and staff on immigration issues.
- Educators and researchers are noticing troubling patterns in both early childhood and K-12 settings in terms of the social-emotional health of their immigrant students.

While not all students are having these experiences and many demonstrate [high levels of resilience](#), researchers have documented some trends nationally, which include:

- an increase in social-emotional distress and in the bullying of immigrant students
- a decrease in motivation and engagement
- a growing sense of distrust and isolation among students
- a changing constellation of factors impacting immigrant families' levels of stability.

While educators should never make assumptions about a family's situation, it is important to note that even if students or families have not mentioned these concerns, they still may be experiencing these issues and not sharing them with others. (For an in-depth discussion about this topic, see our [related section](#) on immigrant students' silence.)

In addition, immigration enforcement activity (or the fear of such activity) can affect student attendance, participation in school activities, and parental engagement in both K-12 and early childhood settings, particularly as schools grapple with ways to increase student safety and school security. For example, Dr. Eva Thorp (2017) writes that many teachers she has worked with "report that immigrant parent participation in school-based or volunteer activities has decreased in part...because of extra security measures, which may deter immigrant families



from feeling that they can safely enter the school building.” These steps might include leaving a photo identification at the front office, for example, in order to visit a child’s classroom (p. 36).

These impacts are not limited just to immigrant students – classmates and educators can be affected by these trends and events as well, as described in our article about a massive immigration raid in [Postville, Iowa](#) in 2008. Many educators nationwide are reporting increased stress and anxiety among other students and classmates, colleagues and the broader school community with respect to immigration issues and immigration enforcement in particular.

In [our webinar](#) about the UCLA research on the impact of immigration enforcement in schools, Dr. Gándara notes, “More than ever, it is important to reinforce [to immigrant students]: ‘We really want you here at this school. We care about you and we want you here’” (Gándara & Sanchez, 2018).

Research on immigration raids

According to the National Association for Secondary School Principals (NASSP), arrests due to immigration enforcement increased by 300% from 2017 to 2018. In addition, NASSP cites research from the [Urban Institute](#) and UnidosUS (formerly National Council of La Raza) conducted in communities affected by immigration raids finding that “the number of children affected was about half the number of adults arrested.”

In some cases, where school officials had prior notification of the raids:

(S)chools were able to ensure that students whose parents were detained in the raids had a safe place to go after school. School leaders and teachers reported that they felt ‘a heavy burden’ helping the students maintain a normal school routine while dealing with the aftermath of the raids. The fear created for immigrant parents and students resulted in symptoms of mental health problems that affected students’ academic performance. Months after the raids, however, students seemed to have benefited from normalized school routines and the support and services provided by their schools. (p. 2)



Recommended resources

Articles and guides

For additional ideas on addressing immigrant family needs and problem-solving, we recommend the following:

- [4 Practical Steps to Help Immigrant Families in Your School Community](#) by Dr. Emily Crawford-Rossi and Dr. Lisa M Dorner (*Education Week*)
- [Creating a Safe Environment for Immigrant and Refugee Students, Families, and Communities](#) (Grantmakers Concerned with Immigrants and Refugees)
- [Migration, Displacement, and Education: Building Bridges, Not Walls](#) (UNESCO Global Education Monitoring Report)
- [All In! How Educators Can Advocate for English Language Learners](#) (National Education Association)
- [Advocating for English Learners: A Guide for Educators](#) by Dr. Diane Staehr Fenner (Corwin & TESOL, 2014)
- [Educator Guide: Supporting Undocumented Students & Their Families](#) (Informed Immigrants)
- [Immigrant Students Are Internalizing Stereotypes. Educators Can Help](#) (*Education Week*)

Immigration data and research

For more immigration data, look at the [Migration Data Hub](#) from the Migration Policy Institute and the [resource library](#) from Grantmakers Concerned with Immigrants and Refugees (GCIR). GCIR has also published a guide entitled, "[What Can Philanthropy Do? Coming Together for Children in Immigrant in a Changing Policy Landscape.](#)"



Researchers studying immigration and education

For in-depth research on immigrant students, see the work of the following scholars:

- [Dr. Leisy Abrego](#) (University of California-Los Angeles)
- [Dr. Germán Cadenas](#) (Lehigh University)
- [Dr. Frances Contreras](#) (University of California-San Diego)
- [Dr. Emily Crawford-Rossi](#) (University of Missouri)
- [Dr. Dafney Blanca Dabach](#) (University of Washington)
- [Dr. Sarah Gallo](#) (Ohio State University)
- [Dr. Patricia Gándara](#) (University of California-Los Angeles)
- [Dr. Roberto Gonzales](#) (Harvard University)
- [Dr. Bryant Jensen](#) (Brigham Young University)
- [Dr. Jill Koyama](#) (University of Arizona)
- [Dr. Leigh Patel](#) (University of Pittsburgh)
- [Dr. William Pérez](#) (Claremont Graduate University)
- [Dr. Sophia Rodriguez](#) (University of North Carolina, Greensboro)
- [Dr. Carola Suárez-Orozco](#) (University of California-Los Angeles/Re-imaging Migration)
- [Dr. Marcelo Suárez-Orozco](#) (University of California-Los Angeles/Re-imaging Migration)
- [Dr. Julie Sugarman](#) (Migration Policy Institute)



See this information online

- **Introduction:** <http://www.colorincolorado.org/immigration/guide/intro>
- **Reflection questions:** <http://www.colorincolorado.org/immigration/guide/reflection>

Complete guide: <http://www.colorincolorado.org/immigration/guide>

Excerpted from *How to Support Immigrant Students and Families*.

Reflection Questions: Part I

Before reading through the strategies in this guide, you may wish to review this list of reflection questions about your current role and setting. Look for ways that you might expand your “[sphere of influence](#)” (Staehr Fenner, 2015), one conversation and meeting at a time.

Reflection before reading

- What are the strengths of our school/district/program in supporting immigrant families?
- What could we improve?
- What are our students’ and families’ strengths? What are their challenges?
- Who are our partners and allies at the school, district, program, and community level?

Reflection while reviewing strategies

- Are we already doing this strategy? If so, what are some examples?
- If not, what are some small steps we could take to work towards this strategy?
- Which stakeholders need to be involved when considering this strategy?
- What are some challenges in implementing this strategy?
- How can we address those challenges?
- What are some potential benefits from achieving this strategy?



What is your impact on systems?

After speaking with many teachers about their work on behalf of immigrant students, UCLA researcher Shena Sanchez shared the following reflection in our webinar about the impact of immigration enforcement on schools (2018):

A lot of teachers have, in their capacity, taken the lead when they see a gap in a process, procedure, or policy, and they have spoken up to help the system operate better, whether it's in their department, school-wide, or in the district.

See more on this topic in Elena Aguilar’s “[Questions for Reflecting on a Year of Learning.](#)”

Immigrant Students' Legal Rights: An Overview

We've heard from educators who would like to know what steps they can take to ensure that front office staff are up-to-date about relevant policies...We continue to make sure all of our schools are aware of our efforts. I meet periodically with our principals on this issue and others to coordinate our efforts. It is expected that they are keeping their staff informed.

– [Scott Kizner](#), Superintendent of Stafford County Public Schools, Virginia (former Superintendent of Harrisonburg Public Schools)

Key Takeaways

- All students have the right to a free, public K-12 education, regardless of their immigration status, or that of their parents. Schools should not ask about immigration status for purposes of enrollment and should review registration forms for unnecessary or inappropriate questions. Schools also have an obligation to protect students' civil and privacy rights.
- School districts or states might have helpful resources on this issue.

See this information online

Immigrant Students' Rights: An Overview

- Online article: <http://www.colorincolorado.org/immigration/guide/rights>
- Download pdf: <http://www.colorincolorado.org/immigration/guide/rights-pdf>

Complete guide: <http://www.colorincolorado.org/immigration/guide>

Excerpted from *How to Support Immigrant Students and Families*.

Overview

All students have the right to a free, public K-12 education, regardless of their immigration status or that of their parents. This includes access to services and programs such as free- and reduced-priced meals, English-language development classes, special education, and school activities. The American Federation of Teachers produced a fact sheet (2017) explaining:

*The 1982 U.S. Supreme Court case [Plyler v. Doe](#) ruled that undocumented students have a constitutional right to receive a free, public K-12 education. All students, regardless of their citizenship or residency status, are entitled to attend school. School districts that either prohibit or discourage students from enrolling in schools because they or their parents are undocumented immigrants may be in violation of federal law and the Equal Protection Clause (of the Fourteenth Amendment) to the U.S. Constitution...Schools **cannot** bar a student from enrolling because the student lacks a birth certificate or social security number or has a record that indicates a foreign place of birth. (p. 1)*

Students' civil rights

In addition, a federal guide on supporting undocumented students published in 2015 notes:

To comply with these Federal civil rights laws, such as Titles IV and VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, as well as the mandates of the Supreme Court, school districts must ensure that they do not discriminate on the basis of race, color, or national origin, and that students are not barred from enrolling in public schools at the elementary and secondary level on the basis of their own citizenship or immigration status or that of their parents or guardians. (U.S. Department of Education, 2015, p. 7)

The rights of English language learners

In addition, English language learners (ELLs) and their parents have specific rights described in the following documents and in this article about [court rulings regarding ELLs](#) by Dr. Wayne E. Wright of Purdue University:

- [Dear Colleague Letter](#) (U.S. Department of Education and U.S. Department of Justice, via Colorín Colorado)
- [Fact Sheets in multiple languages: Schools' Civil Rights Obligations to ELLs and Parents](#) (U.S. Department of Education and U.S. Department of Justice, via Colorín Colorado)
- [Newcomer Toolkit: Helping Parents Understand Their Children's Rights](#) (U.S. Department of Education)



English language learners and special education

English language learners identified with special education needs also have the right to receive **both** language services and special education services, and their parents have the right to receive information about evaluations, IEPs, support services, and other related topics in their home language. Immigration status does not impact students' or parents' right to access these services.

- [Special Education and English Language Learners: Resource Section](#) (Colorín Colorado)
- [Special Education and ELLs: A Conversation with Cristina Sánchez-López](#) (Colorín Colorado)
- [Using a Multi-tiered System of Support \(MTSS\) to Help English Language Learners Succeed](#) (Colorín Colorado)
- [Special Education and ELLs: Partnering with Parents](#) (Colorín Colorado)

Recommended videos

- [ELLs with special education needs are entitled to both ELL and special education services](#) (Attorney Roger Rosenthal, Migration Legal Action Program)



Ensure that all staff understand immigrant students' rights

Why this matters

Students will interact with a variety of staff and personnel throughout the school. All of these adults have an obligation to protect students' privacy and access to an education. Violations of those rights could not only have an impact on the educational climate and cause a chilling effect on attendance or enrollment, but could also result in legal action.

Note: For additional information on early childhood settings, see our section on [young children in immigrant families](#).

Tips for getting started

- Use the resources in this section to become more familiar with these laws.
- Consult with district officials or community partners on questions you have.
- Review forms and policies to see which may need to be updated (see related [recommendations in the following strategy](#)).
- Make sure you and your staff have up-to-date information on students' civil rights and educators' legal obligations to protect those rights.
- Provide professional development and training as needed.

Keeping staff well-informed

Ensure that all K-12 school staff understand that:

- immigration status has no bearing on a student's right to:
 - enroll in elementary, middle, or high school
 - receive school services, such as free- and reduced-priced meals, special education, or ESL classes
 - participate in activities
 - receive medical treatment
- immigration status should not be requested, shared, or reported in public or private
- staff should not tolerate bullying by other students or adults in the building
- violations will not be tolerated and will be grounds for disciplinary action.



Who needs to know this information?

It is critical to underscore that these guidelines apply to **all staff**, including:

- administrators, teachers, and paraprofessionals
- front office staff and counselors
- janitorial, nursing, bussing, and cafeteria staff
- substitute teachers and school resource officers/security personnel.

Note: Some independent athletic associations throughout the country require certain types of documentation from students who wish to participate on a high school athletic team, such as a social security number. You can read more about these policies, as well as one high school's creative approach to starting a soccer league for immigrant students who were determined to play, in this article from *The Hechinger Report*, [Immigrant Students Find Hope in Soccer, But Some States Won't Let Them Play](#).

What if I find out a student is undocumented?

School personnel have a legal obligation to protect student privacy. **Staff members should not request, report, or share a student's immigration status.** There is no legal obligation to report someone with undocumented status. Furthermore, doing so could have a chilling effect on students' attendance at school and be a violation of students' privacy, educational, and civil rights.

What if I find our school is not following these guidelines?

If colleagues are not following these guidelines, it may be because they do not know them. Start by speaking with an administrator and sharing your concerns and related resources. If that step does not affect how these policies are implemented, you may wish to consult with local immigration experts or national immigration organizations working on these issues.

Recommended resources

Fact sheets and briefs

- [Fact Sheet on Enrollment](#) (U.S. Department of Education, via Colorín Colorado)
- [School Enrollment for ELLs/Immigrants: Resource Section](#) (Colorín Colorado)
- Information about the Supreme Court case [Plyler v. Doe](#) (Colorín Colorado)
- [Infographic: Gathering and Managing Student and Family Information](#) (Association of California School Administrators)



- [Fact Sheet: Undocumented Students and Families in School](#) (American Civil Liberties Union)
- [Legal Guidance: Providing All Children Equal Access to Education, Regardless of Immigration Status](#) (California School Board Association)
- [Gathering and Handling Student and Family Information](#) (Office of the California Attorney General)
- [From Plyler to Sanctuary: Education Policies Promoting a Welcoming and Safe Environment for Immigrant Families](#) (Migration Policy Institute)
- [Position Paper on Undocumented Students: The Rights of Undocumented Students](#) (National Association of Secondary School Principals)
- [Enrollment Procedures](#) (Informed Immigrants)

Let Us Learn: FAQs for educators

Another useful resource is the [FAQs for Educators](#) from [Let Us Learn: Schools for Every Child](#) entitled “How does a child’s immigration status affect their enrollment in school?” It addresses:

- students’ rights to a K-12 public education
- extracurricular activities and free- and reduced-price meals
- information/documents that can and cannot be requested during school enrollment.

Note: Let Us Learn, an initiative of the Lawyers’ Committee for Civil Rights Under Law, [sent letters to all state attorneys general](#) in the Fall of 2017 reminding them that all students have the right to enroll in K-12 public schools.

Recommended videos

- [FAQ on Enrolling Immigrant Students: Information on Social Security numbers, proof of residency, birth certificates, immigration documents, and more](#) (Attorney Roger Rosenthal, Migrant Legal Action Program)
- [Why schools should not ask families or students about immigration status](#) (Lori Dodson, ESOL Teacher – Maryland)



Review and update enrollment policies/forms

Why this matters

As explained in our information on the [legal rights of immigrant students](#), schools are not permitted to (a) ask about immigration status for purposes of enrollment or (b) ask any questions that would dissuade immigrant students/families from enrolling or have any kind of chilling effect. If families are asked for such information, they may be concerned that the information could be shared with an immigration enforcement agency. As a result, schools may need to review registration forms. For example, a recent audit in California found at least 75 districts asking about immigration status in the enrollment forms (Californians Together, 2017).

It is critical that front office staff have accurate information about enrolling immigrant students. They will not only set the tone for families' experience, but also will have significant influence on whether the families feel comfortable sharing personal information – or even enroll at the school at all.

Tips for getting started

- Review registration forms, home language surveys, or other forms related to school services/activities. Look for and remove any mention of immigration status.
- Become familiar with alternate documents permitted for school enrollment, including paperwork related to residence in the district, proof of age, and guardianship. If you are uncertain about what is required, check with administrators or the district's legal office.
- Explain to families what their rights are under federal privacy laws, detailed in the next section on protecting student privacy.
- Be mindful of the language used on other school forms, such as report cards or other family correspondence. Terms like “citizenship grade” or “legal student absences” can create fear and confusion among immigrant families (Mangual Figueroa, 2017).

Social security numbers

Districts should avoid asking for Social security numbers; if they do, they must explain:

- how the social security number will be used and why the district is requesting it
- that providing the number is voluntary
- what kinds of paperwork will be accepted instead
- that **not providing a social security number will not bar students** from enrolling in/attending school (CSBA, 2017).



Public charge: Free- and reduced-price meal applications

Note: Schools are receiving questions about whether free- and reduced-price meal enrollment would be counted against a green card application as part of the proposed “public charge” rules. **It will not.** You can read more about these proposed [rule changes in our section about the “public charge” rules](#).

Recommended resources

- Districts who had to change enrollment practices after legal action: News headlines from [Connecticut](#) and [California](#)
- ELL placement/identification: Resources from [Colorín Colorado](#)
- Processing foreign records: Resources from [New York City](#) and [Miami-Dade Schools](#)

Recommended videos

- [FAQ on Enrolling Immigrant Students: Social Security numbers, proof of residency, birth certificates, immigration documents, and more](#) (Attorney Roger Rosenthal, Migrant Legal Action Program)



Protect student privacy

Why this matters

Students have certain legal privacy protections regardless of immigration status. The Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA) is a federal law that protects the privacy of student education records for all students. The American Federation of Teachers notes that, “Under FERPA, schools are prohibited, without parental consent, from providing information from a student’s file to federal immigration agents if the information would potentially expose a student’s immigration status.”

According to [Illinois Legal Aid Online](#):

*FERPA does not allow schools to turn over a student’s file to federal immigration agents. The school can turn the file over if a parent consents and gives them permission or if the information does not contain the student’s immigration status. **School officials are non-reporters. They are not required to report undocumented immigrants.***

Note: The California School Boards Association shares the following reminder: “School leaders should review with legal counsel any request for student information submitted by Immigration and Customs Enforcement” (p. 4).

Tips for getting started

- Review these regulations and your own school policies to see if any changes are needed.
- Determine if there are other privacy policies that should be reflected in school policy/procedures at the district, city, county, or state level.
- Ensure that staff have updated information regarding student privacy laws, particularly those who are working on student enrollment.

Recommended resources

The following resources were published by institutions in California:

- [Infographic: Sharing Student and Family Information](#) (Association of California School Administrators)
- [Protecting Confidentiality of Records](#) (Stanford Law School and the California Charter School Association)
- [Legal Guidance: Providing All Children Equal Access to Education, Regardless of Immigration Status](#) (California School Boards Association)



Additional resources include:

- [Immigrant and Refugee Children: A Guide for Educators/School Staff](#) (Teaching Tolerance)
- [Protecting Student Information](#) and [State-Level Policies Regarding Privacy](#) (National Immigration Law Center)
- [Privacy Protocols and Confidentiality](#) (Informed Immigrants)



Protecting personal information

[Muhidin Warfa](#), the Director of the Multilingual Department in Minneapolis Public Schools (MN), notes the following:

It is important for schools to be very clear and open with families about how information that they provide to schools is stored and protected. Families are particularly concerned about providing information such as home address, immigration history, and forms such as the free/reduced lunch application that ask for a social security number. It can alleviate concerns if schools explain exactly how this information is used and protected.



Find out what resources your district and state have about serving immigrant students

Why this matters

The challenges that immigrant students currently face speak to the importance of creating an environment in which (a) students and families feel welcome and comfortable in the educational setting and (b) all leaders and staff members understand students' rights and their obligations in protecting those rights.

To meet those needs, K-12 school and district leaders have addressed these issues in a variety of ways within (and beyond) their communities. Some leaders have focused on internal communication with staff, while others have made public statements regarding their immigrant students. Some districts that have such guidelines or resolutions have called themselves “sanctuary districts,” “safe zones,” or “safe havens.”

These statements vary in content, length, scope, and method of delivery. Some leaders have collaborated with their school boards to draft resolutions or formal statements supporting all students' access to education. These statements have been delivered in writing or in person through press conferences, events, or interviews with local media in families' languages.

Common themes in this communication include:

- a welcoming message affirming the value of immigrant families to the community
- an affirmation of all students' right to a free, public education, as well as their civil rights, regardless of immigration status
- a reminder of existing policies that address discrimination, bullying, and bias
- an explanation of steps for protecting student and family privacy
- clarification of policies related to immigration and law enforcement activity
- information on new or updated policies, such as the Los Angeles school board's [directive to the superintendent](#) to “develop a plan within 90 days that will train teachers, administrators and other staff on how to quickly respond to immigration enforcement agents”
- messages that try to prevent drops in enrollment or attendance due to family concerns.

These statements can serve as an important step in creating a climate of respect and trust for immigrant students, families, and [staff members](#) while also reiterating districts' legal obligations towards students and families.



The California School Board Association (2017) notes that,

While these resolutions do not provide further or greater legal protection for students than already exists in the law, they do help school districts utilize their lawful discretion to establish policies and procedures to ensure that the district is providing equal access to public education to all students and to ensure the safety and security of its students attending school to the best of its ability. They also direct staff how to respond to potential immigration enforcement activities by ICE or other immigration enforcement officers or agents. (p. 5)

The role of states

States also have an important role to play in communicating related state and federal laws. For example, New York State has published a section on its website titled “[Information Regarding Recent Immigration-Related Actions](#)”, available in more than two dozen languages, as well as [guidance](#) related to the enrollment of undocumented and unaccompanied youth.

California has published multiple documents clarifying existing rules and also has gone beyond what previously existed to create new policies, guidelines, and models for districts to use as they determine their policies at the local level.

In addition, California passed a statewide law, [AB 699](#), increasing protections for immigrant students. You can see fact sheets and infographics about the law in [English and Spanish here](#) and from the [Immigration Legal Resource Center](#). The following documents were published in California as well:

- [Legal Guidance: Providing All Children Equal Access to Education, Regardless of Immigration Status](#) (California School Board Association, or CSBA)
- [Promoting a Safe and Secure Learning Environment for All: Guidance and Model Policies to Assist California’s K-12 Schools in Responding to Immigration Issues](#) (California Attorney General)

Learn more from Informed Immigrants’ section on [Understanding state/local immigration-related policies](#).

Tips for getting started

- Find out what kinds of resources, documents, and statements your district and state already have available and if those resources are available in multiple languages.



- Keep in mind that:
 - school districts are legally obligated to share information in a language that families understand (see multilingual versions of district statements in the “Recommended resources” below).
 - school and district leaders may not realize the extent to which immigration policies are impacting families locally, as seen in [this article written for Colorín Colorado](#). Helping leaders better understand the student population is an area in which educators working with ELLs and immigrant students can have a significant impact.
 - many of these strategies are appropriate for early childhood settings as well.
- In school districts that have refrained from making a formal statement about immigration-related policies, educators might find it helpful to communicate the following kinds of information to decision-makers:
 - examples from other schools or districts, such as statements of support, resolutions, and other documents
 - information on the impact of immigration policies on local students
 - related policies at the district, city, county, or state level that might impact immigrant students.

How to frame the issue

Consider framing these issues in terms of student well-being and learning as a helpful starting point. ELL administrator Kristina Robertson notes,

As a public leader you always worry about the consequences of a decision, a statement, or an action and you want to examine issues from multiple perspectives. Who might gain from a decision? Who might be harmed?

*As we discussed our district support, we recognized that the heart of the matter was **keeping students safe and supporting their continued learning**. This meant that we needed to measure our actions by how they related to supporting the students’ learning and social-emotional well-being. This has been helpful in empowering leaders as they make decisions in response to new situations.*



Recommended resources

The following list shares a sample of documents published by districts around the country.

School district resources: FAQs and Guides

- [Immigration FAQ in 10 languages](#) (Denver Public Schools)
- [Immigration and School Enrollment FAQ](#) (Ann Arbor, Michigan)
- [Education and Immigration Resource Guides](#) (Los Angeles Unified School District)

School district resources: Statements and resolutions

- [Des Moines Public Schools Statement](#)
- [School Board Resolution in 4 languages](#) (Denver Public Schools)
- [School Board Resolution](#) (Ann Arbor Public Schools)
- [School Board Resolution](#) (Sacramento City Unified School District)
- [Sample resolution](#) (California School Board Association)
- [Sample resolution](#) (National Education Association)

Related resources

- [Practice Advisory: The Legal Authority for “Sanctuary” School Policies](#) (National Immigration Law Center, 2018)
- [“Safe Haven” or “Sanctuary” Resolutions](#) (Informed Immigrants)
- [Position Paper on Undocumented Students: Recommendations for State, District, and School Leaders](#) (National Association of Secondary School Principals)

Related news items

- [What it means when a district declares itself a 'safe haven' or 'sanctuary'](#) (EdSource, August 2017)
- [School districts step up protections for immigrant students](#) (EdSource, February 2017)

Recommended videos

- [Portland Public Schools: Welcoming Immigrants](#) (Portland, Oregon)
- [All Are Welcome in the Ann Arbor Public Schools](#) (Ann Arbor, Michigan)





Engaging in important conversations

Illinois: Teachers from McLean County Unit District No. 5 in Illinois [spoke to their school board](#) in the Fall of 2017, advocating for the board to pass a measure declaring the district “a safe learning environment for students regardless of their immigration status.”

Colorado: Denver district leaders [have collaborated](#) with advocacy groups, the teachers’ union, and parent organizations to develop and communicate messages in support of immigrant families. The work in Denver has also resonated beyond the district. Respondents to a [2017 Colorín Colorado survey](#) about how schools are supporting immigrant students noted:

“We like Denver Public Schools communication – ‘Immigration Fact Sheet’ – and are encouraging our district to release a version.”

“The Denver Public Schools had questions and answers on their website and all were translated into several languages. I shared that with our school board members and building principal and other district administrators. I would like to see something similar in our district.”

Virginia: When reflecting on both the positive and negative responses to his actions as superintendent of Harrisonburg schools, [Scott Kizner](#) (now the leader of Stafford County Public Schools) writes,

I recognize that educational leaders work and live in different socio-cultural-political environments. Each leader has to make a personal judgment on what they believe is in the best interest of their children. I am fortunate to be in a community that appreciates the diversity, and the mayor and I put a video together emphasizing our rich tradition of acceptance in Harrisonburg. I...have received criticism from a few but my focus has to be our students and doing what I believe is in their best interest. The school board and community at large have been very supportive.



Making Students and Families Feel Welcome

I know of one teacher who called all families of her students just to say 'I wanted to thank you for entrusting your child to our school. We're happy you're here. I love working with your student.' I heard about the phone call from an older sibling, and it was the first time I'd seen this girl smile in two weeks. Small gestures make a difference.

– Educator response to [Colorín Colorado's survey](#) on support for immigrant families

Key Takeaways

- Schools and early childhood programs can use a variety of strategies to get to know immigrant families and let them know they are welcome in the school community.
- When facing challenging situations, an existing partnership will allow schools to strengthen relationships with families; make communication and problem-solving more effective; and encourage student attendance and participation, as well as family engagement.



See this information online

Making Students and Families Feel Welcome

- View online: <http://www.colorincolorado.org/immigration/guide/welcome>
- Download PDF: <http://www.colorincolorado.org/immigration/guide/welcome-pdf>

Complete guide: <http://www.colorincolorado.org/immigration/guide>

Excerpted from *How to Support Immigrant Students and Families*.

Let all families know that they are welcome

Why this matters

The best way to let families know that they are welcome is to tell them. This kind of outreach has always been important for ELL and immigrant families; however, it is even more critical for immigrant families who may:

- feel unwelcome in the school, early childhood program, or community
- not know if immigration status impacts the [right to attend school](#) or early childhood program, or even enter the building
- be more likely to keep their children home and avoid educational settings themselves
- keep their children home due to local immigration enforcement activity.

Expressing support signals that you value their place in your community and take those concerns seriously. It is also an important message to [communicate to staff](#) who are serving immigrant students and who may be immigrants themselves or have ties to immigrant relatives/communities.

Tips for getting started

Educators and school/program leaders can communicate this message by:

- regularly expressing that families are welcome
- posting welcome signs and messages of support on doors in multiple languages
- making statements of support available online.

Other kinds of engagement

Schools, districts, and early childhood programs can also share welcoming messages through:

- parent information meetings
- phone calls
- public remarks in the community or local press
- collaboration with community organizations that have a relationship with families (i.e. houses of worship, community centers, and immigrant rights groups)
- Public Service Announcements and interviews with local media outlets in families' native languages, especially for communities with low levels of native language literacy.





Attendance and community engagement

Attendance is an important reason to reach out to immigrant families. Researchers at UCLA [studying the impact of immigration enforcement on schools](#) reported that 68% of school administrators who were surveyed in late 2017 and early 2018 found increased absenteeism among immigrant students to be a problem, with nearly 11% considering it a big problem. Many districts have also seen attendance drop when immigration enforcement activity is reported nearby, as in the case of a [2017 raid in Las Cruces, New Mexico](#), or the [case](#) of a 2018 [workplace raid](#) in Tennessee. Other districts have been concerned about overall [school enrollment](#). These absences not only impact student achievement and teacher planning; they have a financial impact on school districts in states that fund districts based on average daily attendance (Gándara, 2018).

An administrator from New Jersey reports, “The kids are scared and sometimes they hide for days when there are immigration raids in the area. Some of the students have no food or place to live because the parents do not have a job and they go day by day” (Gándara and Ee, 2018a, p. 14).

The same is true in early childhood settings. Researchers from the Center for Law and Social Policy (CLASP) interviewing early childhood educators documented “drops in attendance, fewer applicants, trouble filling available spaces, and decreased parent participation in classrooms and at events” due to concern about immigration enforcement, in addition to fewer trips to community activities at the library, park, or even shopping (Cervantes, Ullrich, & Matthews, 2018, p.3). The CLASP researchers note that young “children are losing out on enriching early childhood experiences that are important to prepare them for success in school and in life.”

Resources

- [Going to school when your family is in hiding from ICE](#) (*The Hechinger Report*)
- [A Stanford University study](#) released in the Fall of 2018 indicates that police cooperation with immigration enforcement officials can impact the enrollment of Latino students in nearby schools. The researchers estimated that such partnerships in 55 jurisdictions nationwide displaced more than 300,000 Latino students between 2000 and 2011.



Create a welcoming environment

Why this matters

The environment of a school or early childhood program has a significant impact on students and families. Here are some ways to make immigrant families feel welcome in your setting.

Tips for getting started

Make students and families feel welcome by:

Removing barriers to engagement

- ensuring that families are [greeted warmly](#) at the front office in their language
- introducing them to parent liaisons, Family Resource Centers, or other resources
- helping families understand the U.S. school system
- providing transportation, meals, and child care for family events
- identifying specific stressors, such as [stimuli that trigger post-traumatic stress](#)

Communicating in families' languages

- having access to someone who speaks their language
- making information available in their language and format they prefer
- teaching staff how to use a language phone line or other services with an interpreter
- learning how to [pronounce student and family names correctly](#)
- learning a few phrases in families' languages
- welcoming and using students' home languages in the classroom
- connecting students with peers, staff, or volunteers who speak their language

Celebrating students' countries and cultures

- displaying flags, artwork, photos, and mementos from students' home countries
- including culturally responsive books in families' home languages in the library and in classrooms (including books by diverse authors who share students' heritage)
- providing opportunities for students and/or families to share songs and stories from their country or culture if they feel comfortable doing so
- being mindful that some students may not wish to share information about their home country, immigration story, or place of birth and others may not remember or know much about it (see more on [students' silence when talking about immigration](#))



Engaging the school-wide / district-wide community

- encouraging students to brainstorm ideas on how to make peers feel welcome
- encouraging activities that foster students' [empathy](#)
- reminding the community, including all students and adults in the building, of existing policies on bullying, bias, and discrimination
- taking steps to [prevent bullying](#) and addressing bullying incidents when they occur
- sharing these strategies and ideas with colleagues.

In addition, consider adding immigration status as a form of difference that merits equitable treatment in your classroom. Any time you engage in conversations with students about why it is important not to discriminate against others due to their race, religion, sexual orientation, gender, or other form of social difference, include immigration status (as is developmentally appropriate). If you have signs in your classroom that name different kinds of bullying or hate speech, include immigration status as well (Gallo, 2018).

Addressing bias

For recommendations on how to discuss and address bias, see the [comprehensive resource list](#) we put together following the mass shooting at the Tree of Life Synagogue in Pittsburgh, PA.

Recommended resources

Resources from Colorín Colorado

- [Engaging ELL Families Guide](#)
- [ELL Family Outreach: Resource Section](#)
- [Creating a Welcoming Classroom: Resource Section](#)

Toolkits

- [Who Are Our Newcomers?](#) (U.S. Department of Education Newcomer Toolkit)
- [Welcoming Newcomers to a Safe and Thriving School Environment](#) (U.S. Department of Education Newcomer Toolkit)
- [Building Welcome Schools: A Guide for K-12 Educators and After-School Providers](#) (Welcoming America)

News headlines

- [Students Help Refugee Families Settle into Life in America](#) (*The Daily Lobo*)
- [High School Club Aims to Make Refugees, Immigrants Welcome](#) (*The Today Show*)



Recommended videos

- [Creating a Welcoming Environment for ELLs and Immigrant Students](#)
- [Why Building Relationships with Immigrant Students Matters](#) (Anne Marie Foerster Luu, ESOL Teacher – Maryland)
- [What Happened When the Students Realized the Yemeni Flag Wasn't on Stage](#) (Diana Alqadhi, English Language Development Specialist – Dearborn, MI)



Making students feel welcome

Teachers use different strategies to make students feel welcome. [Lori Dodson](#), an ESOL teacher in Maryland, shares that her Central American students love seeing books by El Salvadorian author [Jorge Argueta](#), while Michelle Bryant, an ESOL teacher in Virginia, writes,

As the ESOL teacher, I had a local community group that works with immigrants come in several times at staff meetings to inform teachers about cultural awareness and small steps we can take to help newly arrived immigrants feel safe and welcome.

[A teacher](#) who realized the impact her advocacy could have writes this:

A conversation I had with a well-meaning teacher as we made copies one morning turned into a total awakening for her; she said it had never occurred to her that she had students who were struggling with anti-Muslim sentiment or whose families might be undocumented, but once she thought about it, she realized she needed to intentionally put some things up on her classroom walls that affirmed that all were welcome in her room, and to express to them that they could approach her for support.

And Jan Anglade, an ESOL teacher in Georgia, [shared the following exchange](#):

Me: "So you like this school and the teachers?"

Student: "Yes, I like it. You are my favorite teacher."

M: "But I'm NOT your teacher. You have never been in my class."

S: "Yes, but you are nice to us, and smile, and talk to us, and say good morning to us."



Get to know your students and families

Why this matters

One of the most important steps educators can take is to get to know students and families, developing a personal relationship that establishes trust and rapport. It is much easier to address a difficult situation, such as [changes in student behavior](#), when you have a relationship.

Tips for getting started

- Learn more about family backgrounds and strengths by talking with families, cultural liaisons, and ELL/bilingual colleagues.
- Invite members of the community or local organizations to share their insights.
- Look for ways to increase the amount of interaction between staff and families.
- Get into families' neighborhoods by planning events in local venues and home visits.
- Give students the chance to tell their stories with tips in [this Colorín Colorado article](#).
- Take a look at the ideas in [Family Engagement is More than Having a Multicultural Potluck](#) from Confianza, posted on Re-imagining Migration.

Recommended resources from Colorín Colorado

- [A Guide for Engaging ELL Families](#)
- [Getting to Know ELLs and Their Families](#)
- [Children in Mixed-Status Families](#)
- [DACA and Dreamers: What Schools Need to Know](#)
- [Special Populations: Refugees, Unaccompanied Minors, and Newcomer Immigrants](#)
- [The Inner World of the Immigrant Child](#) by Cristina Igoa

Recommended videos

- [Video Playlist: Home Visits with Immigrant Students](#)
- [Video Playlist: Getting to Know Your ELL/Immigrant Students](#)
- [One Principal's Journey to a Refugee Camp](#) (Dr. Cynthia Lundgren, WIDA)

Documentaries

- [The Graduates](#) (PBS)
- [I Learn America](#)
- [When We Stop Counting](#)





When families speak indigenous or low-incidence languages

Families who speak Mixtec

A couple of years ago, staff at Wolfe Street Academy, a [community school in Baltimore, Maryland](#), began to notice an unusually high number of special education referrals among their Spanish speakers. After the special education and ELL team looked at the issue more closely, they realized that a significant number of families that the school thought were dominant Spanish speakers actually spoke Mixtec, an indigenous language from Mexico. The students who had been flagged for special education were in fact trilingual!

Due to the stigma they faced in their home country, the families had not shared this part of their background with the school. The school has since learned a great deal about the language and what influence it might have on language development, and the whole school community has worked to develop pride in the language throughout the school – none of which could have happened without parent input. Learn more about this case study from [an article written for Colorín Colorado](#) by the Wolfe Street staff and related video interviews.

The need for interpreters who speak indigenous languages

Read more about the challenges of managing court proceedings for Latin American immigrants who speak indigenous languages in these news stories:

- [“No One Is Available”: When Immigration Judges Ask for Indigenous Languages Interpreters](#) (Univision)
- [Indigenous Language Interpreters Help Asylum-Seekers at the Border](#) (*Christian Science Monitor*)
- [On Border, Indigenous Interpreters in Demand](#) (*Santa Fe New Mexican*)
- [Language Barriers Pose Challenges for Mayan Migrant Children](#) (NPR)



Learn more about special student populations

Why this matters

It is critical to learn as much as possible about your students' backgrounds and educational experiences, as well as their talents and gifts, as you look for ways to help them succeed. You may also meet students who have unique experiences, strengths, and needs:

- **Refugee students** may have experienced trauma, difficult journeys, and lengthy stays in refugee camps or temporary accommodations with little access to schooling.
- **Students with interrupted education** may have little or no schooling, or a patchwork of experiences.
- **Children of migrant farmworkers** may have moved frequently around the country following different harvest seasons. They may not have school records. They may be living in poverty and particularly vulnerable to events such as natural disasters.
- **Unaccompanied children and youth** may have endured long, traumatic, and violent journeys and may be reuniting with family they have not met or seen for a long time.
- **Students displaced by natural disasters** may have gone through traumatic experiences, upheaval, and long separations from immediate family members.

Learn more in our section on [special populations](#) of immigrant students and ELLs.

Tips for getting started

- Look for clues about your students' experiences without asking direct questions.
- Build relationships with students and families.
- Find out if colleagues such as ESOL teachers, parent liaisons, or community partners have information about students' prior experiences or [background knowledge](#) about students' home countries; invite them to share their insights.
- Learn more about the context for your students' experiences, such as a civil war that caused them to flee or the conditions that migrants face along particular routes.
- Keep in mind that some students may be reluctant to share their experiences. See ideas for supportive ways to engage students that don't put them on the spot in [our related section on immigrants students' silence](#) and our article on student stories.
- Keep in mind that refugees and asylees have different kinds of rights in the U.S.; not everyone that used to live in a refugee camp has resettled through the State Department and has access to the rights and privileges that such a process entails.



Recommended resources from Colorín Colorado

- [Getting to Know Your ELLs: Six Strategies for Success](#)
- [Special Populations: ELL and Immigrant Students](#)
- [Refugees and Displaced Students: The Story Behind the Story](#)
- [Building Bridges Through Storytelling: What Are Your Students' Stories?](#)

Recommended video

- [Mister Rogers on Welcoming Children of Migrant Workers in the Classroom](#) (*The Oprah Winfrey Show*, 1985)

Films about refugees

Re-imagining Migration shares the following films about refugees on its website:

- [Fatima's Drawings](#): This film follows a nine-year-old refugee's journey from home in war-torn Syria to Sweden.
- [4.1 Miles](#): A captain in the Greek coast guard works to save migrants, fleeing from their homes, from drowning at sea. (Nominated for the 2017 Academy Award for Best Documentary Short Subject)
- [Sea Prayer](#): This illustrated film depicts a Syrian father's reflections as his son sleeps on the dangerous sea journey awaiting them.
- [Desperate Journeys with Khaled Hosseini](#): Hosseini, a Goodwill Ambassador for the United Nations High Commission for Human Rights, speaks with refugees and their families to explore the question, "Why do refugees leave their homes?"
- [Step into a Refugee Camp](#): In the fall of 2016, *The New York Times* broadcast live from the Zaatari Refugee Camp. At the time, the number of displaced people in the world was larger than at any time since the end of World War II. The short video that the times produced from the broadcast introduced ordinary people, around the world, to Syrian refugees and life in the refugee camps.



Identify student and family strengths

Why this matters

All students and families have strengths and assets. Recognizing those strengths can create a foundation on which to build an effective partnership. It is an important shift from a “deficit” approach, in which families and students are defined by their needs and challenges.

Tips for getting started

- Highlight student and family strengths and celebrate them publicly and regularly within the entire school/program community. Look for families’ strengths and successes in overcoming and managing their challenges and caring for their children.
- Ask students and families to describe their skills, interests, and talents, and ask for additional input from colleagues and community partners.
- Look for ways to do this in the classroom. Encourage teachers to look for students’ strengths (using this chart of [asset-based language](#) as a starting point), as well as local or national contributions from members of the students’ communities.

Recommended resources

- [Using a Strengths-Based Approach with ELs: Supporting Students Living with Trauma, Violence, and Chronic Stress](#) (Colorín Colorado article by Debbie Zacarian, Lourdes Álvarez-Ortiz and Judie Haynes)
- [Teaching to Strengths: Supporting Students Living with Trauma, Violence, and Chronic Stress](#) (Book by Debbie Zacarian, Lourdes Álvarez-Ortiz, and Judie Haynes)
- [Strengths-Based Instruction for ELLs](#) (Colorín Colorado)
- [A Strengths-Based Approach to Teaching English Learners](#) (Cult of Pedagogy)
- [Finding Students’ Hidden Strengths and Passions](#) (Edutopia)
- [The Strengths of Immigrant Students](#) (Harvard Graduate School of Education, via Re-imagining Migration)
- [Engaging English Learners: Interview with Confianza founder Sarah Ottow](#) (Re-imagining Migration)



Recommended videos

- [Getting to Know Students Through Parent Letters](#) (Clara Gonzales-Espinoza, 4th-Grade Teacher – Albuquerque, NM)
- [Our Parents Value Education and Their Children’s Teachers](#) (Diana Alqadhi, English Language Development Specialist – Dearborn, MI)
- [Building Upon Student Strengths](#) (Dr. Lynn Shafer-Willner, WIDA)





Building upon student and family strengths

“Roots and wings”

Dr. Sandra Duval, an instructional specialist who immigrated to New York City from Haiti as a child, recommends bringing children’s lives, experiences, and cultures into the classroom – as was done for her when she was a child in school. She was particularly impacted by lessons in which she learned about important historical contributions of Haitians to the Americas (Duval, 2018). Learn more from her chapter in [Teachers as Allies](#) (Teachers College Press, 2017) and from these [video clips](#) from her colleagues, Anne Marie Foerster Luu and Lori Dodson:

- [Dr. Sandra Duval’s work on “roots and wings”](#)
- [Dr. Sandra Duval and the power of seeing yourself in the curriculum](#)

“We do gardens”

In California, a group of teachers organized a meeting for the school’s Hmong and Cambodian parents (whose people had been farmers for many generations) to discuss the creation of a new school garden. The teachers were disappointed when just a few parents attended the meeting and assumed there was little interest in the garden. On garden day, however, eighty family members arrived with hoes and dug up the garden in a single day. When asked why the families hadn’t attended the meeting, a parent said, “We don’t do meetings. We do gardens” (Ferlazzo and Hammond, 2009, p. 45).

What does a strengths-based approach look like?

In their introduction to the Bank Street College of Education [series on supporting young children of immigrants](#), Dr. Fabienne Doucet and Dr. Jennifer Keys Adair write:

Work that engages children and families in strength-based, asset-oriented ways should:

1. *Recognize strengths and capabilities of children, families, and communities*
2. *Avoid programs, policies, discourses and practices that begin with deficit views of immigrant families and communities*
3. *See the children of immigrants as intersectional and complex*
4. *Create programs that begin from the expertise and experience of immigrant families. (p. 5)*



Building Partnerships with Immigrant Families

(It is best to) provide a summary of information in the family's native language. Assume that families may have to be given information multiple times in multiple formats (orally, written, follow up) before they know what to do, as the system is unfamiliar.

– Response to a [Colorín Colorado survey](#) on how schools are supporting immigrant families

Key Takeaways

- School districts are legally obligated to share information in a language that families understand. Schools can use a wide range of methods for communicating with families in their home languages and making updated information available.
- Schools can also strengthen family partnerships by encouraging parent leadership and collaborating with community organizations.

See this information online

Building Partnerships with Immigrant Families

- View online: <http://www.colorincolorado.org/immigration/guide/families>
- Download PDF: <http://www.colorincolorado.org/immigration/guide/families-pdf>

Complete guide: <http://www.colorincolorado.org/immigration/guide>

Excerpted from *How to Support Immigrant Students and Families*.

Create different channels for communication in families' languages

Why this matters

School districts are legally obligated to share information in a language that families understand. Families may also need information in different formats to understand it, especially if they have lower levels of literacy. By learning more about how families prefer to communicate, administrators can allocate resources and staff time more effectively.

In addition, it is critical to provide forms and documents in families' home languages to the extent possible, such as registration forms, home language surveys, and emergency contact forms. Keep in mind that the U.S. educational system will be new to families and they may have lots of questions on top of their questions about complex issues related to immigration.

Note: This is especially critical when it comes to questions of [special education evaluation](#), services, or Individualized Education Programs (IEPs).

Tips for getting started

Work with parent liaisons to determine how best to provide translated information and if your families prefer to communicate through:

- in-person conversation
- written handouts
- email or websites
- telephone hotlines or automated phone calls
- text messages or social media
- video-streaming events
- partnerships with local community groups such as a house of worship

Posting information online

Posting translated information online increases families' access to resources from their own home. When you find out families' preferred methods of contact, you can find out how easily families can access information online and let them know where internet access is available.

Note: Providing a link to an online translator is not sufficient, as machine translators often mistranslate educational or context-specific words and phrases.



Recommended resources

- Fact Sheet: Communicating with ELL Parents, available in [English](#) and [other languages](#) (U.S. Department of Education and U.S. Department of Justice, via Colorín Colorado)
- [Communicating with ELL and Immigrant families](#) (Colorín Colorado)
- [Resources and Information for Families](#) (Californians Together)
- [Effectively engaging immigrant families](#) (Informed Immigrants)

Recommended videos

- [Building Parent Relationships Built on Trust](#) (Mark Gaither, Principal – Wolfe Street Academy, Baltimore Public Schools, MD)



School district websites for immigrant families

The **Boston Public Schools** [website for immigrant families](#) includes:

- information in 15 languages on a range of immigration issues
- information on legal rights
- scholarship information for undocumented immigrant students
- a hate-crime hotline
- tips to support Muslim families
- educational tools for teachers on how to engage in civics conversations.

In addition to a hotline for immigration questions, **the Los Angeles Unified School District** has launched [a website](#) with bilingual information on:

- students' educational rights
- preparing for a possible family separation
- lists of important phone numbers and documents to have in secure locations
- contact information for legal resources and site-specific resources for the district.

The Dallas ISD [Welcoming and Protective Schools](#) website includes information about DACA and video interviews with Dallas “DACA-mented” teachers.

Other online resources include an [immigration website](#) from the **Harrisonburg, VA** school district and one from **Denver, Colorado**, whose [“Safe and Welcoming School District” website](#) includes an FAQ for Muslim families in English, Arabic, and other languages.



Revisit data about immigrant students

Why this matters

Looking at student data can help identify patterns or experiences that may be affecting your families. While it is important not to make assumptions or ask for any information related to immigration status, the better you know your families, the better you will be able to address their concerns. You may also find some patterns that surprise you, as in the case of [this Illinois high school](#) who realized that many immigrant students needed significant support in applying for college.

Tips for getting started

- Revisit student data and talk with the staff who work with immigrant students to make sure you know who your immigrant students are, always protecting student privacy.
- Remember that immigrant students may have diverse backgrounds/education levels.
- You may wish to ask the following questions when you look at your data:
 - What trends and commonalities are there within the different families?
 - Do families represent different world regions, religions, and languages?
 - What are students' educational backgrounds? How are they similar or different?
 - Are there particular issues impacting families that need to be addressed?

It is also worthwhile to take a look at your state immigrant/ELL population. You can get started with the following data sources, as well as the [immigration data resources](#) in our introduction:

- [A Snapshot of Immigrants in California](#) (Public Policy Institute of California)
- [State Immigration Fact Sheets](#) (American Immigration Council)
- [English Learners by States: Demographics, Outcomes, and State Accountability Policies](#) (Migration Policy Institute)
- [A Guide to Finding and Understanding English Learner Data](#) (Migration Policy Institute)

Finally, **avoid making assumptions** about what kinds of issues and challenges families are facing based on their background, country of origin, or languages spoken. For example, the DREAMer population is a diverse group; while the majority of DACA recipients are from Mexico and other Latin American countries, [The Washington Post](#) reports that tens of thousands of DACA recipients also come from countries such as South Korea, the Philippines, India, Jamaica, Tobago, Poland, and Pakistan. A significant number of DACA recipients are also high school students. (Read more in our section on the [diversity among undocumented immigrants](#).)



Encourage family leadership

Why this matters

Families can be tremendous allies and ambassadors with ideas on how to effectively address the community's concerns. Learn how families at one school are rising to the challenge in our video with Principal Nathaniel Provencio in the "Recommended video" section below.

Tips for getting started

- Ask families what their questions and concerns are. Form an advisory group of families to discuss these issues and ask them to identify priorities and then draft recommendations for teachers, administrators or other leaders.
- Invite families to school board meetings and encourage them to speak. Remind school districts to have interpreters available and encourage families to use them.
- Take their input seriously, and do not ask for it until you are prepared to listen. It may be challenging at first, but well worth the learning curve.

Recommended resources

Articles and strategies

- [Strategy: Encourage ELL parents to take on leadership roles](#) (Colorín Colorado)
- [Supporting Newcomer Students and Parent Civic Engagement in the Schools](#) (Blog post by [Laura Gardner](#) for Bridging Refugee Youth and Children's Services)
- [Four Stages of Immigrant Parent Involvement](#) by Young-Chan Han
- [Building Partnerships with Immigrant Parents](#) (*Educational Leadership*)
- [Parent Empowerment and Leadership Development](#) (Californians Together)

Toolkits

- [Serving on Groups That Make Decisions: A Guide for Families](#) (Wisconsin Family Assistance Center for Education, Training, and Support)
- [Promising Partnership Practices Toolkit](#) (Johns Hopkins University)
- [Promising Partnership Practices in Colorado](#) (Colorado Department of Education)



Reports

- [*Partnering with Parents and Families to Support Immigrant and Refugee Children at School*](#) (Center for Health and Health Care in Schools)
- [*Rethinking Parent Involvement: Perspectives of Immigrant and Refugee Parents*](#) (Bank Street College of Education)
- [*Building Bridges, Not Walls, Between Latinx Immigrant Parents and Schools*](#) (Bank Street College of Education)

Recommended videos

- [*Immigrant Parents Are Rising to Meet New Challenges*](#) (Nathaniel Provencio, Principal – Minnieville Elementary School, VA)
- [*Interview: Iveth Monterrosa*](#) (PTA President of Wolfe Street Academy – Baltimore, MD)



Reach out to community organizations

Why this matters

Beyond addressing questions of basic needs, other community partners that represent your families can be valuable allies, such as organizations with ties to local immigrants, houses of worship, and businesses. These organizations can help provide:

- unique insights on challenges families are facing
- skill sets and programs targeted to particular communities
- a network of resources ready to help, as well as practical help such as legal services
- volunteers who are ready to provide an important supporting role.

The role of libraries

Libraries can also play an important role in supporting immigrant families. These articles highlight some examples:

- [school librarian outreach](#) and support for immigrant students (*School Library Journal*)
- [a welcoming campaign](#) at Minnesota's Hennepin County Library (*School Library Journal*)
- [a partnership](#) between Boston libraries and schools to provide citizenship classes (Wicked Local West Roxbury).

You can also read about an innovative early literacy program designed to welcome immigrant families in [Building Safe Community Spaces for Immigrant Families, One Library at a Time](#).

Tips for getting started

- Create an [asset map](#) of valuable partners and resources in your community.
- Talk with colleagues about which existing partnerships are working and new partnerships that make sense to pursue on behalf of your families.
- Look for partners that can provide students with enrichment experiences.
- Do not hesitate to turn down partnerships that are not a good fit. Principal Mark Gaither at Wolfe Street Community School reminds educators that the most important question to answer when considering a new partnership is how it will benefit students.
- Connect with other community leaders, such as faith leaders, non-profit leaders, political leaders, or business owners who wish to express their support for local immigrant communities. There may be ways to have a broader impact through



partnerships and find solutions to local challenges (see the video below about Chicago Cubs manager Joe Maddon and his community work in his hometown of Hazleton, PA).

- As you bring people together, share examples of what other schools and communities are doing.

Recommended resources

- [Working with Community Organizations on Behalf of ELLs](#) (Colorín Colorado)
- [Community Schools: A Strategy for Success](#) (Resource page from Colorín Colorado)

Case studies

- [Joe Maddon and the Hazelton Integration Project](#) (NBC, via Re-imagining Migration)
- [After a hate crime, a town welcomes immigrants into its schools](#) (*The Hechinger Report*)





Family engagement toolkits

A number of organizations have published toolkits focused on culturally responsive parent engagement with diverse families. Here are some of the highlights:

ELL/Immigrant family engagement

- [Engaging ELL Families: 20 Strategies for School Leaders](#) (Colorín Colorado)
- [Community & Family Toolkit: Engaging the Families of English Learners in Classrooms, Schools, and Communities](#) (TESOL Press)
- [Ensuring Meaningful Communication with LEP Parents](#) (U.S. Department of Education Toolkit)

Culturally responsive family engagement

- [Handbook on Family and Community Engagement](#) (School Community Network)
- [Family Engagement Toolkit: Continuous Improvement Through an Equity Lens](#) (California Department of Education)
- [Family Engagement Tools: Editable Templates](#) (California Department of Education)
- [Organizing Family and Community Connections with Schools: How Do Schools Build Meaningful Relationships with All Stakeholders?](#) (National Center for Family and Community Connections with Schools)
- [Toolkit of Resources for Engaging Families and the Community as Partners in Education](#) (REL Pacific)
- [Establishing Partnerships with Families](#) (U.S. Department of Education Newcomer Toolkit)
- [Welcoming America Resource Library](#) (Welcoming America)



Special Considerations for Young Children in Immigrant Families

For kids as young as the ones I teach, keeping the routine going is vital, as well as reassuring them that we love them and want them here in school with us. When the kids go home feeling happy and safe, that seems to reassure parents some too, but I wish I could do more.

– Educator response to [Colorín Colorado’s survey](#) on support for immigrant families

Key Takeaways

- Early childhood programs can play a critical role in providing support for young children.
- Early childhood settings are considered “sensitive locations,” where immigration enforcement should not take place.
- Early childhood providers should be familiar with policies related to immigrant students, strategies for supporting social-emotional health, and the signs of trauma and anxiety.

See this information online

Special Considerations for Young Children in Immigrant Families

- View online: <http://www.colorincolorado.org/immigration/guide/preschool>
- Download PDF: <http://www.colorincolorado.org/immigration/guide/preschool-pdf>

Complete guide: <http://www.colorincolorado.org/immigration/guide>

Excerpted from *How to Support Immigrant Students and Families*.

Overview

Preschools, early childhood centers, and other child care settings can play a critical role in supporting the children in immigrant families. In addition to the strategies recommended throughout this guide, early childhood educators may wish to keep these additional considerations in mind as they review their own program policies and think about the needs of young children. As noted in [the introduction](#), there are 1.6 million children under the age of five nationwide who have at least one parent who is undocumented (Gándara & Ee, 2018a, p. 3).

Notes:

- Guidelines and laws that apply to early childhood programs may vary depending on the program’s location, affiliation, and sources of funding. They also may vary from K-12 public school policies. If clarification is needed, look for assistance from program administrators, local early childhood agencies, or national early childhood organizations.
- In addition, it is important for educators and leaders to keep in mind that immigration issues may be impacting staff as well, such as [Karen Reyes](#), a teacher of hearing impaired toddlers in Austin, Texas who is a DACA recipient. See more on this topic [in our section on how immigration issues can affect staff](#).



Opportunities for professional development

When considering professional development for staff, keep in mind the following:

- Community partners, as well as colleagues in nearby K-12 settings who serve the same families, may have guidance what kinds of training will best serve the staff.
- Early childhood agencies may also wish to offer centralized training for providers who are not in a large program setting.
- As part of the U.S. Department of Education’s non-regulatory guidance on implementing the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) with English learners, school districts are strongly encouraged to include local early childhood teachers in professional development. This might give providers an opportunity to learn how their local district is responding to current concerns of immigrant families.



Look for ways to build relationships with families

Why this matters

Strong family partnerships are a valuable tool not only in supporting young children's future academic success but also in supporting healthy social-emotional development – particularly in the face of stress and uncertainty. Early childhood programs may need to be creative in building and expanding these relationships with immigrant families, but the results will be well worth the extra effort. It is easier to address challenges after trust has been established.

Tips for getting started

There are a number of things that early childhood programs can do to get started, including:

- Making immigrant families [feel welcome](#)
- Creating an environment [that celebrates families' cultures and languages](#)
- Looking for new ways to [get to know families and their neighborhoods](#)
- Being proactive about [identifying families' strengths](#)
- Providing opportunities for families to ask [questions about issues of concern](#)
- Ensuring that communication is happening in [parents' languages](#)
- Building partnerships with [local community organizations that serve your families](#)

The role of home languages: Family outreach

In addition, it is critical to communicate in families' home languages and provide forms and documents in families' home languages to the extent possible, such as registration forms, home language surveys, and emergency contact forms. Keep in mind that the U.S. educational system will be new to families and they may have lots of questions related to the program, on top of their questions about complex issues related to immigration. See more recommendations in our section on [communicating with families](#).

The role of home languages: Language and literacy development

At the same time, welcoming and including children's home languages in their learning environment provides numerous benefits to their social-emotional development, sense of identity, early literacy development, and acquisition of English.



Learn more from the following:

- [The Importance of Home Language Series](#) (Head Start)
- [Creating an Environment That Helps Young Bilingual Children Thrive](#) (Harvard News)

Recommended resources

- [Engaging ELL Families: A Guide for School Leaders](#) (Colorín Colorado)
- [ELLs in Early Childhood Education: Recruiting Immigrant Families](#) (Colorín Colorado)
- [Increasing PreK Access for the Children of Immigrants](#) (Eye on Early Education)
- [Welcoming Refugee Children into Early Childhood Classrooms](#) (National Association for the Education of Young Children)
- [Voices of Immigrant Parents in Preschool Settings](#) (NAEYC)
- [Early Childhood Resources](#) (Bridging Refugee Youth & Children's Services)
- [The Inner World of the Immigrant Child](#) by Cristina Igoa

Resources from Head Start

- [Communicating Across Language and Culture: How Do I Reach Out to Parents Who Are Immigrants?](#)
- [Families Support Their Children Who Are Dual Language Learners](#)
- [Creating Programs to Partner with Immigrant Parents](#)
- [Gathering and Using Language Information that Families Share](#)
- [Raising Young Children in a New Country: A Handbook for Supporting Early Learning and Healthy Development](#) (with [tips for using the handbook](#))

Research and books

- [Administrators' Roles in Offering Dynamic Early Learning Experiences to Children of Latinx Immigrants](#) (Bank Street College of Education)
- [Rethinking Parent Involvement: Perspectives of Immigrant and Refugee Parents](#) (Bank Street College of Education)
- [Building Bridges Between Home and School for Latinx Families of Preschool Children](#) (Bank Street College of Education)
- [Building Bridges, Not Walls, Between Latinx Immigrant Parents and Schools](#) (Bank Street College of Education)
- Book Recommendation: [Teaching to Strengths: Supporting Students Living with Trauma, Violence, and Chronic Stress](#) by Debbie Zacarian, Lourdes Álvarez-Ortiz and Judie Haynes



Review program enrollment guidelines

Why this matters

The benefits of early childhood education for immigrant children are well-documented (Greenberg, Michie, and Adams, 2018, p. 1). In the majority of early childhood programs nationwide, children can enroll in the program if they (or their parents) are undocumented.

Staff who are enrolling children should not ask families about their immigration status. While programs must follow all legal requirements in their state for maintaining information on each family, when possible, programs are also strongly discouraged from asking about country of origin and social security numbers. If children or family members volunteer the information, **staff should not share it with others.**

Maintaining student privacy and confidentiality

There are a number of student privacy policies that can apply to different kinds of early childhood programs. All staff should be familiar with the policies that apply to their program. If clarification is needed, look for assistance from program administrators, local early childhood agencies, or national early childhood organizations that can provide appropriate information.

Tips for getting started

Program administrators and staff assisting with enrollment should be familiar with:

- program policies related to enrollment
- all types of documents that can be used to verify a child's age (described [in these videos](#) from attorney Roger Rosenthal)
- requirements for establishing local residency
- applicable privacy policies.



Ensure staff are familiar with other policies and issues related to immigrant students

Why this matters

Families and staff members may have questions related to immigration issues; making sure that everyone has accurate and updated information will make it easier to address questions and concerns when they arise. Here are some important topics related to early childhood settings:

“Sensitive locations” guidance for early childhood settings

The federal "sensitive locations" guidelines that apply to schools also apply to early childhood settings such as preschools and day care centers. (See more about [“sensitive locations” guidance](#) and [this brief](#) about how “sensitive locations” guidance impacts early childhood settings from the Center for Law and Social Policy, or CLASP.) There is no indication that this policy will change, although there have been cases of immigration enforcement activity happening near child-care and early childhood centers. Many early childhood settings have also reported drops in attendance and enrollment related to concerns about immigration enforcement. This may partly be due to the fact that many early childhood providers do not know that their settings are considered “sensitive locations” (Ullrich, 2018).

Following in-depth interviews with early childhood providers, researchers from CLASP concluded the following:

Many early childhood providers weren’t aware of the sensitive locations policies or didn’t know their programs were included. Few providers had internal policies for dealing with ICE or CBP agents who try to enter their facilities. They also didn’t know if they were legally obligated to admit immigration agents without a warrant. Consequently, many providers couldn’t assure immigrant families that the center was a safe place. (Ullrich, 2018)

This research speaks to the importance of ensuring that early childhood providers are familiar with the “sensitive locations” guidance. In addition, programs may wish to create a policy that clarifies what should happen if an immigration agent comes to the center.

Note: The “sensitive locations” guidance is just that – guidance – and not codified into law; it could change at any point. The guidance also has certain limitations, which is why program administrators should become familiar with other related local/state laws and should stay current with updates on this topic.



Making a plan to care for children whose caregivers are unavailable

In June 2018, a [large immigration raid](#) left dozens of young children stranded at day care centers and preschools in Ohio as caretakers scrambled to find relatives and emergency contacts. This example underscores the importance of having updated emergency contact information and a plan in place to care for children whose caregivers/parents/guardians are detained during the day.

Putting protocols in place for these situation improves the chance of finding an appropriate caregiver for children. See suggestions and resources in the following sections of this guide:

- [The Importance of Emergency Contact Information](#)
- [Make a Plan to Care for Children Stranded Following Detention](#)

Answering questions about proposed “public charge” rule changes

The White House announced a proposed rule change in September 2018 that would make it harder for legal immigrants to get green cards if they receive certain kinds of public assistance. Head Start programs, services provided under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, and enrollment in free- and reduced-price meal programs **are not included** in this rule change.

However, other benefits have been added to the list that would likely impact many immigrant families if the rules go into effect, and some families have already started withdrawing from benefits programs. Learn more from our section on the “[public charge](#)” issue.

Answering questions about immigration and legal resources

There are a number of steps early childhood programs can take to address families’ questions and concerns about immigration issues, as well as to connect families to legal support. Many of the strategies detailed throughout this guide can be applied in early childhood settings as well:

- [Understanding How Immigration Issues Impact Students](#)
- [Addressing Immigrant Families' Questions and Concerns](#)
- [Addressing Questions About Immigration Enforcement](#)
- [How to Connect Immigrant Families with Legal Support and Advice](#)

Other issues that might impact young children

Other immigration issues that may affect children include changes to Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals ([DACA](#)); Temporary Protected Status ([TPS](#)); and [travel restrictions](#) that impact family reunification.



Tips for getting started

- Identify the policies that apply to your setting. If you have questions, look for assistance from program administrators, local early childhood agencies, or national early childhood organizations that can provide appropriate information.
- Identify the information that staff should have and the best ways to provide the training and professional development they need.
- Identify the information families should have and the most appropriate ways to share that information, such as one-on-one conversations or [parent outreach events](#).
- Determine whether any [existing policies, procedures, or forms](#) need to be updated.
- Determine whether any new policies should be created to address these issues; if so, look for sound guidance on how to do so.



Look for ways to offer social-emotional support to children throughout the day

Why this matters

Young children in immigrant families may be experiencing a number of situations that are causing stress (see examples in our section on [how immigration issues can affect children](#) as well as the following section on anxiety and trauma). This can impact their healthy development, social interactions, and motivation and also result in their asking adults questions about these issues.

In addition, the situations children's families are facing may have an impact on whether their [basic needs are being met](#). This is why it is so important for early childhood programs to look at the whole picture when identifying and addressing young children's needs.

Note: See our related information on:

- the various causes of [changes in behavior](#), particularly as they relate to special education referrals
- [sibling caregivers](#)
- [strategies for providing social-emotional support for students](#).

Tips for getting started

Early childhood environments can provide a nurturing, safe environment for children by:

- maintaining their familiar routines
- designating a primary caregiver/support person for an anxious child
- doing age-appropriate activities where kids can share feelings, such as drawing, [circle time](#), or one-on-one time
- [reading stories](#) about related topics
- providing staff with training on topics related to [trauma and anxiety](#)
- providing parents with tips and training on how to address anxiety and answer children's questions.



Recommended resources

Sesame Street

You may find some helpful ideas in the following toolkits from *Sesame Street*. While there is no "immigration toolkit," these resources include related topics. All are available in Spanish, and the *Sesame Street in Communities* toolkit is available in multiple languages.

- [Traumatic Experiences](#)
- [Helping Kids Grieve](#)
- [Coping with Incarceration](#)
- [Sesame Street in Communities: Care, Cope, Connect](#)

You may also get some helpful ideas from these [bilingual activities and videos on self-expression from Sesame Street](#).

How to calm down

These articles provide some activities to calm down, such as the following:

- [Fred Rogers: Parent Resources on Fear](#) (Fred Rogers Company)
- [8 Fun Breathing Exercises for Kids](#) (Childhood 101)
- [How to Teach Your Child Calm Breathing](#) (Anxiety Canada)
- [Calming Anxiety in Children](#) (Coping Skills for Kids)

Recommended videos

- [When Immigration Status Impacts Younger Children](#) (Lori Dodson, ESOL Teacher – Maryland)



Train staff and families on the impacts of trauma and anxiety on young children

Why this matters

In 2018, researchers at CLASP published a study on how immigration policy affects young children (Cervantes, Ullrich, & Matthews, 2018). Researchers report that early childhood educators and providers around the country have recently observed more stress, anxiety, and behavioral difficulties in the immigrant children they serve, such as:

- “aggression, hyperactivity, and separation anxiety” (p. 9)
- more bathroom accidents from kids who were toilet-trained
- “symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder, such as frequent crying, trouble sleeping, and increased anxiety” (p. 11).

This correlates with findings by the [American Psychological Association](#) (APA) that “young children whose undocumented parents have been detained or even deported...experience in the short term, frequent crying, withdrawal, disrupted eating and sleeping patterns, anger, anxiety and depression.” See more [age-specific effects of trauma](#) from the National Child Trauma Stress Network.

According to the report, educators and families have also reported:

- decreased engagement and participation in the classroom, fear of police, and actions to protect relatives from police
- children as young as three (both immigrant and U.S. citizen children) expressing fears about being separated from a parent.

These changes can impact children's healthy development, both physically and emotionally, their confidence and self-esteem, and their identity. The APA notes that, “Over time, these (stresses) can lead to more severe issues like post-traumatic stress disorder, poor identity formation, difficulty forming relationships, feelings of persecution, distrust of institutions and authority figures, acting out behaviors and difficulties at school.” (See the [APA’s Report of the Presidential Task Force on Immigration](#) for more information.)

Parents want advice on how to address these issues as well. CLASP researchers noted that multiple educators reported that immigrant families had asked for support or training about



social-emotional health, such as tips for dealing with anxiety. (See more about this topic in our section related to [changes in behavior](#).)

What explains these trends?

Children may be feeling anxiety or fear about:

- losing a parent (such as the [case of Sophie Cruz](#), a five-year-old who slipped past security during Pope Francis' 2015 visit to Washington, D.C. to give him a letter expressing her fear that that her parents would be deported)
- [an unexpected or lengthy separation](#)
- having to move to a new country if a parent is deported
- losing a friend
- family members' stress, anxiety, depression, or intimate partner abuse.

Children may also have experienced a traumatic event, such as:

- witnessing a loved one's arrest
- being separated from a parent during interrogation
- a forced and/or lengthy separation from family
- detention in an immigration detention center
- coming into contact with immigration enforcement officers
- an arduous journey to this country
- violence or hardship in a home country.

Tips for getting started

- In order to better equip providers and parents to address these challenges, offer training about topics that are most relevant to the setting. Topics could include the impact of trauma on young children's healthy development and behavior or tools and words for different situations, such as "That sounds really hard. You can talk to me anytime you need me."
- If needed, request additional training, information, or support from a program office, community partner, or expert in mental health for young children, ideally someone who is familiar with culturally responsive practices. It is critical for staff and parents to have accurate information on this topic.



Recommended resources

- [How the Toxic Stress of Family Separation Can Harm a Child](#) (PBS NewsHour)
- [Tutorial: Recognizing and Addressing Trauma in Infants, Young Children, and Their Families](#) (Georgetown University Center for Child and Human Development)



The impact of trauma on a preschool child

Kristina Robertson shares the following anecdote from a preschool setting.

We learned about a preschool child who was acting out – biting, grabbing, hitting – and the mother was depressed and withdrawn, so it was very difficult to address the child’s needs proactively with parenting suggestions. It was apparent that the mother was overwhelmed. This increased her isolation and lessened her support.

The other parents began to get angry and wanted the program to “kick out” the student. Instead, the preschool director worked very carefully to place a paraprofessional with the child to play positively, model, and act as a mediator to help the child learn the skills she needed to function better. This also provided the child with a consistent, supportive adult; she wasn’t so thrown by transitions in the classroom. The child is doing very well now – although the mom still struggles with depression.

These kinds of situations can be challenging because trauma contributes to kids acting in unsafe ways – just at a time when they need the security of that setting most.



Addressing Students' Basic Needs

We want to connect families with the resources they need to maintain their home and stability in the community.

– [Kristina Robertson](#), English Learner Program Administrator, Roseville Public Schools, Minnesota

Key Takeaways

- There is a constellation of factors that can impact an immigrant family's economic situation, along with housing or caregiving arrangements that may also be in flux.
- Staying attuned to clues can help educators identify challenges students are facing.
- Community organizations and community schools can play a valuable role in helping to meet the basic needs of immigrant students and families.

See this information online

Addressing Students' Basic Needs

- View online: <http://www.colorincolorado.org/immigration/guide/basic>
- Download PDF: <http://www.colorincolorado.org/immigration/guide/basic-pdf>

Complete guide: <http://www.colorincolorado.org/immigration/guide>

Excerpted from *How to Support Immigrant Students and Families*.

Keep in mind that immigrant families' economic situations may change

Why this matters

The ways in which immigration issues relate to families' economic situations are complex, especially when those situations or immigration policies change. Sometimes the changes are immediately visible; other times they are hidden, in part due to families' reluctance to draw attention to their situation.

Understanding how these issues are related is a good first step to addressing challenges that may impact students' abilities to be successful in the classroom. For example, students may not have some of their basic needs met. For example, breadwinners' employment situations may change because:

- they lose employment following an immigration raid, even if they were not detained (Gándara and Ee, 2018a)
- they choose to leave their jobs to avoid workplace immigration raids
- they experience extended, unexpected separations
- they are [detained](#) or deported
- they are limited in transportation options, especially if undocumented
- families are moving often, making it difficult to maintain employment.

In addition:

- Immigrant families may decide not to register for benefits regarding food, housing, medical care, and disaster relief, foregoing benefits they previously used.
- Children may be cared for by another adult, relative or older sibling.
- Immigration proceedings can be costly.
- Landlords and employers may exploit undocumented families.
- Families may be [scaling back on their expenses](#).
- Families may be uncertain about how future policy changes will impact their situation.
- Families may be concerned about proposed rule changes related to legal immigrants using public benefits (“public charge” rules) and deciding to turn those benefits down. See more on the “public charge” issue [in our related resource section](#).



Examples from the field

[ELL administrator](#) Kristina Robertson writes,

We are now seeing the financial effects families have experienced – for example, if a father has been the main wage earner and he is detained, the family is missing significant income. This impacts their ability to pay the rent or mortgage, buy food and in some cases impacts transportation if the remaining parent doesn't have a driver's license.

In addition, if the detained person is released on bail, our immigrant lawyer consultant said they would likely have to pay thousands of dollars for the bond. If a person is detained for many weeks, they are likely to lose their job and the family may lose their housing and have to start in a new community.

[Service providers who work with immigrant families](#) are also beginning to see the impact of economic uncertainty on the families they serve. Lariza Dugan-Cuadra, Executive Director, of the Central America Resource Center (CARECEN), notes, “Our attorneys are doing quasi-social work. Unable to work and pay rent, many of those awaiting their immigration proceedings have become homeless or unstable in the process.” News outlets [NBC 4-New York](#) and [KCUR Public Radio](#) have reported that many families are foregoing benefits such as food stamps through the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), and preliminary research presented in late 2018 shows that the number of immigrant families enrolled in SNAP [dropped 10% in 2018](#). While there may be a variety of reasons for the change, researchers cite families' concern about immigration status as likely to be a key factor (see more on this topic in the next section about the “[public charge](#)” rule).

Kristina also confirms that she is seeing this on the ground:

We've also had a huge drop in our government food benefits program locally even for legally born children...currently our food pantries are strained to the max as families try to make use of local support...This also means they are less likely to take advantage of other school programs that their children may qualify for such as school lunch. (Personal communication, November 21, 2018)

There are also reports that some immigrant families are foregoing [medical immunizations](#), while researchers with the Center for Law and Social Policy (CLASP) report that families of young children are skipping [medical appointments](#), prenatal care, therapeutic services, hospital visits, and registration for programs like WIC for fear of immigration enforcement (Cervantes, Ullrich, & Matthews, 2018, p. 15).



In addition, as a general rule, undocumented families have less access to health care and preventive services. (You can read more about that topic in this [related report](#) from the Migration Policy Institute.) Some localities are working to help address these gaps; for example, [The Washington Post](#) reports that in April, “the school board in Las Cruces, N.M., passed a resolution promising to provide free and reduced cost meals, rides, health care, education and extracurricular services to undocumented immigrant students.”

One teacher who filled out our survey writes,

Eye-opening for me was when I took a survey of the number of students who work after school at full time jobs; often second shift late into the night. Helping to pay rent becomes a priority. Often, school falls by the wayside...It was surprising for me to find that 10 out of 10 ELLs in one particular class all worked in their home countries in agriculture as child laborers. Younger children went to school in the mornings and worked in the fields in the afternoons. Older children worked in the mornings and went to school in the afternoons.

Proposed changes to the “public charge” rule

In September 2018, the White House announced a proposed rule change that would make it harder for legal immigrants to get green cards if they receive certain kinds of public assistance. When considering if a person is admissible to the United States as an immigrant or is eligible for legal permanent residence status, the government considers whether a person is likely to become a “public charge,” meaning a person is likely to become dependent on public assistance.

Benefits previously considered in this determination included cash assistance/welfare (such as Temporary Assistance for Needy Families or Supplemental Security Income) or federal assistance in paying for long-term care.

Under the proposed rule change, the list of benefits would be expanded to include non-emergency Medicaid (with some exceptions for services through school and disability programs); food stamps through the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP); enrollment in Medicare Part D program subsidies for prescription drugs; and Section 8 rental and housing vouchers. It has not been decided whether the Children’s Health Insurance Program, or CHIP, would be counted as a “public charge” program.

Some categories of immigrants would be excluded from the rule. Green card applicants would be judged on whether they themselves use the benefits, and not on whether other family



members or dependents such as children use the benefits; nevertheless, the impact of immigrants not using these programs is likely to extend all members of a household.

Many immigrants have already started to [withdraw from benefit programs](#), even though the rule has not yet taken effect. In addition, as Kristina noted above, schools are receiving questions about enrolling free- and reduced-price lunch programs and some families have begun to withdraw from these programs. **Free- and reduced-price meal programs are not included in this rule, and some districts are taking steps to communicate that information to families.** ([Education Week reports](#) that Head Start, the federal school lunch program, and services provided under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act are also not included in the proposed changes.)

If the rule change takes effect, it will likely start in 2019. See more about the recent "public charge" rule proposal from [Education Week](#), [ABC News](#), and [The New York Times](#). Analysis of possible impacts has been compiled by [Grantmakers Concerned with Immigrants and Refugees](#) and the [Kaiser Family Foundation](#), which estimates millions of children in immigrant families could be impacted by the rule, most of whom are U.S. citizens, not including immigrants who withdraw from programs because of confusion about the new rules.

Note: If you'd like to discuss this topic with students, take a look at this [lesson plan about the public charge rule change](#) from Immigrants Rising.



Proposed changes in public housing regulations

In Spring 2019, the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development proposed tightening restrictions in order to prevent mixed-status immigrant families from accessing federal housing subsidies. The proposal is currently under review. **According to *The Washington Post*,**

"Current rules already bar undocumented immigrants from receiving federal housing subsidies but allow families of mixed-immigration status to live in public housing as long as one person is eligible. The eligible person could be a child born in the U.S. In addition to citizens, lawful permanent residents, refugees and asylum seekers are also eligible for housing assistance."

Tips for getting started

- Look for clues about what is happening in students' lives rather than asking questions.
- Take time to listen to students when they wish to talk to you.
- Keep an eye out for economic distress among your students.
- While it is important not to make assumptions or draw unwanted attention to families, consider having some discreet conversations if you notice an issue.
- Talk with counselors, social workers, or administrators about how to best support families struggling to make ends meet.
- Keep in mind that immigration status may impact ability to secure basic services or benefits, such as:
 - Food
 - Housing and utilities (such as heating assistance in the winter)
 - Social-emotional/mental health services
 - Medical and dental care
 - Transportation
- Think about broader solutions if there seems to be wide-scale issues impacting multiple families, including [partnering with organizations](#) that can help address basic needs.
- Look for ways to increase access to these services broadly. One respondent to our survey wrote, "All of our immigrant families are given access to the meals program, community help, and free- and reduced-lunch when they enroll at our schools."
- Keep in mind that students may be afraid to share what is happening for fear of being separated from family members or siblings.
- Keep in mind that immigrant and newcomer families may also have specific needs related to natural disasters. Learn more in [Why Immigrant Families May Have Unique Needs Before, During, and After Natural Disasters](#).

Recommended resources

- [Social and Emotional Needs of Middle/High School ELLs](#) (Colorín Colorado)
- [Health-Related Resources for Immigrant and Refugee Families](#) (Grantmakers Concerned with Immigrants and Refugees)
- [Health-Related Resources: Supporting Immigrant Families](#) (Californians Together)



Recommended videos

- [Community Schools and ELLs](#) featuring Wolfe Street Academy in Baltimore, Maryland
- [Video Playlist: Educators reflect on Maslow's Hierarchy of Need](#)
- [Video Playlist: Housing insecurity for immigrant families](#)



Community schools: A strategy for success

Districts across the country — including rural, suburban, and urban districts — are embracing the community school strategy as a way of addressing students' needs in order to help them succeed. Community schools serve as the hub for the community and can offer a wide range of services and activities (ideally determined with students and families) to support student success. You can learn more about how community schools can support ELLs and immigrant students from the following:

- [Community Schools and ELLs project](#) featuring Wolfe Street Academy in Baltimore, Maryland
- [Community Schools: A Strategy for Success](#) (Colorín Colorado)





Sibling responsibilities

Older siblings may be taking care of younger siblings after parents are detained. This kind of situation has been documented by teachers whose students were [being cared for by an older sibling](#), had major caretaking and breadwinning responsibilities, or were being prepared to take care of younger siblings in the event of detention.

In talking with educators about sibling responsibilities, UCLA researchers studying the [impact of immigration enforcement on schools](#) noted, “Many students are legal residents, because they were born here, but their parents are still on immigrant status, so there have been several students having to get jobs or stay at home and take care of younger siblings. This has led to an increase in concern about keeping up with grades” (Gándara and Ee, 2018a, p. 16). The team also shares the following quote:

[My student] told me that her mom is teaching her how to make food and feed her baby sister in case the mom is taken away (p. 12).

Researchers from the Center for Law and Social Policy studying the impacts of immigration enforcement on young children (2018) share this quote:

“One little boy was writing down what he knew how to cook—peanut butter sandwiches and cheese sandwiches — in order to reassure his frightened five-year-old sister that they would be okay if their parents were deported” (p. 8).

In addition, older children in families who are separated due to immigration or other circumstances may have significant responsibilities for younger siblings. For example, teacher Diana Alqadhi notes that many of her middle school students from Yemen in Dearborn, Michigan have come to America without their mothers, who are waiting for visas. This situation results in significant caregiving responsibilities for the students.



Ensure that students experiencing homelessness have appropriate support

Why this matters

When immigrant students experience homelessness, they have additional educational rights under the federal McKinney-Vento Act (KIND and NAEHCY, 2010). Homeless students may not have documents required for school enrollment (U.S. Department of Education, 2015), yet they are still guaranteed a right to a free public education. See more on this issue from the following:

- [*Immigration and Schools: Supporting Success for Undocumented and Unaccompanied Homeless Youth*](#) (KIND & NAEHCY, 2010)
- [*Educational Rights of Immigrant Students*](#) (AFT tip sheet)

The authors of the above report from KIND and NAEHCY explain that reasons for homelessness in this population include:

- coming to the country unaccompanied
- separation from family as a result of parental deportation
- separation from family as a result of limited space/rules at homeless shelters
- separation from family as a result of abuse, neglect, abandonment, or family discord
- being forced to leave home as a punishment for pregnancy or revealing that they are gay, lesbian, bisexual, or transgender.

The researchers also note that undocumented homeless youth face unique challenges because they:

- cannot work legally
- are not eligible for most health insurance, health care services, and financial aid.

Students may also be afraid to reveal that they are homeless, as in the story Anne Marie Foerster Luu shares in the recommended video below, “A Student Who Was Homeless.” It is also important to note that some immigrant students may be:

- sharing housing with other families
- moving often due to immigration concerns
- having trouble establishing housing when they arrive in a new community.



Tips for getting started

We recommend the [report](#) by KIND and NAEHCY for additional legal guidelines related to this population, as well as the [tips](#) and strategies included in the guide for educators and immigration attorneys.

Recommended resources

For additional information on this issue, see the following:

- This [related report](#) on homeless newcomer youth in Toronto (Center for Addiction and Mental Health, Canada)
- [Far from Family, Alone, Homeless and Still Just 18](#) (*The New York Times*)

Recommended videos

- [Student Story: A Student Who Was Homeless](#) (Anne Marie Foerster Luu, ESOL Teacher – Maryland)
- [Challenges Families Face: Affordable Housing](#) (Nathaniel Provencio – Principal, Minnieville Elementary School, VA)
- [Video Playlist: Housing insecurity for immigrant families](#)



How Immigration Issues Impact Students

We held an optional district professional development session called "Developing Resources and Supports for Immigrant Students"...I think it was an eye-opener for many who attended. The district's Coordinator of Social Workers attended and relayed that immigration trauma and stress would be put on her agenda for the next district mental health meeting.

– [Sarah Fladwood-Handley](#), District Elementary ELL Coach, Topeka Public Schools, Kansas

Key Takeaways

- Educators, staff, and administrators may not know how much issues around immigration are affecting students or colleagues. Learning more about these issues can enhance staff members' ability to offer instruction and support to students. Schools can work with colleagues, families, and community partners to identify priority topics.
- There are a number of steps that schools can take to create a respectful setting for professional development about topics related to immigration.



See this information online

How Immigration Issues Impact Students

- View online: <http://www.colorincolorado.org/immigration/guide/issues>
- Download PDF: <http://www.colorincolorado.org/immigration/guide/issues-pdf>

Complete guide: <http://www.colorincolorado.org/immigration/guide>

Excerpted from *How to Support Immigrant Students and Families*.

Overview

Helping staff understand students' experiences can have a powerful impact on how they interact with immigrant students and families. **A number of educators have noted that their colleagues, including administrators, were surprised to learn how much these issues were affecting their students.** The following sections provide some background information on immigration issues that may affect students or staff at your school/program, as well as tips for offering professional development on these issues.

In addition, it is important to keep in mind that immigration issues can affect staff as well. Learn more [about this topic in our section on social-emotional support for staff](#).

For more information on recent immigration policy changes and immigration impacts on students, see our strategies for [keeping up with current events and policy changes](#), as well as the following:

- [Key Facts About U.S. Immigration Policies and Proposed Changes](#) (Pew Research Center, 2018)
- [Immigrant Youth: Some Implications for Schools](#) (UCLA)



Separation and Reunification

Immigrant students may have complex situations in their families when it comes to separation, reunification, and the impacts of changing immigration policies. Examples include the following:

- Unaccompanied minors who come to the U.S. to reunite with parents may not have seen those parents for many years and may have new siblings in the U.S. that they are meeting for the first time.
- Other students may be experiencing separation from family members due to detention or deportation, or due to travel restrictions that have lengthened the separation. In some of these cases, students may have significant [care-taking responsibilities](#) for younger siblings.

At the same time, students may also be concerned about the safety of family members who have stayed in unstable, violent, or war-torn regions of their home countries.

Here are examples of real students navigating those issues, including some students featured by *The Washington Post*:

- [Alex](#), a young man being cared for by his 18-year-old sister after his mother was detained in an immigration raid in Ohio
- [Jafet and Jeshua](#), teenagers who traveled from Guatemala to live with their mother after being separated from her for 13 years, leaving a younger sister behind in Guatemala
- [Steve](#), a 10-year-old living with his father in Northern Virginia after his mother was deported to El Salvador, where she now lives with his younger sister
- [Isaac](#), an 11-year-old from Honduras who was separated from his mother at the border in 2017 and now lives in Illinois with an uncle following her deportation
- Hana, a middle school student from Yemen living in Michigan with her father and younger brothers whose mother is currently awaiting her visa
- Hussein (sixth grade) and Yussef (second grade), brothers who came from Yemen without their mother before she joined them six months later



Impacts of Immigration Enforcement

Why this matters

There are 4.5 million children with at least one parent who is undocumented; 1.6 million of those children are under the age of five, and a high percentage of those children were born in the U.S. and are therefore U.S. citizens. In California alone, nearly two million children live in “mixed-status” households, and one in eight students have at least one undocumented parent. Researchers at UCLA estimate that immigration enforcement policies have the potential to impact more than 5 million children nationwide (Gándara & Ee, 2018a, p. 3).

Immigration enforcement activity can result in a variety of outcomes, including:

- detention in U.S. facility
- deportation to another country
- large raids
- arrests of other undocumented people nearby
- extended separations between family members.

It is also worth noting that thousands of people who are deported, usually men, often try to return to the U.S. each year. This journey can prove fatal, as in the case of [Adrián Luna](#), a 45-year-old father of five who had lived in Idaho for 27 years and died deep in the desert in an attempt to come back to the U.S. following his deportation.

In addition, some undocumented sponsors of young people who have crossed the border are reluctant to come forward to take children home because of [a new memorandum of understanding](#) in which the Department of Health and Human Services is sharing sponsor information with immigration officials. This policy has led to the arrest of numerous undocumented sponsors. This is one factor impacting the increased amount of time children are in federal custody, leading to higher numbers of children in shelters [and an expansion of “tent cities”](#) where immigrant youth are housed.

All of these outcomes have long-lasting emotional, economic, and practical effects on students and families. The UCLA research team shares the following anecdotes from teachers, the first in Maryland and the second in California:

We have one student who had attempted to slit her wrists because her family has been separated and she wants to be with her mother. She literally didn't want to live without her mother (2018a, pp. 1-2).



I had one student who came back the day after prom and would not eat or talk to anyone. I finally found out from one of her friends that she came home from prom to find her mom deported and never had the chance to say good-bye or anything. She was suffering but did not know what to do (2018a, p. 3).

Some of the documented impacts of separation, detention, and deportation include:

Social-emotional impacts

- increased fear, anxiety, and depression
- lack of motivation and interest in school
- uncertainty about the future in terms of where the student will live and go to school
- post-traumatic stress

Economic uncertainty

- loss of income and instability
- an increase in transiency as families relocate, go into hiding, or move to join loved ones
- reduced access (voluntary or involuntary) to social services and benefits

Care-taking arrangements

- possible transfer of the child into [foster care](#)
- an increase in responsibilities (or preparation for that increase) for older siblings as [caretakers, breadwinners, and coordinators](#) of logistics or family affairs.

School/community impact

The UCLA team echoed what other educators have reported, which is that immigration enforcement can affect non-immigrant students as well, including increased concern, anxiety, grief, and anger over the loss of a friend who may disappear. One teacher notes,

I have already had several students who have parents who have been deported to Mexico and India. One of our students skipped school for 3 weeks when a teacher brought up the topic of immigration in class. Last year I had students missing class to attend their parent's immigration court hearings. All of this is wearing on my students and is causing anxiety and depression. (p. 14)

You can read more about the broader school and community impacts of this enforcement in [our article](#) about massive immigration raids in Postville, Iowa, as well as information about the impacts on young children in particular in our section on [early childhood education](#).



Recommended resources

Research and Reports

- [Position Paper on Undocumented Students: The Impact of Immigration Enforcement on Children and Youth](#) (National Association of Secondary School Principals)
- [Facing Our Future: Children in the Aftermath of Immigration Enforcement](#) (Urban Institute)
- [Trauma and psychological distress in Latino citizen children following parental detention and deportation](#) (APA PsychNet)
- [Treating Toxic Stress in Immigrant Children](#) (National Association of School Psychologists)

From Colorín Colorado

- [Lessons from Postville: How an Immigration Raid Changed a Small Town and Its Schools](#) (Colorín Colorado)
- [Finding Where the Hope Is: Supporting Immigrant Students as a School Psychologist](#) (Dr. Lisa Peterson, Ph.D., LSSP, NCSP, School Psychologist – Dallas School District, Texas)

The Washington Post

- [After immigration raid, immigrant families are separated in the American heartland](#) (*The Washington Post*)
- [Deported, divided: How a mom's return to El Salvador tore her family in two](#) (*The Washington Post*)
- [Diane Guerrero is a successful TV star. But she's still grappling with her parents' deportation](#) (*The Washington Post*)
- [Meet Sophie Cruz, 5-year-old who gave the Pope a letter because she doesn't want her parents deported](#) (*The Washington Post*)

NPR

- [When Immigration Detention Means Losing Your Kids](#) (NPR)
- [With a Deported Father, California Teen Lives Life Between Borders](#) (NPR)



Other sources

- [Why a Texas school district is helping immigrants facing deportation](#) (*The Hechinger Report*)
- [Losing Gloria: A Family Faces Impossible Choices After a Mother's Deportation](#) (*California Sunday*)
- [Second Grader to Michelle Obama: "My mom doesn't have any papers"](#) (CBS News)

Recommended videos

- [Diane Guerrero recalls the day of her parents' deportation](#) (The Washington Post)



Student concerns and fears

School psychologist [Dr. Lisa Peterson](#) writes,

Most of my work as it relates to immigrant students is with undocumented students who have a relative, usually a father, facing deportation. In younger children, it is usually sadness or fear, depending on how much exposure they have to the process. As they get older, the emotions are more complex. There is definitely fear, but it is mixed with anger...at anyone who thinks that because they are undocumented that they are lazy, delinquent, or otherwise inferior.

Adolescents also tend to worry about how they will have to support their family.

Another educator in our survey reported that, "some of our students are suffering from PTSD due to parents being deported and their being left behind."



Being Undocumented

Why this matters

Many educators may not know that some of their students are undocumented. In fact, teacher Lori Dodson notes that some students themselves do not know they are undocumented – even if they know their parents are – until they apply for a driver’s license, a first job, or college. At the same time, many students are regularly navigating complex decisions about what to share or not share about their personal background, experience, and immigration. (See more in our section on [immigrant students’ choices to remain silent](#) about their experiences.)

How does being undocumented impact daily life?

Students who are undocumented or who have family members who are undocumented may experience the following:

- fear of filling out paperwork for benefits and school services, like special education, free- and reduced-price lunch, and financial aid (Gándara and Ee, 2018a)
- missing out on field trips and extra-curricular activities due to the paperwork or fear of being out in the community after school hours (Gándara and Ee, 2018a)
- restricted access to employment, medical insurance, and other benefits
- questions of transportation, such as [state driver’s licenses policies](#) and the inability to fly without identification
- fear of entering public buildings that require IDs, such as military bases.

Note: State-issued ID cards for undocumented immigrants are not protection [against immigration enforcement](#).

Other considerations and impacts include:

- limited access to financial aid for higher education (see more in our section on [undocumented students’ access to college below](#))
- possible decisions to relocate
- “worst-case scenarios” for children of different ages or in mixed-status families
 - challenges for undocumented youth [who are homeless](#)
 - challenges for [undocumented youth who identify as gay, lesbian, bisexual or transgender](#) (who may also be seeking asylum due to persecution in their country)
 - implications of [school disciplinary actions](#).



Diverse backgrounds among undocumented immigrants

The undocumented population of the U.S. includes immigrants from around the world. Many of those individuals are advocating for more visibility in conversations about immigration. Here are some resources that highlight that diversity:

- [Profile of the Unauthorized Population: United States](#) (Migration Policy Institute)
- [Unauthorized Immigrant Population Trends for States, Birth Countries and Regions](#) (Pew Research Center)
- [Key Facts About Black Immigrants in the U.S.](#) (Pew Research Center)
- [For Black Immigrants Here Illegally, A Battle Against Both Fear and Historic Discrimination](#) (*Chicago Tribune*)
- ['You Feel Invisible': How America's Fastest-Growing Immigrant Group Is Being Left Out of the DACA Conversation](#) (*The Washington Post*)
- [Raise Our Story: Undocumented Asian Youth Seek Higher Profile in Immigration Debate](#) (*Education Week*)

Researchers studying undocumented students

For research on undocumented students, see the list of [scholars in the introduction](#).

Recommended resources

- [Undocumented: Stories of Young Immigrants](#) (Colorín Colorado young adult booklist)
- [Educator Guide: Supporting Undocumented Students & Their Families](#) (Informed Immigrants)
- [Teachers as Allies: Transformative Practices for Teaching DREAMers and Undocumented Students](#) (Teachers College Press)
- [My Undocumented Life: Resources for Undocumented Immigrants and Students](#)
- [Undocumented Students in California](#) (The Education Trust-West)
- [Supporting Undocumented Students](#) (Harvard Graduate School of Education)
- [Why LGBTQ 'Dreamers' Are Particularly Vulnerable as DACA Winds Down](#) (*PBS NewsHour*)
- [Immigrant and Refugee Children: A Guide for Educators and School Support Staff](#) (American Federation of Teachers)
- [Position Paper on Undocumented Students: The Rights of Undocumented Students](#) (National Association of Secondary School Principals)



Recommended videos

- [Student Story: When Students Share Immigration Concerns from Home](#) (Anne Marie Foerster Luu, ESOL Teacher – Maryland)
- [Publishing Teachers as Allies](#) featuring co-editors Anne Marie Foerster Luu and Lori Dodson
- [The Shifting Conversation Around Citizenship](#) (Julissa Arce)



College resources for undocumented students

Many states offer undocumented students [in-state tuition](#), and there are also a number of scholarships available regardless of immigration status or specifically for DREAMers. Schools can help undocumented students navigate the college application process and apply for scholarships that do not take immigration status into account.

See the following resources to learn more, keeping in mind that some of the resources have not been updated to reflect more recent changes in state or federal immigration policy:

- [Guide: Supporting Undocumented Youth](#) (U.S. Department of Education)
- [Resources for Undocumented Students](#) (The California State University)
- [Undocumented Latino Students and the DREAM of Pursuing College](#) (Colorín Colorado)
- [Higher Education Access for Undocumented Students: Recommendations for Counseling Professionals](#) by Dr. William Perez
- [Expert Advice and Resources for Undocumented College Students](#) (Affordable Colleges Online)
- [Post-Secondary Preparation and Support for Immigrant Students](#) (Californians Together)
- [Position Paper on Undocumented Students: The Rights of Undocumented Students](#) (National Association of Secondary School Principals)
- [College Access and Paying for College for Undocumented Students](#) (Immigrants Rising)
- [Access to Higher Education and Campus Safety for Immigrant Students](#) (Informed Immigrants)
- [Scholarships Open to Undocumented Students](#) (Informed Immigrants)



What is DACA?

Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) is a policy enacted during the Obama Administration through executive action in 2012 focused on undocumented youth who have lived in the U.S. since childhood, often referred to as "DREAMers." The DREAMer population is a diverse group representing countries around the world.

[DREAM Act legislation](#) (short for Development, Relief and Education for Alien Minors Act) has been introduced multiple times in Congress but has not yet passed.

This [summary from NPR](#) provides a helpful overview:

DACA is the acronym for Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals, a program created in 2012 by the Obama administration allowing young people brought to this country illegally by their parents to get a temporary reprieve from deportation and to receive permission to work, study, and obtain driver's licenses.

DACA applicants had to be younger than 31 years old when the program began. They also had to prove that they had lived in the United States continuously since June 15, 2007, and that they had arrived in the U.S. before the age of 16.

Those signing up for DACA must show that they have clean criminal records. They have to be enrolled in high school or college, or serve in the military. Their status is renewable every two years.

As of this writing, court cases related to DACA are proceeding, DACA still stands and recipients can continue to renew. However, new applications are not currently being accepted.

Why this matters

Many educators may not understand how DACA works and how changes in the policy can impact families or schools. Researchers at UCLA studying the [impact of immigration enforcement on schools](#) found that “many educators appeared to be confused about” DACA – what it is, who qualifies, and what the current status of the program is (p. 22). Changes in DACA would impact not only the [children of DACA recipients](#) but thousands of teachers in both K-12 and early childhood settings working with DACA work permits. For more information, as well as interviews with teachers who have DACA, see our [related resource](#) section. You can also look for networks online to find out what other educators are sharing and discussing, as well as local colleagues or community members who can speak about its impact on students and families, such as college-level DREAM organizations.



Recommended resources

About DACA / Resources for DREAMers

- [DREAMers and DACA: Information for Schools](#) (Colorín Colorado)
- Infographic: DACA Renewals in [English](#) / [Spanish](#) (Immigrant Legal Resource Center)
- [Deferred Action Portal](#) (Grantmakers Concerned with Immigrants and Refugees)
- [Special Immigrant Populations: DACA](#) (Californians Together)
- [Resources for Undocumented Youth, Educators, and Allies](#) (Immigrants Rising)
- [Teachers as Allies: Transformative Practices for Teaching DREAMers & Undocumented Students](#) (Teachers College Press)
- [DACA Renewal Guide](#) (Informed Immigrants)
- [The Dream 9](#) (Latino USA, via Re-imagining Migration)
- [Teaching about DACA as a current event](#) (Re-imagining Migration)
- [Navigating Difficult Conversations: Talking About DACA and DREAMers](#) (Webinar from Re-imagining Migration and Facing History and Ourselves)

News headlines and blog posts

For DACA news, as well as interviews with DACA teachers, see our Colorín Colorado [resource section](#), as well as the following:

- [Meet Jin Park, the First DACA Recipient Awarded a Rhodes Scholarship](#) (NPR)
- [Why LGBTQ ‘Dreamers’ Are Especially Vulnerable as DACA Winds Down](#) (PBS NewsHour)
- Interview with actor/DACA recipient [Bambadian Bamba](#), who appeared in *Black Panther*
- [Life interrupted](#) by DACA teacher Areli Zarate
- [With DACA in Limbo, Teachers Protected by the Program Gird for the Worst](#) (*The New York Times*)
- [Shattering the Silence: Undocumented Twins Share Their Story](#) (University of Notre Dame)
- [How Immigration Status Has Impacted One Family](#) (NPR, via Re-imagining Migration)

Recommended videos

- [Helping Dreamers Tell Their Stories](#) (Anne Marie Foerster Luu, ESOL Teacher – Maryland)
- DACA Teachers Stories: [American Federation of Teachers](#) and [Dallas, TX School District](#)
- [Documentary: Beyond the Dream](#) (RoadTrip Nation)
- [The shifting conversation around citizenship](#) (TED Talk with Julissa Arce)



What is TPS?

Temporary Protected Status (TPS) is a type of immigration status. The [Council on Foreign Relations \(CFR\) explains](#),

Established by the U.S. Congress in 1990, temporary protected status (TPS) provides legal status to migrants from countries that have suffered natural disasters, protracted unrest, or conflict...It allows migrants to stay in the United States for periods of up to eighteen months, which the U.S. government can renew indefinitely. (Felter & Shendruk, 2018)

If a nation's TPS designation expires, TPS holders, many of whom have lived here for more than two decades, must return to their native country, with few options for staying legally in the U.S.

In late 2017 and early 2018, the White House announced it would end TPS for Sudan, Nicaragua, Haiti, and El Salvador. However, in October 2018, a federal court [temporarily blocked](#) the move, saying that doing so would cause "irreparable harm and great hardship." A full hearing will be held in the future.

Why this matters

CFR reports that, "TPS holders are parents to at least 273,000 children with U.S. citizenship." Ending TPS designation is likely to separate many families who choose not to take their children to countries they feel are unsafe.

Tips for getting started

- Learn more about TPS from the resources below.
- Ask parent liaisons and community organizations if they know whether TPS is an issue of concern for local families. If so, consider connecting families with legal resources so that they can continue to receive updated information and guidance.

Recommended resources

- [Temporary Protected Status: An Overview](#) (American Immigration Council)
- [Teaching and Talking about TPS](#) (Re-imagining Migration)

Recommended videos

- [Video: What is Temporary Protected Status?](#) (CNN)



Ideas for Professional Development

Framing the conversation

One way you may wish to share information about immigration with colleagues is through professional development. Given the polarizing nature of this topic, we recommend that skilled, experienced trainers in this topic lead these conversations. It may be helpful to start a conversation on immigration by:

- Reminding colleagues to show respect for differing opinions (this is especially effective if all staff members are familiar with the same norms for discussion and teamwork, such as the guidelines outlined in the [Norms of Collaboration Toolkit](#))
- Sharing relevant district policies and initiatives related to serving immigrant students
- Sharing the following quotes for discussion or reference:

As we discussed our district support, we recognized that the heart of the matter was keeping students safe and supporting their continued learning. This meant that we needed to measure our actions by how they related to supporting the students' learning and social-emotional well-being. This has been helpful in empowering leaders as they make decisions in response to new situations.

It is important that we respect the different viewpoints of others and not silence those opinions if channeled correctly. However, our school division [district] has clear set of core beliefs that need to be adhered to. Most importantly, our staff must show unwavering respect and acceptance of all children regardless if they are an immigrant or not.

Tips for getting started

If planning professional development on these topics, educators and administrators should think about how to:

- identify the most important topics for your context
- establish your goals for training and how it will allow colleagues to better serve students
- establish a climate of respect and trust
- address myths or misconceptions as needed
- help staff understand immigrant students' rights and staff members' obligations to protect student privacy



- take the information provided and use it to improve students' experiences at the school
- share culturally responsive ways to address these issues
- be responsive to situations as they arise (rather than waiting too long to address them before they become critical)
- connect to existing districtwide programs
- identify [useful types of data](#) to share
- talk about the ways in which immigration issues may [impact staff](#) as well as students.

Discussion questions

These questions may provide some useful entry points into discussion:

- How do you think these experiences might impact students in the classroom and in their social-emotional health?
- What information was new to you, or surprised you?
- What can you do as an educator to support students who have had these experiences?

Recommended resources

- [Professional Development Modules: Support for Immigrant and Refugee Students](#) (Californians Together)
- [Opinion: How teachers can help anxious students by knowing immigration policy](#) (Post written by Kristina Robertson for the *PBS NewsHour* Teachers' Lounge Blog)

Recommended videos

- [The danger of a single story](#): TED Talk from Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie





Culturally responsive training

Developing empathy for English language learners (ELLs)

An additional topic that educators have highlighted in their advocacy for ELLs is professional development on [what it feels like to be an ELL](#). Related topics could include the kinds of strengths ELLs and their families bring to their schools and examples of culturally responsive instruction that would be appropriate for the school population.

In our [Facebook Chat on Advocating for ELLs](#), Diane Staehr Fenner noted that one teacher in Syracuse, NY found a session on what it felt like to be an ELL the most powerful professional development offered during a year of training. Colleagues can get a taste of that experience through [the empathy-building activities excerpted from Diane's book Advocating for English Learners](#), which include a math lesson in German and school registration forms written in Arabic. ESOL specialist Katy Padilla also describes a [professional development activity](#) in which staff were taught a lesson in German by a colleague. See more ideas in our section on [teaching empathy](#).

Culturally responsive training

ELL educators in Dearborn, Michigan, which has a large Arab-American and Muslim population, have been focused on providing [culturally responsiveness training](#) for colleagues about working with diverse families in the district, including a [session on the cultural richness](#) of Arab-American and Muslim children.

See more in our article from Nadra Shami, a Language and Literacy SIOP Trainer in the district's ELL Department: [Getting to Know Our Families' Cultural and Social Assets: The View from Dearborn, Michigan](#).

Recommended videos

- [Video Interview: What It Feels Like to Be an ELL](#), featuring awarding-winning teacher Sean Pang, a former ELL student
- [Professional development activity: A lesson in another language](#) (Katy Padilla, ESOL Specialist – Annandale, Virginia)



Providing Social-Emotional Support for Students

I have seen the teachers and leaders I support be extra compassionate, extra supportive and extra available.

– Educator response to [Colorín Colorado’s survey](#) on support for immigrant families

Key Takeaways

- Issues around immigration may be affecting students’ social-emotional health.
- Non-immigrant students may also have questions or concerns about current events related to immigration.
- There are a number of age-appropriate strategies schools, early childhood programs, and individual teachers can use to help address those challenges in the classroom and beyond.

See this information online

Providing Social-Emotional Support for Students

- View online: <http://www.colorincolorado.org/immigration/guide/student>
- Download PDF: <http://www.colorincolorado.org/immigration/guide/student-pdf>

Complete guide: <http://www.colorincolorado.org/immigration/guide>

Excerpted from *How to Support Immigrant Students and Families*.

Help students maintain their routine

Why this matters

Having a safe and familiar place to go can make a huge difference for students who are experiencing uncertainty, trauma, or stress; a normal routine can offer stability and distraction from worries at home. One respondent to our survey writes, "For kids as young as the ones I teach, keeping the routine going is vital, as well as reassuring them that we love them and want them here in school with us."

Tips for getting started

- Remind staff members of the importance of helping kids maintain their routines.
- Try to avoid extra disruptions to the extent possible.
- Encourage teachers to look at their daily routines and adjust as needed.

Reviewing students' schedules

You may also wish to look at students' schedules and look for ways to reduce the number disruptions and transitions where possible. ELL administrator Kristina Robertson writes,

Think about what kinds of supports are available in the school environment if students have had very little school experience or if they have experienced trauma. These students may benefit from a lot of structure and attention from the same small group of people on a regular basis and a regular schedule.

For elementary students, this may mean reducing the number of transitions and classroom switches throughout the day, which can be overwhelming – this is a particular challenge for ELLs who are behind and being pulled out for multiple kinds of services and support. For secondary students, consider connecting students with adult mentors that can provide a check-in each day, as well as a place to take a break when needed. (Personal communication, November 28, 2018)





The strength of consistency

Principal Mark Gaither of [Wolfe Street Academy](#) (Baltimore, Maryland) writes,

Consider the strength of consistency in stressful, uncertain times. The advice for educators I would say is the same as for many situations where trauma is in play: be at work every day, listen, take the time to connect (even if it is not about the specific fear or stressor but instead about the positives in a kid's life); be aware of indicators of critical stress that might lead to self-harm; educate yourself about how kids respond to stress so that you don't [misunderstand inappropriate behavior](#) as "being bad" but see it for what it is, a response to traumatic stress... That is where letting them (kids, families, etc.) know that you are a consistent member of their world can really help. (Personal communication, February 24, 2017)



Encourage teachers and staff to build relationships with students

Why this matters

Sometimes what students need most is for someone to listen. ELL administrator [Kristina Robertson](#) notes that this is a particularly important role educators can play since many immigrant students are aware of their parents' already high levels of stress and don't wish to worry them further. She writes, "Many immigrant students I've worked with have said, 'I don't want to say anything to my mom because she is already so worried.'" Anyone can play this role for kids, including bus drivers, cafeteria staff, or the school nurse can have an impact by taking a few minutes to check in with a child.

In [our webinar with UCLA researchers](#) about the impact of immigration policy on schools (2018), Dr. Patricia Gándara also encourages teachers to continue to "share with students a deep sense of caring and a real relationship; more than ever, it is important for teachers to know what is going on with their kids."

Tips for getting started

Without singling students out, look for ways to check in and find one-on-one or small group time:

- at lunch
- during group work
- before or after school
- during another activity or class.

In these conversations:

- Be mindful of protecting student privacy.
- Avoid drawing attention to your immigrant students in front of peers.
- Let students know they can talk to you at any time.
- Be as honest as possible and acknowledge the uncertainty of the moment as well as the difficulty of the challenges students are facing.
- Avoid platitudes such as, "I'm sure it will be fine," or "Everything will work out." Instead, try, "That sounds really hard. You can always talk to me when you need to."



- Determine whether students have someone they can talk to in their own language and help make those connections if needed.

Ideas from educators

In our 2017 on how schools are supporting immigrant students, teachers wrote that they are:

- *Allowing students to talk and share their feelings about what they are experiencing.*
- *Offering class time as a space for expressing concerns and sharing thoughts and attempt to have questions answered. They responded well to that opportunity.*

A number of respondents also shared specific steps they had taken to reach out to students by:

- letting students know that teachers could be trusted and would listen to their concerns
- trying to be as honest as possible with students and families, and acknowledge the uncertainty of the moment
- making an effort to check in with students.

See [more information on challenges](#) that immigrant students may be experiencing for important background on this topic, as well as [ideas for supporting young children](#).

Bullying prevention

Read more about [tips for protecting ELLs and immigrant students from bullying](#) in this article.

Recommended videos

- [Student story: When students share immigration concerns from home](#) (Anne Marie Foerster Luu, ESOL Teacher – Maryland)



Using circle time

Connie Phelps, former Community Schools Director at Wolfe Street Academy, talks about the use of circle time, in which all students answer the same question, such as “What kinds of things make you want to come to school?” or “What can we do to help our friends who are having a hard time?” She noted that this kind of activity works best on more complex topics if the students are already used to doing it with more mundane topics.



Provide ideas for age-appropriate ways to express emotions and manage stress

Why this matters

There are lots of other ways that kids can express their emotions beyond conversation. The UCLA team shares the experience of an art teacher from Texas: “(M)any students drew and colored images of their parents and themselves being separated, or about people stalking/hunting their family” (Gándara & Ee, 2018a, p. 9).

Tips for getting started

Giving students strategies to express emotions and manage stress

You may wish to introduce this topic by asking students how they manage difficult topics – they may never have thought about it! Consider sharing the following activities that educators have recommended and giving students opportunities to practice these activities. You may also wish to invite a school counselor to lead a class discussion and share strategies such as:

- Drawing “what this means to me”
- Writing journal entries
- Writing letters to elected officials, as in [this post-election activity](#) from Larry Ferlazzo
- [Creating comic books](#) (See [related video](#) from NPR)
- Brainstorming ways that students do/can help each other from teacher [Rosa Villalpando](#)
- Activities to deal with stress such as breathing exercises, [meditation, the arts, and sports](#)
- Sharing other artistic activities, such as [this musical about immigration](#)
- Providing opportunities for students to share their stories (see our [related article](#))
- Talking with trusted friends or adults
- Writing thoughts about current events on sticky notes posted in a public place

One teacher who responded to our survey wrote,

Having students keep journals can be effective. The journals are used for processing their learning, but at times, utilizing the journal to share their concerns and feelings. The journal can be kept between the student and the teacher or students may elect to share their journals with classmates. Teacher comments and feedback are a very important aspect...This is a safe way for students to express their thoughts and for teachers to identify student needs.



Giving students the words they need to express themselves

Another important tool that can help students, particularly English language learners (ELLs), is to teach them words and phrases that will help express emotions, much in the way a teacher teaches academic language. Some strategies for this include:

- giving students sentence frames and sentence starters that illustrate how to express different feelings, manage interactions in the classroom, and resolve conflict
- providing these on a sheet that students can keep in English and their native languages
- posting them on the wall.

ELL administrator Kristina Robertson writes,

One of our after-school workers said she has many bilingual students (mostly boys) who get into fights across cultures because they just don't have the words to express their frustration or needs, so their anger builds. How can we think about ways to intentionally teach language about feelings and appropriate ways to express emotion? We are so focused on teaching academic language and basic needs of following rules in a classroom that we overlook the need to learn how to express our emotions. This is a terrible feeling for a student who is sad or angry. (Personal communication, November, 29, 2018)

Developing social-emotional skills

Help students develop their social-emotional skills with the following strategies:

- Introduce activities early in the year that give students practice in expressing themselves, both individually and in a group setting.
- Provide students a regular opportunity to share their thoughts, concerns, and questions.
- Look for opportunities to include social-emotional learning activities or themes in the classroom throughout the year.

Recommended resources

- [How Do We Support Newcomers' Social-Emotional Needs?](#) (U.S. Department of Education Newcomer Toolkit)
- [How Teachers Can Help Immigrant Kids Feel Safe](#) (Greater Good Magazine, UC Berkeley)
- [The Inner World of the Immigrant Child](#) by Cristina Igoa
- [California Schools Help Unaccompanied Immigrant Students Combat Trauma, Language Barriers](#) (EdSource)



Exercises for calming anxiety

- [8 Fun Breathing Exercises for Kids](#) (Childhood 101)
- [How to Teach Your Child Calm Breathing](#) (Anxiety Canada)
- [Calming Anxiety in Children](#) (Coping Skills for Kids)

Resources from Re-imagining Migration

- [What can schools do to meet the social, emotional, and academic needs of immigrant-origin students?](#)
- [What are some of the typical social-emotional challenges most relevant to immigrant-origin students?](#)
- [A Culturally Responsive Guide to Fostering the Inclusion of Immigrant-Origin Students](#)



Take a closer look when you notice changes in a student's behavior

Why this matters

The impact of immigration issues on students can lead to changes in students' behavior. The [American Psychological Association](#) notes, "These stressful experiences can lead to a number of negative emotional and behavioral outcomes including [anxiety, fear, depression](#), anger, social isolation and lack of a sense of belonging." The impacts can be especially severe on [young children](#).

When such changes present themselves, it is critical to dig deeper to find the root cause, especially before taking action that will have serious, long-term consequences for the student. This is where having a relationship with the student can make a big difference. Viridiana Carrizales, co-founder and CEO of [ImmSchools](#), says "An educator who does not have a relationship with their students is only going to see a kid who is misbehaving or disengaged" (Dillard, 2018, p. 45).

Often the first response to a change in behavior is a special education referral or disciplinary referral, which is not necessarily appropriate for the situation (see more on these issues below). It is also essential to use a team approach that includes a variety of perspectives, including that of the family and an interpreter or cultural liaison, in order to:

- address concerns or changes in student behavior
- ensure that families have access to all information in their home language.

Student stories

For some concrete examples of this issue, see the following stories included in this guide:

- [A preschool child's experience with post-traumatic stress](#)
- [A young student's alarming change in behavior](#)

Special education referrals

In their chapter on cultural dilemmas in [Teachers as Allies: Transformative Practices for Teaching DREAMers and Undocumented Students](#), Dr. Eva K. Thorp, Dr. Sylvia Y. Sánchez, and Dr. Elaisa Sánchez Gosnell share the following experience. A teacher approached the group out of concern about an immigrant student's sudden change in behavior; the teacher was weighing whether or not to refer the student to special education. The team suggested that the teacher



make a home visit; upon doing so, the teacher learned that “(t)he child’s father had recently been detained, no one in the family knew where he had been taken, and out of fear, the student’s mother had left the country. The student was living under the care of her [18-year-old sibling](#)” (p. 20).

Based on this information, the teacher was able to find a more appropriate avenue of support rather than a special education referral. Lori Dodson talks more about this issue in her video below, “[Why not all changes in behavior require a special education.](#)”

Tips for getting started

If you are concerned about an immigrant student’s behavior, consider looking at the following questions as you think about how to respond, always taking care to respect students’ privacy.

- What do you know about the student and the student’s home life?
- Is there a colleague who can provide some additional insight on the student’s situation?
- Are there particular stressors impacting the student?
- Are any of the following issues playing a role?
 - [Challenges in meeting basic needs](#)
 - [Immigration issues that impact students](#)
 - [Causes of stress and anxiety](#)
- What is your school’s protocol for behavior/discipline and is it appropriate in this case?
- Who should be part of the team to address this issue?
- What should next steps be?

Recommended resources

- [Chapter 2: “Embracing Cultural Dilemmas”](#) (Excerpt from *Teachers as Allies*)
- [Fix School Discipline: School-wide Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports](#)
- [What is restorative justice?](#) (RestorativeJustice.org)
- [Restorative Justice: Resources for Schools](#) (Edutopia)

Recommended videos

- [Why not all changes in behavior require a special education referral](#) (Lori Dodson, ESOL Teacher – Maryland)
- [What is like to grow up as an undocumented youth in America?](#) (American Psychological Association)





School discipline policies: What they mean for immigrant students and families

For undocumented students, involvement in a disciplinary situation can have serious consequences, ranging from a negative impact on their immigration case to detention and deportation. *Teaching Tolerance* studies this issue in-depth in its Fall 2018 issue with the article, "[The School-to-Deportation Pipeline](#)," which examines the story of a high school student in Houston, [Dennis Rivera-Sarmiento](#), who was nearly deported following an incident with a young woman he said had been bullying him. His reporting of that incident led to his arrest by his school's police officer, which flagged him for deportation back to his native Honduras. He has also been advised that his case brought his mother and siblings to the attention of Immigration and Customs Enforcement.

His case earned a lot of attention, eventually resulting in his release. He has since graduated from high school and been accepted to three colleges, although his asylum case is still pending. His story highlights the high stakes for young people in his situation.

The Immigrant Legal Resource Center notes, "School disciplinary policies that involve local law enforcement often result in a student being exposed (to immigration enforcement). Conversely, school policies that don't involve local law enforcement will better protect immigrant students from being detained or deported" (ILRC Guide). You can read more about this issue in ILRC's brief, [The School to Prison to Deportation Pipeline](#). The ILRC also recommends the information on school-wide positive behavioral intervention and supports from the [Fix School Discipline website](#).

At a time when many schools are increasing security measures, it is important to consider:

- how to increase school safety while continuing to protect students' rights and maintain a welcoming environment for students and families
- what new measures and policies mean for immigrant students
- what role school resource officers play within the school
- what a policy addressing these issues might look like if none exists.

It is also important to reflect on how these issues impact immigrant families. For example, Dr. Thorp (2017) notes that some security measures dissuade immigrant families from entering the school, such as leaving a photo identification in the office.



Look for ways to make classroom connections

Why this matters

Connecting current events to the classroom can broaden student understanding of timely topics, increase empathy and engagement, draw upon students' unique experiences and perspectives, and empower students during a moment of uncertainty.

Teacher Anna Centi, who teaches newcomer students and refugees from Yemen in Dearborn, Michigan, also has found that students are more likely to tackle challenging material if they can relate to it. One book that has resonated with her students is [A Long Walk to Water](#) by Linda Sue Park.

Tips for getting started

Brainstorm ideas

- Look for connections to your students' lives across the curriculum.
- Ask students to brainstorm ideas on what they would like to study.
- Consider using an inquiry-based or project-based learning approach that allows students to take the lead in identifying a question or problem to solve/research.

Look for local connections

- Assign students projects that focus on issues that apply to their own community.
- Identify community assets and resources that you can utilize. Look for opportunities to make connections with guest speakers, community members, or local organizations in the community that reflect students' lives and can be used as resources.
- Offer students opportunities to present their work in public, whether to classmates, parents, or community members through presentations, local media, and outreach.
- Encourage students to look for contributions members of their local community have made. (See more on this on idea from [Dr. Sandra Duval](#).)

Use care with challenging topics

These topics can be difficult to navigate, particularly if they impact members of the class personally. One teacher notes that in her government class, "some students have been quite strident in supporting separation of families."



When discussing controversial topics:

- Do careful research and look for materials from well-established, trustworthy sources.
- Think about your own point of view and possible biases.
- Be well-prepared and anticipate the need to manage discussions on controversial topics.
- Consider the best way to approach the topic so as not to put students on the spot.
- Assure students that you will respect their privacy when introducing a topic like immigration and that they do not have to share any personal information to participate.
- Create a list of guidelines for respectful classroom discussion with the class.
- Look for strategies designed to increase student understanding and dialogue, such as [dialogue circles](#) and the [activities compiled by from Facing History and Ourselves](#).
- Look for ways to foster students' empathy. (See ideas under "[Teaching empathy](#).")

Recommended resources

- [Classroom Connections: Immigration in the Curriculum](#) (Colorín Colorado)
- [Teachers as Allies: Transformative Practices for Teaching DREAMers and Undocumented Students](#) (Teachers College Press)
- [Teaching Difficult Topics: Educator Reflections](#) edited by Larry Ferlazzo
- [Discussing Difficult/Controversial Topics](#) (Center for Research on Teaching and Learning)
- [Immigrant Student Success: A Free Online Workshop](#) (The Immigrant Learning Center)
- [Sample Lesson Plan: Public Charge Changes](#) (Immigrants Rising)
- [Re-imagining Migration](#): Resource Collection for Educators (UCLA)
- [The Waiting Game: Online Game About Seeking Asylum in the U.S.](#) (ProPublica and WYNC, via Re-imagining Migration)

Recommended videos

- [Talking About Big Topics with High School and ELL Immigrant Students](#) (Anne Marie Foerster Luu, ESOL Teacher – Maryland)
- [Making Connections to Students' Lives in the Classroom](#) (Lori Dodson, ESOL Teacher – Maryland)



Teach empathy and appreciation

Why this matters

Empathy can help build community and a culture of respect in a classroom or school. A first step in developing empathy is to understand how issues affect an individual personally – this can be a powerful exercise [for staff](#) and students alike. Given that empathy is considered one of the most critical 21st-century skills for students to learn, these exercises can have long-lasting impacts for students. See more about that topic from [KQED](#).

Tips for getting started

- Find out what social-emotional resources your school or district has available.
- Identify your goals for developing empathy, including relevant topics for your classroom, school community, or colleagues.
- Review the following resources to find the activities that best fit your setting.
- Consider collaborating with colleagues, even informally, to find ways to extend your efforts to more students and staff.

Activity idea

If only you knew me: In a [series of Education Week blog posts](#) edited by Larry Ferlazzo on how to teach controversial topics, [teacher Paul Barnwell](#) describes an activity in which students write three things about themselves that classmates do not know. As the teacher then reads them anonymously to the class, the students begin to get an idea of the “range of intense experiences and perspectives (the) classroom community contains.”

Expressing appreciation

Giving students the chance to express appreciation for others is another way to create community and develop empathy. It allows students to identify positive traits and behaviors in each other, build self-esteem, and highlight student qualities that teachers might overlook. Students can express appreciation for peers, teachers, and staff with activities such as:

- **Appreciation mailbox:** Each student creates an envelope, folder, or “mailbox” in which classmates can leave an anonymous note of appreciation, such as, “He is a good soccer player,” or “She picked up something I dropped.” The point is to find something positive for each person in the class. This can be an ongoing exercise or a special activity.



- **Appreciate station:** This is a more public version of the above activity where students post thank you notes publicly for classmates, teachers, or staff in the building. This [blog post](#) shares ideas for getting started.
- **This helped my learning:** [Teacher David Olio](#) regularly gives his students note cards and asks them to write down a way in which a classmate helped their learning. This highlights students' contributions for him and the class – and offers some opportunities for informal assessment as well.

Recommended resources

Edutopia

- [The Power of Empathy](#)
- [4 Proven Strategies for Teaching Empathy](#)

Teaching Tolerance

- [Understanding Empathy: Lesson Plan for Grade 3-5](#)
- [Developing Empathy: Lesson Plan for Grades 6-8](#)
- [Boosting Empathy with Five Simple Words](#)
- [Empathy: The Antidote to Bullying](#)

More classroom resources

- [Roots of Empathy](#) classroom project
- [Random Acts of Kindness Lesson Plans](#) (Random Acts of Kindness Foundation)
- [Books That Teach Empathy](#) (Common Sense Media)
- [Why Empathy Matters in Classroom Storytelling](#) (Re-imagining Migration)

Related strategies from this guide

- [Sharing personal stories](#)
- [Using books in the classroom and beyond](#)
- [Understanding the impact of immigration issues on students](#)
- [Developing empathy for English language learners](#)

Recommended videos

- [3 Videos on the Importance of Empathy](#) (Edutopia)



Pay attention to what students do – and do not – say about immigration

Why this matters

Immigrant students, including young children, regularly navigate decisions about what to say in conversations about immigration or related topics throughout the school day. There is now more research focusing on this topic, including on the significance of students' silence with respect to immigration issues and status.

Case study: Celebrating diversity

In her research based on extensive classroom observations of peer discussions at an elementary school in Brooklyn, Dr. Ariana Mangual Figueroa (2017) notes a range of circumstances that can impact what students will or will not share about themselves, including:

- the nature of the activity and how it is framed
- whether personal questions are asked, and if so, which ones
- the experiences and immigration status of students and their family members.

Dr. Mangual Figueroa observed a variety of classroom activities at the school; one situation she highlights took place in a social-emotional learning class about bullying. In an effort to increase understanding about students' diversity, the teacher had planned an activity in which students would stand when their country of origin was called.

However, she had not taken into account that some of the students were not born in the U.S.; after some initial confusion, she asked everyone “not born here” to stand. Dr. Mangual Figueroa noted that an undocumented student in the class, Lupe, remained seated through the exercise and mumbled that she would not stand up. Dr. Mangual Figueroa writes,

The way this exercise — intended to foster inclusion — in fact alienated certain students is revealing. Educators may assume that students will feel comfortable talking about their identity during activities meant to elicit multicultural perspectives designed to honor their culture and experiences in school. By creating a situation in which students would have to publically identify with a home country that might then raise questions about nationality and citizenship, (the teacher) inadvertently turned the activity from one of celebrating diversity into one that generated student fear of revealing their differences in legal status.



This does not suggest that activities celebrating diversity and students' cultures are out of place. Instead, it may be worth it to examine the activities, determine whether they might put students on the spot, and try reframing them. Dr. Mangual Figueroa encourages teachers to:

- give students an opportunity to engage with “relevant social issues” (p. 515) with which they could identify
- allow students to choose topics of interest without putting them in a position where they have to describe their own experiences or disclose immigration/citizenship status
- pay attention to students' silence by tuning in to both “audible” silences that stop classroom conversation as well as those “inaudible silences that indicate a strategic refusal to participate” (p. 516).

Note: You may find some helpful ideas in [our resource section](#) on adapting assignments about family history and genealogy to include diverse families and students who are adopted.

Case study: Talking about campaign rhetoric

In a separate study (2018), Dr. Sandra L. Osorio [shares the approach](#) that she and a teacher in a dual-language second-grade classroom used to respond to a classroom discussion about immigration rhetoric during the 2016 election. Dr. Osorio and her co-teacher decided to create a lesson centered on [culturally sustaining pedagogy](#) and used the picture book *From North to South/Del norte al sur* by René Colato Laínez. They found that their students had deep funds of knowledge about immigration, citizenship, and family separation; by talking about immigration explicitly, the teachers created a supportive environment in which students could discuss their concerns and experiences in the midst of much uncertainty.

In addition to integrating art and civic action into the classroom, Dr. Osorio also recommends the following:

*What every teacher can do is position him- or herself as a learner and welcome students' [funds of knowledge](#) (González, Moll, & Amanti, 2005) into the classroom. Teachers must be willing to create opportunities for students to share their lived experiences. Some additional ways that Natalia and I did this in our classroom were by including multicultural children's literature, inviting families into the classroom, having a Latinx author visit the classroom, and taking up topics students brought into the classroom (e.g., *La Llorona*, or the Weeping Woman, Mayan legends, and immigration).*



A decision to “shatter the silence”

For a personal take on living in the shadows as undocumented students, read [this interview](#) with twin sisters Brizzia and Maria Muñoz Robles, who are both students at Notre Dame. They were the first twin valedictorians of their high school and are DACA recipients who talk about what it was like to hide their undocumented status throughout all of their schooling, until a conversation with the former president of Notre Dame gave them the courage to share their story.

Related research and resources

If you would like to explore more of the discussion around this topic, take a look at the following. Some of these reports may require a subscription to download.

- [Dilemmas in Classrooms and Schools: Silence](#) (Re-imagining Migration)
- [The Inner World of the Immigrant Child](#) by Cristina Igoa
- [The Art of the Reveal: Undocumented High School Students, Institutional Agents, and the Disclosure of Legal Status](#) by Marco A. Murillo
- [On the Grammar of Silence: The Structure of My Undocumented Immigrant Writer's Block](#) by Alberto Ledesma
- [Inhabited Silence in Qualitative Research: Putting Poststructural Theory to Work](#) by Lisa A. Mazzei

Tips for getting started

In addition to the recommendations from these researchers, Dr. Emily Crawford-Rossi, a researcher at the University of Missouri studying this issue, recommends looking for opportunities to:

- build [empathy](#) and kindness
- use diverse children’s literature to talk about struggles with belonging and identity (such as the forthcoming title [Where Are You From?](#) by Yamile Saied Méndez)
- challenge immigration myths using resources such as [Teaching Tolerance’s Ten Myths About Immigration](#) and the related [lesson plan](#).

Recommended videos

- [Helping Dreamers Tell Their Stories](#) (Anne Marie Foerster Luu, ESOL Teacher – Maryland)



Use books in the classroom and beyond

Why this matters

Books can be a powerful doorway into a topic that is complex and highly personal. They can serve as mirrors for students who see their experiences reflected and validated; they can also serve as windows for other students (and adults) who gain a new perspective, some background knowledge, and perhaps a new level of empathy as well.

As [Dr. Rudine Sims Bishop](#), who created the “windows and mirrors” metaphor, says, “When lighting conditions are just right, however, a window can also be a mirror. Literature transforms human experience and reflects it back to us, and in that reflection, we can see our own lives and experiences as part of the larger human experience.”

Tips for getting started

- Look for books related to your students’ experiences and cultures. Ask colleagues for their input on cultural authenticity.
- Look for books that focus on immigration stories.
- Include the books you find in:
 - classroom libraries
 - in school libraries
 - in reading rooms, parent resource rooms
 - other places where families will be able to share them together.
- Look for ways to include the books as a part of a class unit or classroom read-aloud.
- Keep in mind that picture books can be great resources for older students and adults as well, particularly when addressing a complex topic.

Recommended resources

Colorín Colorado has compiled the following resources:

- [Immigration Booklists for Kids and Young Adults](#)
- [Multicultural Booklists by Topic for Kids and Adults](#)
- [Professional Booklists for Educators](#)
- [Culturally Relevant Books in the ELL Classroom](#)





Immigration book packs

Rachel Lerner, a social worker in Massachusetts, started [putting together immigration book packs](#) and donating them to libraries and other neighborhood locations as a way to give all families an entry into conversations about immigration. Her titles included:

- [Lost and Found Cat](#) by Doug Kuntz and Amy Shrodes
- [Stepping Stones](#) by Magriet Ruurs
- [Mama's Nightingale](#) by Edwidge Danticat
- [The Journey](#) by Francesca Sanna
- [I'm New Here](#) by Anne Sibley O'Brien
- [We Came to America](#) by Faith Ringgold

Recommended video

[This video](#) from *The Guardian* tells the incredible story of Kunkush, the cat featured in *Lost and Found Cat*.



Learn how your families approach social-emotional health

Why this matters

The notion of “mental health” and how to address different challenges or topics can vary widely across cultures. Collaboration among cultural liaisons, ESL/bilingual staff, school psychologists, and families is critical for meeting students’ needs in this area. In addition, families have numerous strengths and coping strategies that can be harnessed in supportive settings.

Tips for getting started

Social worker [Laura Gardner](#) encourages schools to engage with families and talk about:

- what has helped the family overcome difficult situations in the past
- what the family sees as [its strengths](#), and as their children’s strengths
- their own coping strategies
- how difficult situations are addressed in their culture
- how the school/program might make members of a particular community feel welcome or supported
- how to rebuild their extended family systems/informal community networks
- what kinds of information or support the family may want.

Recommended resources

- [Social and Emotional Support for Refugee Families: A School Psychology Perspective](#) (Colorín Colorado)
- [Helping Immigrant and Refugee Students Succeed: It’s Not Just What Happens in the Classroom](#) (Center for Health and Health Care in Schools)
- [Culture and Trauma](#) (The National Child Traumatic Stress Network)
- [Refugee Trauma](#) (The National Child Traumatic Stress Network)
- [Culturally-Sensitive Trauma-Informed Care](#) (Health Care Toolbox)

Recommended videos

- [One Principal’s Journey to a Refugee Camp](#) (Dr. Cynthia Lundgren, WIDA)



Addressing Student Trauma, Anxiety, and Depression

It really helps to understand where the children come from and understand post-traumatic stress disorder. Things that we might take for granted or might not notice could be very upsetting to a child, keeping them in that part of their brain where it's "fight or flight." So it's a reminder every now and then that we just need to check ourselves and think, what are some things that we can control that could be helpful to a child in distress?

– Susan Stanley, Principal of Salina Elementary School, Dearborn, Michigan

Key Takeaways

- Educators working with immigrant and refugee students should be aware of the ways in which anxiety, stress, fear, depression, and post-traumatic stress can affect their students.
- Building relationships with students and families can help identify students' needs, while providing professional development on a variety of topics in a respectful setting can help increase awareness across the staff.

See this information online

Addressing Student Trauma, Anxiety, and Depression

- View online: <http://www.colorincolorado.org/immigration/guide/trauma>
- Download PDF: <http://www.colorincolorado.org/immigration/guide/trauma-pdf>

Complete guide: <http://www.colorincolorado.org/immigration/guide>

Excerpted from *How to Support Immigrant Students and Families*.

Overview

Many immigrant students are currently living with high levels of fear, anxiety, stress, and depression. To better understand the reasons why, take a look at our section on [how immigration issues impact students](#).

To address these challenges, building relationships with students and families can help identify students' needs, while providing professional development on a variety of topics in a respectful setting can help increase awareness across the staff. Here is some information to help get started.

Social-emotional distress

In UCLA survey about how immigration enforcement is affecting schools, almost 90% of administrators surveyed "indicated that they have observed behavioral or emotional problems in immigrant students," and 25% indicated that it was a significant problem (Gándara & Ee, 2018b, p. 2). One administrator notes,

"Several students have arrived at school crying, withdrawn and refusing to eat lunch because they have witnessed deportation of a family member. Some students show anxiety symptoms...All of this impacts their ability to focus and complete work, which further affects them academically." (p.9)

Pediatricians serving immigrant families are noticing the same thing, according to a December 2017 [Kaiser Family Foundation report](#), as well as negative effects on health such as problems sleeping, headaches, stomachaches, and mental health issues.

Loss of motivation

In addition, students' loss of motivation is another challenge. In this [Education Week article](#), Principal Nedda de Castro of the International School at Prospect Heights in Brooklyn observed that, "Some of the students are assuming that they're just going to be deported anyway and starting to talk about how there's really no point in coming to school anymore. It's a lot of lost potential."

According to the UCLA research, administrators and educators across the country also reported that high-achieving students are giving up on their plans for college. After a nearby raid, a teacher in the Midwest observed the following:



“I noticed those students behaving so differently. They don't sit or stand tall. They do not want to participate in presentations. They do not want to be called. They seem disconnected or uninterested now... I serve in an academically advanced setting where students are selected and good performers” (p. 10).

Another teacher from Oregon observed,

“I have students who were college-bound now questioning if it's worth it, because they don't believe that they could get a job in their field after graduating” (p. 12).

And in our own travels to Dearborn, MI, we met teachers and community members who spoke about the toll of [lengthy separations](#) on students and families from countries such as Yemen and Syria.



Identify resources for addressing student anxiety and depression

Why this matters

The American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) [has publicly stated their expectation](#) that the current climate will likely increase students' toxic stress level, particularly if students experience trauma. Researchers at the Center for Law and Social Policy (CLASP) documented the impact of this anxiety on children as young as three, including an increase in finger biting and toilet accidents (Cervantes, Ullrich, & Matthews, 2018, p. 9), while teachers of older students report an increase in severe depression and a decrease in motivation and engagement. See more on the impact of anxiety in early childhood in our section [on young children in immigrant families](#).

Tips for getting started

- Learn about anxiety's impacts on students in your age group, such as impacts on [behavior](#), as well as strategies for [supporting students' social-emotional health](#).
- Consider pulling together a team of educators, cultural liaisons, mental health professionals, administrators, parents, students (as appropriate), and community partners to identify (a) challenges students are facing (b) [culturally appropriate approaches](#) to social-emotional health for your families and (c) priorities and next steps.
- Determine which supports are in place and what might be needed, such as training, community outreach/partnerships, family engagement, or small group meetings.
- Continue to revisit these topics, particularly if new immigration policies are announced.
- Keep in mind that students might keep these concerns quiet out of fear for their safety.
- Respect student/staff privacy; nothing personal should be shared without permission.

Recommended resources

- [Sesame Street in Communities: Care, Cope, Connect](#) (Toolkit in multiple languages)
- [Bilingual activities and videos on self-expression from Sesame Street](#)
- [Stress and Coping Strategies for Immigrant-Origin Students and Educators who Serve Them](#) (Re-imagining Migration)

Recommended videos

- [When Immigration Status Impacts Younger Children](#) (Lori Dodson, ESOL Teacher – Maryland)



Learn about post-traumatic stress syndrome

Why this matters

More and more educators across the country are learning about the impacts of trauma and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) on students. Researchers estimate that half of the U.S. student population has experienced or is still experiencing some type of trauma, violence, or chronic stress (Zacarian, Haynes, and Alvarez-Ortiz, 2017). One teacher wrote in our survey, “Staff need training in trauma-informed education and supporting students who've experienced many kinds of trauma. We brought in the Center for Victims of Torture to train our staff to support our specific refugee populations.”

For immigrant students, the sources of trauma may be complex and may be related to:

Their immigration story

- the reasons the family left their home country (such as war or wide-spread violence)
- difficult conditions, violence, sexual assault, or casualties during the journey to this country
- forced separation from a parent or sibling on the journey

Experiences related to immigration enforcement

- witnessing a loved one's arrest
- being separated from a parent during interrogation
- a forced separation for an extended period of time
- detention in an immigration detention center
- coming into contact with immigration enforcement officers
- a lengthy separation from families or siblings

Current stresses

- stressful situations such as economic stress and homelessness
- other challenges at home, including domestic abuse.

Note: See the resources on addressing trauma in our resource section about [family separations at the border](#).



Tips for getting started

- Learn more about the [impacts of trauma](#) and signs of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) for students the age group you work with.
- If possible, look for clues and try to learn a little bit more about your students' backgrounds, keeping in mind that every individual's situation is unique, even within a family, and protecting student privacy. Start with a trusted colleague, parent liaison or community partner. If appropriate, give students opportunities to [share their stories](#) privately, or, if they wish, with classmates.
- Discuss ideas for addressing students' needs with colleagues and identify next steps to implement those ideas.
- Learn more about trauma-informed instruction in the following resources.



Refugees and displaced families: The story behind the story

For educators working with refugees or displaced students, it can be helpful to learn more about the conflict or situation that caused students to leave their homeland or country of residence. This also can shed light on concerns that students continue to have for relatives still in the conflict zone. Here are some examples of resources that provide this kind of background information. Some of these resources include disturbing images.

- [Refugee Backgrounds](#) (Cultural Orientation Resource Center – archived information)
- [Supporting Syrian Refugees: Related Resources](#) (Colorín Colorado)
- [How the War in Yemen Became a Bloody Stalemate — And the Worst Humanitarian Crisis in the World](#) (*The New York Times*)

The same is true for students displaced by natural disasters who have also experienced trauma. For example, even though students from Puerto Rico are U.S. citizens, those displaced by Hurricane Maria faced significant challenges once they relocated to the U.S. Learn more in these resources:

- [Supporting Students and Educators from Puerto Rico After Hurricane Maria](#)
- [Why Immigrant Families May Have Unique Needs Before, During, and After Natural Disasters](#)



Trauma-informed instruction

- [The How and Why of Trauma-Informed Teaching](#) (Edutopia)
- [The Transformative Power of Trauma-Informed Teaching](#) (*Education Week*)
- [A Glimpse Inside the Transition to Trauma-Informed Practices](#) (KQED)
- [Essential Trauma-Informed Teaching Strategies for Managing Stress in the Classroom](#) (Concordia University-Portland)

Strategies and toolkits

- [Helping Students Heal Through Love and Trust: A Social Worker's Perspective on Serving Immigrant Youth](#) (Colorín Colorado)
- [Using a Strengths-Based Approach with ELs: Supporting Students Living with Trauma, Violence and Chronic Stress](#) (Colorín Colorado)
- [Trauma Toolkit: Tools to Support the Learning and Development of Students Experiencing Childhood and Adolescent Trauma](#) (First Book and Maryland State Education Association)
- [Child Trauma Toolkit for Educators](#) (The National Child Traumatic Stress Network)
- [Helping Traumatized Children Learn: Supportive School Environments for Children Traumatized by Family Violence](#) (Massachusetts Advocates for Children, Harvard Law School, and the Task Force on Children Affected by Domestic Violence)
- [Over the Hills and Far Away: Inviting and Holding Traumatic Stories in School](#) (Bank Street College of Education)

In the news

- [Trauma and Transitions: How San Diego Schools Grapple With Educating Refugees](#) (KPBS)
- [Lego Foundation and Sesame Street Team Up to Help Refugee Children](#) (*The New York Times*)
- [When Schools Meet Trauma With Understanding, Not Discipline](#) (NPR Ed)
- [For Traumatized Children, An Offer of Help from the Muppets](#) (NPR Ed)
- [A Pediatrician's Advice for Treating Student Trauma](#) (*Education Week*)
- [Student Trauma Is Widespread. Schools Don't Have to Go It Alone](#) (*Education Week*)
- [The Transformative Power of Trauma-Informed Teaching](#) (*Education Week*)
- [Student Trauma Is Real. But Connection Can Heal.](#) (*Education Week*)



Recommended videos

- [Video Playlist: What educators need to know about trauma](#)
- [When loud noises cause post-traumatic stress in schools](#) (Susan Stanley, Principal – Salina Elementary School, Dearborn , MI)
- [A distressing journal entry](#) (Glenn Maleyko, Superintendent – Dearborn Public Schools, MI)
- [Why not all changes in behavior require a special education referral](#) (Lori Dodson, ESOL Teacher – Maryland)





Addressing trauma

Santa Cruz, California

The school district of Santa Cruz, California [has launched a new program](#) with the help of the city government to help newly arrived youth from El Salvador fleeing gang violence. School officials report that newcomers have already begun sharing difficult stories of:

- the conditions that forced them to leave
- their dangerous journey to the U.S. (documented in the book [Enrique's Journey](#) by Pulitzer-Prize winning journalist [Sonia Nazario](#))
- reunions with relatives that they may not have seen for many years (or even met).

Additionally, school officials have received training on the impact of trauma on learning and are working to help ensure that immigrant students continue to have access to mental health services. You can learn more about this support from [this powerful article](#) written for Colorín Colorado with by social worker Nereida Robles.

Dearborn, Michigan

Salina Elementary School in Dearborn, Michigan is home to many students who come from war-torn regions of Yemen and have experienced trauma. Classical music plays in the morning on the loudspeaker, and the walls are covered with student work, creating a feeling of warmth and community throughout the building. Principal Susan Stanley notes that creating a calm, peaceful environment is especially important in her school because [loud noises, bells, and alarms](#) can trigger post-traumatic stress disorder for her students who have lived in war zones, so she makes sure that those kinds of disruptions are kept to a minimum. Staff are also trained on recognizing and addressing signs of trauma.

Prince William County, Virginia

Principal Nathaniel Provencio shares the story of a young boy from El Salvador whose behavior took an exceedingly negative turn. After repeated attempts at connecting with the mother, who was initially quite defensive, she finally shared that her husband had been murdered in El Salvador and the crime had been filmed. The young boy, in an effort to deal with the loss of his father, repeatedly watched the tragic video. The school team immediately switched into crisis intervention mode to address his trauma and connected the mother with legal support that had a positive impact on their situation.



Addressing Immigrant Families' Questions and Concerns

We would advise school staff to educate themselves about concerns that families of English Learners in their community are facing, and to be aware of and sensitive to those concerns without making any assumptions about a family's specific situation.

– [Muhidin Warfa](#), Director of the Multilingual Department, Minneapolis Public Schools, Minnesota

Key Takeaways

- Immigrant families may have a range of questions and concerns. Understanding those concerns (and not making assumptions about families' situations) will help schools partner with families more effectively.
- Schools can learn more by providing families with plenty of channels for communication and opportunities to share input.

See this information online

Addressing Immigrant Families' Questions and Concerns

- View online: <http://www.colorincolorado.org/immigration/guide/questions>
- Download PDF: <http://www.colorincolorado.org/immigration/guide/questions-pdf>

Complete guide: <http://www.colorincolorado.org/immigration/guide>

Excerpted from *How to Support Immigrant Students and Families*.

Listen to immigrant families' questions and concerns

Why this matters

Immigrant families' situations can be very complex, varying from community to community and family to family. In order to best address parents' concerns, it is critical to ask for their input and give them a variety of avenues for sharing that input. You may be surprised at what parents would find helpful or unhelpful – which is why it is important to ask! For example, educators who completed our survey indicated that families had concerns about the following issues:

- Fears about deportation
- Separation from family members in other countries
- Discrimination
- Safety concerns
- Interest in legal advice
- Bullying
- Where to get help for trauma
- Proving residency in the school district

Educators have also received requests from families who wanted information about how to manage stress and help their children manage stress and anxiety, including from parents of young children (Cervantes, Ullrich, & Matthews, 2018).

Some school districts have also put extra channels of communication in place for immigrant families to share questions and concerns. For example, officials in Los Angeles set up a [hotline and a website](#) for questions related to immigration, while officials in Santa Fe, New Mexico created a hotline to report bullying or harassment and a parent group for immigrant families to “collect information and share news.”

Respondents to our 2017 survey on how schools were supporting immigrant students said they were making a point to:

Speak directly with parents and ask if we can help them in anything. Sometimes they are only seeking someone that will listen to them.

Establish a climate and culture of respect and addressing concerns openly and honestly.



Tips for getting started

You can gather input from families in both private and group settings by collaborating with a cultural liaison and asking families what kinds of information they want and how they would like to receive it. You may also wish to:

- provide families with a space for meeting and opportunities for discussion
- determine what roles your staff and community partners can play
- find ways to make outreach as [culturally responsive](#) as possible
- find ways to share information with multiple families who may have similar questions
- encourage immigrant families [to take leadership roles](#).

Recommended resources

- [Drawing Upon Strong Community Support: Meeting Immigrant Families' Needs During Uncertain Times](#) (Muhidin Warfa, Director of the Multilingual Department. – Minneapolis Public Schools, MN)

Recommended videos

- [Question from a Muslim parent](#) (Nathaniel Provencio – Principal, Minnieville Elementary School, VA)



Expanding parent outreach

Wolfe Street Academy in Baltimore is a [community school](#) that has a great relationship with its families; a school-wide morning meeting draws dozens of parents to the school each day. Immigrant parents wanted more information about changing immigration policies, however, so school leaders have:

- hosted parent workshops to answer questions about immigration policy, crisis management, and supporting kids struggling with anxiety
- organized an informal support group for parents
- offered space in the school for parents to meet
- distributed updated information through the school's parent action committee
- partnered with local groups that have offered family workshops on crisis, anxiety, and stress management.



Be honest with families and share the kinds of support you can provide

Why this matters

Educators and school leaders spoke about the need to be honest and realistic with families while reassuring them that they were doing everything in their power to keep students safe. They did not want to offer false hope but were still striving to address parents' concerns.

Tips for getting started

Administrators can have address families' concerns by:

- answering questions honestly
- sharing policies proactively
- asking parents what they would find helpful (such as video-streaming events for parents without requiring attendance)
- reminding families that all children have a constitutional right to a free public K-12 education and they have rights about sharing their and their child's personal information under FERPA
- keeping lines of communication open.

In addition:

- Talk with colleagues in your school, district, or professional learning communities about how they are addressing these challenging conversations.
- Do your best to understand your own local context and families' concerns. Current approaches to communicating about these issues vary widely, even within the same district.
- Ask families for their input. While some things are beyond your control, there may be other things you can do that would help families feel more comfortable in sending their kids to school and coming to the school themselves.
- Work with community partners such as an immigration advocacy organization to provide accurate, up-to-date information.





Speaking sincerely with families

[Scott Kizner](#), Superintendent of Stafford County Schools (and former Superintendent in Harrisonburg, VA) writes,

At a Hispanic Parent Teacher Organization meeting on immigration, one parent was emotionally upset on the possibility that she could be separated from her child and I went over to her to show support. It was at that time that I also told parents that they must have a plan just in case they are separated...My main role is to provide moral leadership and also make school resources available to the students, families and community. It is also important I share what our legal role is and not to over-promise, but also take steps to alleviate fear. Being forthright and keeping the communication channels open with the school community is critical.

Dallas, TX school psychologist [Dr. Lisa Peterson](#) writes,

Instead of talking about the future, which is so uncertain and may just exacerbate negative emotions, focus on the factors that will help them get through challenges in the present. Compliment them on their effort in school and other activities. Point out their own personal strengths that will help them when times are challenging. And always let them know that you will be there for them.



Share information through outreach and events

Why this matters

Families may not know where to turn for help and may be afraid to reach out with questions. Schools and early childhood programs can offer workshops, family nights, or other events about:

- “know your rights” sessions: This information helps families understand what rights they do have, even if they are undocumented, and what to expect if detained. (Learn more about how educators in [North Carolina](#), [Virginia](#), and [Los Angeles](#) are sharing this kind of information with families.)
- information about the school/program policies regarding enrollment and immigration
- resources in the community
- tips for managing stress.

Note: The information in this guide should not be interpreted as legal advice. Any individual or organization seeking legal advice related to immigration issues should consult with the appropriate attorneys, local government officials, or non-profit organizations specializing in immigration law that can offer guidance. **We also remind educators not to provide legal advice.**

Reminders to families

Some educators are reminding families to avoid run-ins with the law that can lead to immigration proceedings, such as getting pulled over for a broken taillight, driving without a license, driving under the influence, or even riding in a car with someone else who is undocumented. (See more about driving while undocumented in this [New York Times article](#).)

Are we allowed to hold these kinds of events at school?

Schools and districts across the country are answering that question differently with regards to using school facilities and teacher involvement. See more [guidelines for educators in our section on educator advocacy and outreach](#). For schools that have policies prohibiting events explicitly about immigration issues, community partners or teachers’ unions may be able to host events on their property in collaboration (directly or indirectly) with the school.



Tips for getting started

- Talk with families and staff who work closely with families about what kinds of information they would find most useful.
- Connect with a legal or immigration advocacy group to share this information with families.
- Look for ways to share this kind of information on a regular basis, such as at parent teacher conferences with all families, and include a way for them to follow up with you. This places the decision to talk more about these issues in families' hands.
- Look for ways that can make these events more accessible for families, such as:
 - providing transportation, meals, child care, and interpretation (if needed)
 - holding events at times convenient to the families
 - holding events in families' neighborhoods (this may address restrictions on the kinds of events that can be held at the school and make families feel more comfortable)
 - offering information in different formats for families who may not wish to visit the school, such as phone calls, email, text, fliers, or livestreamed video events.

Recommended resources

- [Hosting Know Your Rights and family preparedness workshops at your school](#) (Informed Immigrants)
- [Know Your Rights: A Guide to Your Rights When Interacting with Law Enforcement in Multiple Languages](#) (Catholic Legal Immigration Network)
- Know Your Rights: Guide in [English](#) and [Spanish](#) (American Federation of Teachers)

Recommended videos

- [Supporting Immigrant Parents](#): This Spanish-language video addresses tough topics such as bullying and potential family separation. The video is also available with English subtitles.



Addressing Questions About Immigration Enforcement and Policy

You don't want to give false promises, but you also don't want families to feel abandoned. That is where letting kids and families know that you are a consistent member of their world can really help.

– Mark Gaither, Principal of Wolfe Street Academy, Baltimore, Maryland, (Personal communication, February 24, 2017)

Key Takeaways

- Immigration enforcement agents have been instructed to avoid activity at certain kinds of educational settings. These "sensitive locations" guidelines remain in effect, although some enforcement activity near schools has occurred. Leaders should stay current with these policies.
- Districts can develop policies, protocols, and training procedures to help employees respond to families' questions, protect students' civil and privacy rights, and increase the chances of children going home with a known caregiver in the event of a family member being detained.



See this information online

Addressing Questions About Immigration Enforcement and Policy

- View online: <http://www.colorincolorado.org/immigration/guide/policy>
- Download PDF: <http://www.colorincolorado.org/immigration/guide/policy-pdf>

Complete guide: <http://www.colorincolorado.org/immigration/guide>

Excerpted from *How to Support Immigrant Students and Families*.

Overview

Students, families, and staff members have questions about immigration enforcement in schools and early childhood settings. Possible scenarios that come up range from a request for information to an agent entering a school building for the purposes of detaining someone (the latter could possibly happen but is not currently done under federal policy, as explained in the following information about “sensitive locations”). Here are some steps schools can take to address these questions. For a quick snapshot, see this helpful infographic on [Responding to Immigration Enforcement Issues](#) from the Association of California School Administrators.

Note: Additional information related to [early childhood settings is included in our section on young children in immigrant families](#).

How do these concerns impact schools?

Concerns about immigration enforcement can impact student attendance, participation in activities, and parental engagement in both K-12 and early childhood settings if families are afraid to go to school/day care or to the grocery store, park, or library; they stop family outings; they do things in a hurry; they are late to school because they take different routes each day; or they are afraid to come into the school.

Schools and early childhood settings are “sensitive locations.” What does that mean?

As of this writing, the Department of Homeland Security still recognizes “sensitive locations” where immigration enforcement should not take place without certain prior approvals and “exigent” (pressing) circumstances requiring immediate action. These include schools, bus stops, and other educational sites such as college campuses and [preschools](#); houses of worship; and medical facilities. So far, there has been [no indication that that policy will change](#), although there have been cases of detentions happening very near sensitive locations, including schools, bus stops, churches, and hospitals. In addition, the 2017 case of [Rosa Maria Hernandez](#), a 10-year-old with cerebral palsy who was detained for more than week following gallbladder surgery, raised the level of scrutiny on the “sensitive locations” policy.

Note: The “sensitive locations” guidance is just that – guidance – and not codified into law; it could change at any point. The guidance also has certain limitations, which is why school and district leaders should become familiar with other related local/state laws and should stay current on this topic.



Review “sensitive locations” guidance

Why this matters

It is important for school and district leaders, as well as early childhood providers, to understand the policies and guidelines that impact their settings so that they can (a) communicate them to staff and families, (b) answer questions, and (c) seek guidance if they have questions or concerns. This [article from the Center for Law and Social Policy \(CLASP\)](#) shares its findings that many early childhood providers were not familiar with sensitive locations guidance and as a result, could not answer families’ questions accurately.

Tips for getting started

- Review sensitive locations guidance and share it with staff and families.
- Ask district/immigration attorneys for clarification as needed.
- Identify sources for updates should any of these policies change.

Recommended resources

- [Fact Sheet for Families and School Staff: Limitations on DHS Immigration Enforcement Actions at Sensitive Locations](#) (U.S. Department of Education and U.S. Department of Justice, posted on Colorín Colorado)
- [Keeping Immigrant Families Safe in Early Childhood Programs](#) (CLASP)
- [In-depth information: Sensitive Locations Memo](#) and [Immigration Warrants](#) (National Immigration Law Center)

Teacher voices

This issue was on the minds of our survey participants. Here are two of their responses:

I met with administrators to share tips for staff members and advise them of legalities concerning immigration coming on school grounds.

We reach out (to families) on a personal level, and that seems to help. But I think it would be better if there was an official district statement of support and clarification about how things will be handled if immigration officers arrive at the school or seek information on students or families.

Review and update current district/program policies regarding immigration enforcement

Why this matters

Many school districts have put policies in place to address questions about immigration enforcement. Even so, educators and families in these districts may have questions about existing or new policies. If your district has such a policy, it is important to be familiar with it and “sensitive locations” guidance in order to:

- answer parent questions accurately
- share relevant procedures with staff districtwide, especially with front-office staff
- respond appropriately to any requests for information by immigration enforcement.

Education Week notes that, “The policies in most districts affirm that schools will do everything within their legal power to protect student privacy, including barring the release of information about immigration status unless there is parental consent, or if federal agents produce a warrant, subpoena, or similar court order.”

Note: The California School Boards Association shares the following reminder: “School leaders should review with legal counsel any request for student information submitted by Immigration and Customs Enforcement” (p. 4).

Tips for getting started

To ensure that all staff have the most up-to-date information about these policies, first find out whether such a policy exists in your district or program.

If there is a policy related to immigration enforcement in place:

- Check the policy regarding cooperation with law enforcement and immigration officials; many districts have tightened these restrictions or clarified the language regarding immigration enforcement on school grounds and requests for information.
- Review and update these policies with district lawyers and immigration organizations as needed.
- Share these policies with staff and families.
- Ask for clarification in the policies where it is needed.



If your district has no policy regarding immigration enforcement in place:

- Look at examples of these kinds of policies, such as this [sample protocol](#).
- Talk with school or district leaders about steps needed to establish a school-wide protocol if immigration enforcement agents come to the school.
- Share examples of other districts' policies.
- Consult with immigration attorneys and school district attorneys as needed.

Educators and staff should also review district discipline policies to better understand how they may [impact immigrant students](#).

It is important to keep in mind that:

- educators should not give legal advice about what any specific family should do, other than to refer them to “know your rights” information or to consult an attorney
- any educator or staff member may be asked about immigration enforcement by a student or family
- educators working directly with immigrant families may be well-informed about these issues based on independent research and experience.

Recommended resources

School district guidance

- [Sacramento City Unified School District](#)

Guides

- [Responding to Law Enforcement Activities on School Grounds](#) (Stanford Law School and the California Charter Schools Association)
- [Undocumented Students and Families: The Facts](#) – also available [in Spanish](#) (The Association of California School Administrators)
- [Responding to Requests for Access to School Grounds for Immigration-Enforcement Purposes](#) (Office of the California Attorney General)
- [Position Paper on Undocumented Students: Recommendations for School Leaders](#) (National Association of Secondary School Principals)
- [Immigration Enforcement and Access on School Grounds](#) (Informed Immigrants)



Virginia state superintendent memo on immigration

This state [memo](#) answers the following questions:

- What legal responsibilities do division [district] superintendents have in reference to federal executive actions concerning immigration that may impact students enrolled in local school divisions?
- What legal responsibility do districts have towards Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) officials on this issue?
- What are the legal obligations of districts towards students in the case that their parents are taken into custody or deportation proceedings and their children are left alone or homeless?
- Do districts have the authority to take action in support of students and their families whose fears of deportation are heightened?

Articles

- [Creating an Ethic of Community: How School Leaders Make Decisions Related to Immigration Policy](#) (Dr. Emily Crawford-Rossi, University of Missouri)
- [Finding Answers for Our Immigrant Students and Families: An ELL District Leader's Perspective](#) (Kristina Robertson, ELL Program Administrator – Roseville Public Schools, Minnesota)



Help families keep emergency contact information updated

Overview

One of the most important things that schools and early childhood programs can do to support immigrant families is to help keep accurate emergency contact records. It is essential that schools and early childhood programs not only gather emergency contact records for each child but also make it easy for families to update them as needed and provide frequent reminders to do so. Educators who have [experienced immigration raids in their community](#) say that **this is one of the most critical steps** educators can take on behalf of immigrant families.

This step can make a significant difference in the outcome of a family's situation where questions of legal guardianship are at stake. Children of detained parents/guardians can end up in foster care, as seen in [this family's story from NPR](#).

Tips for getting started

How to make it easier for families to update information

- Ask for multiple contacts of trusted adults for each student, as well as for older siblings. Be diligent about collecting this information at the beginning of the school year or when the child enrolls, and explain applicable privacy laws regarding personal information.
- Review your contact forms and procedures from the point of view of ELL/immigrant families. For example, translate emergency contact forms and help immigrant families understand what they are, through an interpreter or parent liaison if necessary.
- Include reminders to update contact information in all school- or district-wide communications and events so that immigrant families do not feel singled out.
- Ensure that families have instructions on how to update their contact information. Confirm that they understand those instructions.
- If updates must be made online, ask parent liaisons to talk with families about:
 - which kinds of information can be updated online
 - how the process works
 - where they can find Internet access (perhaps at school or a public library).
- Even if families are reluctant to share contact information, or seem to be moving frequently, encourage them to keep their information current.



- In the event that parents can't be reached and staff suspect they may have been detained or deported, train staff and administrators to follow all parental instructions and exhaust contact options to find a "[known caretaker in a safe environment](#)" (Stanford Law School & California Charter School Association, 2017, p. 17) in an effort to minimize referrals to child protective services. (See related state legislation addressing this issue in [California's Assembly Bill 699](#), passed in 2017.)
- Share these recommendations with school and district administrators as needed.

See additional information about [making a plan to care for children](#) whose parent may be unavailable, as well as guides that can help prepare families [prepare for separation](#), in our section about legal resources that may be available to immigrant families as they review their situations.

Recommended resources

- [Help Parents and Caretakers Prepare in Case They Are Detained](#) (Stanford Law School and the California Charter School Association)
- [Lessons from Postville: How an Immigration Raid Changed a Small Town and Its Schools](#) (Colorín Colorado)
- [Dozens of Children Stranded at Day Care Centers After an Immigration Raid in Ohio](#) (*The Washington Post*)



Make a plan to care for children whose caregivers are unavailable

Why this matters

Schools and early childhood centers are finding themselves in the unexpected position of caring for children whose parents, caregivers, or guardians have been detained during the day. Having some protocols in place for this situation improves the chance of finding an appropriate, known caregiver for students. The UCLA research team notes that two administrators who responded to their survey reported that they were investigating foster parenting in case they needed to take students home with them (Gándara and Ee, 2018a).

Support for students

Family separation, detention, or deportation can cause intense trauma, stress, [economic hardship](#), and uncertainty for students. Learn more about those impacts as well as how to address them in our sections in this guide on:

- [the impacts of immigration enforcement](#)
- what educators need to know about [anxiety and trauma](#)
- [what it's like to be undocumented](#)
- [how to address social-emotional needs of students](#).

Tips for getting started

Find out if your district/program has a basic protocol for educators to follow if parents, caregivers, or guardians have been detained. If so, review it to see what it entails. If not, consider creating one that includes:

- what employees should do if they suspect a parent has been detained or deported
- whom to contact
- where the child should stay until emergency contacts are reached
- guidance on following all parental instructions and exhausting contact options to find a “known caregiver in a safe environment” (Stanford Law School & California Charter School Association, 2017, p. 17) in an effort to minimize referrals to child protective services
- providing emergency/temporary shelter care as needed
- access to social-emotional support and services



- guidance on working with child protective services should all options be exhausted to ensure the best possible outcomes for the child
- [additional actions to take](#) to protect children whose parents have been arrested, detained, or are otherwise unavailable.

Note: As part of [California’s Assembly Bill 699](#) (2017), schools in California must take appropriate steps to minimize referrals to child protective services if a parent or guardian becomes unavailable due to immigration enforcement action.

Recommended resources

Articles and news items

- [Lessons from Postville: How an Immigration Raid Changed a Small Town and Its Schools](#) (Colorín Colorado)
- [114 Workers Arrested in Immigration Raid at Ohio Gardening Company](#) (*The Washington Post*)

Guides, toolkits, and recommendations

- [Actions to Help Parents and Caretakers Prepare in Case They Are Detained, Arrested, or Otherwise Unavailable](#) (Stanford Law School and the California Charter Schools Association)
- [Responding to the Detention or Deportation of a Student’s Family Member](#) (California Attorney General)
- [Protecting Assets and Child Custody in the Face of Deportation](#) (Appleseed): This bilingual manual contains detailed information on issues ranging from school safety, child custody, psychological issues for children, special considerations for survivors of domestic violence and sexual assault, and financial services and products including credit cards, debit cards, mortgages and rental payments, taxes, veteran benefits, and much more.
- [Caring for students whose parents or caregivers are detained or deported](#) (Informed Immigrants)



Consider creating community outreach partnerships with fire or police departments

Why this matters

You may wish to explore partnerships with local fire or police organizations to build relationships with the community at a time of uncertainty. The Center for Law and Social Policy shares the story of a young child who tried to hide his mother when they saw a police officer for fear that she would be arrested (Cervantes, Ullrich, & Matthews, 2018, p. 10).

In order to build bridges, many schools [are creating partnerships](#) with police community liaisons and/or bringing police officers to the school in informal settings (basketball games, barbeques, family events etc.). You may find that public safety departments are looking for avenues to increase outreach. Working with these partners can strengthen community relationships and **also improve safety** if families feel more confident reporting emergencies or other problems. A teacher shared a story with us about a young girl who met a firefighter at school; she later confided in him that, during a family emergency, she felt more comfortable calling the fire department after having met him than she would have otherwise.

Tips for getting started

- If you would like to try this kind of partnership, first find out which local organizations might be a good fit. Your mayor's or county executive's office might have suggestions about where to start. If you want to explore a partnership with local police departments, work closely with the local police officials to determine their policies regarding immigration enforcement, as well as to establish shared goals and expectations for the partnership.
- If you share common goals and want to try the partnership, be sure to communicate clearly what the goals of the partnership to families are so that they know what to expect and are not surprised to see police officers in an unexpected setting. Seeing a uniformed official at the school may cause families to panic.
- Explore partnerships with local firefighters or park rangers as an alternative or first step.
- Keep in mind that some police departments may be more proactive in cooperating with immigration officials. Remember that school personnel have an obligation to protect [students' rights and privacy](#); there is no "duty" to report undocumented immigrants.

Recommended videos

- [A community partnership with local police officers](#) (Principal Nathaniel Provencio)





Local safety partnerships

Police department partnerships

In [this excerpt from her article](#) on supporting immigrant families, Kristina Robertson writes,

We have a good relationship with our local police force and collaborate regularly with the police community liaison to increase positive connections with our new immigrant community. As stories of raids began to emerge and families contacted school staff regarding their fears, I had a conversation with the police community liaison. He was very interested in helping and we really puzzled about what that might look like given the amount of fear in the community...At this time we decided to keep the conversation open and it's been very helpful to have a connection to check on problems that are reported in the community.

Fire department partnerships

Principal Victor Tam of San Francisco's Edwin and Anita Lee Newcomer Center writes,

We have a connection with our San Francisco Fire Department. It initiated with informal connections with firefighters when they came out to our school to run drills. The partnership focuses on education around fire safety and general home safety, especially given the earthquakes here. I know I can call on bilingual fire department staff to come and support our work.

It reinforces the idea that, in our work at schools, it comes down to relationships. Students and families feel a deeper sense of trust and connection with our fire safety personnel. When the firefighters drive by, the kids can wave and see familiar faces in the neighborhood. For our culture and our community, there sometimes is not a strong sense of trust in connection in authority figures. If we truly believe that stronger neighborhoods and close-knit communities shape a better world, then it starts with these simple connections where the students and families get to know safety personnel on a more personal level. (Personal communication, October 16, 2018)



Keep informed on current events and changes in policy

Why this matters

New or updated immigration policies may be announced at any time by the federal government. In addition, local measures in your school district, municipality, or state may also change. At the most practical level, it will be important to know how any changes in policy may affect your families. On a broader level, it will be important to know what kinds of issues may be affecting your students, what they hear, and what they are feeling.

Tips for getting started

- Designate [a point person](#) on immigration.
- Look for organizations in the community and online that are providing regular updates on the issues impacting your families.
- Ask your professional networks for recommendations on where to get information.

Reminder: Encourage students and families to choose sources of information carefully

Educators have discussed the difficulty that comes from students and parents having inaccurate information or news coming from unreliable sources, like YouTube. This confusion prompted a high school student [named Katia](#) who came to this country as an unaccompanied minor to speak with some middle school students. She observed, “We got to talk in a circle and we find out, yes, some people are just feeling really stressed and they don’t know what’s going on. We have come to a conclusion that we need to put more information for parents and scholars to know more about what’s going on instead of randomly saying little pieces of things that they heard.” See more on the issue of media literacy in [4 Practical Steps to Help Immigrant Families in Your School Community](#) from *Education Week*.

Recommended resources

- Colorín Colorado social media: [Facebook Page](#); [Facebook ELL Group](#); and [Twitter Feed](#)
- [Key Facts About U.S. Immigration Policies and Proposed Changes](#) (Pew Research Center, 2018)



Connecting Families with Legal Resources

Families have varied wishes for how much information they want young children to know (about their situation), and we need to find ways to support students while also respecting families' wishes. Each family approaches the situation differently, so educators need to ask questions about how families are approaching talking to children.

– Educator, American Federation of Teachers ELL Cadre

Key Takeaways

- Schools can help connect families with legitimate legal advice and support, often presented by a community partner or advocacy organization. This information and support may focus on families' and steps or decisions that could have a big impact on their situation and on their children.
- Partner organizations can help pinpoint the information that will best serve your population of families.

See this information online

Connecting Families with Legal Support

- View online: <http://www.colorincolorado.org/immigration/guide/legal>
- Download PDF: <http://www.colorincolorado.org/immigration/guide/legal-pdf>

Complete guide: <http://www.colorincolorado.org/immigration/guide>

Excerpted from *How to Support Immigrant Students and Families*.

Provide families with information about trusted legal resources

Why this matters

Connecting families with free or low-cost legal help could have a significant impact on their situation. It is important to note that immigrant families are particularly vulnerable to fraudulent “attorneys” who charge ongoing fees for their services. (See more about scams targeting immigrant clients in the following information.) In addition, immigrant children in deportation or asylum proceedings [do not have the right to publicly-funded court-appointed lawyers](#). There may be immigrant organizations offering pro bono legal help that could make a big difference to a family. These organizations:

- are more likely to have accurate and up-to-date information, particularly as events move quickly
- may be able to provide advice and materials in settings not restricted by district rules
- may have professionals who can connect families with immediate legal advice.

Note: Here are some tips for figuring out [what kind of outreach is allowed](#) in your setting. This information should not be interpreted as legal advice. Any individual or organization seeking legal advice related to immigration issues should consult with the appropriate attorneys, local government officials, or non-profit organizations specializing in immigration law that can offer guidance. **We also remind educators not to provide legal advice.**

Tips for getting started

- Your district may have guidelines or rules about what is considered legal advice or support. Check those carefully as you get started.
- Look around the community for trusted resources and partners that can provide pro bono legal advice, such as a legal practice or law school.
- Look for ways to connect families to these kinds of resources by:
 - providing translated flyers parents with contact information or legal hotlines
 - offering information in one-on-one conversations with families
 - hosting workshops and information sessions for parents
 - finding out what resources or events are available through your teacher’s union.



Note: The California courts have developed a [bilingual resource directory](#) about basic state and federal immigration information, how to find immigration legal help, and resources if children are separated from their parents.

Help for immigrant families: Guidance for schools

The Immigrant Legal Resource Center offers the following additional tips for schools in their guide on [helping immigrant families](#):

- Help educate families on how to seek competent immigration help and avoid fraud.
- Encourage all families to get an immigration “checkup” to find out what protections and options that may benefit them.
- Offer families advice about which documents to keep with them at all times.

Avoiding fraud: Scams targeting immigrants

There are many different scams targeting immigrants, often promising to help change immigration status or speed along an application. (These scams can target both documented and undocumented immigrants.) These scams not only cost immigrants large sums of money that will not be recovered, they can actually hurt their immigration cases or lead to deportation. A common problem is the hiring of *notarios* ("notaries") in Latino communities. While *notarios* in Latin America may have legitimate legal credentials, that is not the case in the U.S. They are not qualified to provide legal advice and often take advantage of neighbors who feel more comfortable hiring someone from their home country who speaks Spanish.

Learn more about *notarios* and how to help immigrants avoid scams from the following resources and videos. Note that official government documents, even in the form of hand-outs, may make some families nervous. Be sensitive in how you distribute this information.

Recommended resources

Legal resources from Informed Immigrants

- [Strategy: How to help families find qualified immigration legal services](#)
- [Resources for finding legal assistance](#)

Flyers

- [Anti-Fraud Flyers](#) – also in [Spanish](#) (Immigration Legal Resource Center)
- ["The Wrong Help Can Hurt" Flyer](#) in multiple languages (U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services)



FAQ and background information

- [Who is authorized to help immigrants with their legal matters?: FAQ in Multiple Languages](#) (StopNotarioFraud.org)
- [Scams Against Immigrants: Basic Overview](#) – also in [Spanish](#) (Consumer.gov)
- [Common Scams Against Immigrants](#) (United States Citizenship and Immigration Services)
- [Avoiding Immigration Scams](#) (Boundless)

News headlines

- [Notario Scammers Target Houston's Immigrant Communities](#) (Houston Public Media)
- [Long Time Con Artists Targets Immigrants](#) (Documented)

Recommended videos

These videos are available from the StopNotarioFraud.org website:

- [The Truth About Notarios](#)
- [La Verdad Acerca los Notarios](#) (Spanish version)



Partnerships with legal advocacy groups

Educators have partnered with local, state, regional, and national groups to provide information for families such as:

- CASA de Maryland
- the National Immigration Law Council
- the ACLU
- Catholic Family Charities
- Tennessee Immigrant and Refugee Rights Coalition
- the Mexican Consulate
- Do Good Roseville (Roseville, MN)

One respondent in our survey mentioned that she asked the interpreters who help families in court to come and present to families about their rights and put signs on doors with information that would be accessible to families with low literacy skills.



Connect families with experts who can help them plan for possible separation

Why this matters

Many schools are addressing the question of possible separation due to family detention or deportation through the following steps, usually taken with immigrant advocates who can guide parents through difficult conversations with great sensitivity and attention to practical matters. This expertise is essential on legal questions of guardianship and caretaking.

This is a delicate line to walk. A one-size-fits-all approach may not work well and different families will have varying needs depending on their situation. Nevertheless, a little bit of information and forethought can go a long way in giving children the best chance for a stable situation in the event of separation, especially since children of detained parents can quickly end up in foster care. (See more information on this topic in our sections on [emergency contact information](#) and the [protocols](#) for caring for children when a caregiver is unavailable.)

What will families be asked to consider?

A helpful overview of this topic can be found in [Protecting Undocumented and Vulnerable Students](#). These steps include:

- **Encouraging families to have a written plan in place in the event of separation:** Some schools and advocates are helping parents find guidance on what kind of plans they should have in place in the [event of separation or detention](#). These might include:
 - designating legal guardians, a particularly important decision for parents of children with [special education needs](#) (see related coverage of this issue in [The L.A. Times](#) and [The Washington Post](#))
 - establishing power of attorney
 - gathering necessary information related to the child's care (particularly medical information)
 - [getting passports for U.S.-born children](#) from parents' country of birth, such as Mexico
- **Ensuring that families understand that all plans must be in writing:** Many families may not realize that these plans need to be put into writing in order to take effect.



Tips for getting started

- Consult with legal experts on the information families need and how best to share it.
- “Take the temperature” on whether families are interested in this information; ask parent liaisons before talking with families themselves. Some may want the information, while others will not wish to discuss it or expose their children to the topic. Families may also have preferences on whether they get this information publicly or in private.

Reminder: The importance of sound legal advice

If families are considering giving power of attorney or guardianship of their children to a trusted adult, **it is imperative that they:**

- get sound legal advice and are not consulting with fraudulent immigration lawyers
- understand that all decisions **must be recorded in writing**
- understand all implications of those decisions.

Recommended resources

- [Family Preparedness Plan](#) in English, Spanish, and Chinese, with a related [webinar](#) (Immigrant Legal Resource Center)
- [Immigration Resources: State of Connecticut Family Preparedness Plan](#) in 8 languages
- [Family preparedness plans](#) (Informed Immigrants)
- [Resources for Families Facing Deportation and Separation](#) (Women’s Refugee Commission)
- [Prepare for Possible Family Separation](#) – also in [Spanish](#) (California Courts)
- [Information about](#) a pocket emergency-preparedness guide for immigrant families created and printed by the city of New Haven, CT
- A guide [on this topic in Spanish issued by the Mexican government](#)



Parent information folders

Educators in Minneapolis created education accordion folders where parents could store important information in one place that they could take quickly and easily if needed for legal reasons or if they had to move. The accordion tabs included: Assessments, support services (staff names, roles, contact information), student work/report cards, medical information, communication (letters from school/emails), legal guardianship, etc. This strategy can be used for any family in a K-12 or early childhood setting.

Consider creating a “letters of support” policy

Why this matters

When families experience immigration proceedings such as detention or court hearings, their lawyer may ask them to collect letters of reference to demonstrate the good character of the person and/or family. Individual families may request such letters from administrators, teachers, guidance counselors, parent liaisons, and social workers.

It may be an issue that requires some consideration. In the school district that provided the sample guidance below, there was much discussion about whether to provide these letters since the district had a policy of not providing letters for family disputes. After extensive review, the superintendent decided that the district would provide these letters when requested, clearly stating that they were going to do this because it supported families staying together – which has a direct impact on students’ learning.

Tips for getting started

The first step is to determine whether the district has a policy on this issue. If not, since these are legal documents, it is important for schools, centers, and districts to determine how to approach this issue, including whether these letters will be provided. If the district does decide to provide letters in appropriate cases, it will be helpful to have [a policy](#) indicating:

- who will write and sign the letters
- what kind of information will be included
- how letters should be requested and processed.

Recommended resources

- [Parent Letters of Support: Sample Guidance and Letter](#) (Kristina Robertson, ELL Program Administrator – Roseville Public Schools, MN)
- [How School/District Leaders Can Provide Social and Emotional Support for Immigrant Students](#) (ShareMyLesson and Colorín Colorado Webinar)

Recommended videos

- [Writing Letters of Support for Immigrant Families](#) (Nathaniel Provencio – Principal, Minnieville Elementary School, VA)



Take time to listen to families who want to talk about returning to their home country

Why this matters



Educators are hearing from families who want to discuss important, complicated decisions about whether they might return voluntarily to their home countries, even if their children are U.S. citizens. Schools can play an important role in these conversations by providing families with an opportunity to discuss their options and considerations that might impact their decision. The challenges of integrating students in a new school system are significant. Dr. Sarah Gallo, a researcher based in Mexico who is working with U.S.-born students enrolled in Mexican schools (which now number more than 500,000), has noted two significant factors in the schooling of this population:

- Mexican schools do not offer "Spanish as a second language," which means that students are in a "sink or swim" environment for some time.
- Special education services can differ greatly, and in some cases, be very costly.

At the same time, returning to a home country can provide positive opportunities to reunite with family members and return to a large network of extended family. [This toolkit](#) developed with Dr. Sarah Gallo discusses these issues in depth and also provides a list of required documents for families returning to Mexico who will be enrolling their children in school. Many of these recommendations in the toolkit can be applied to other countries as well, although the school registration requirements and documents may vary.

Tips for getting started

- It is very important to be sensitive to how you communicate about these kinds of resources. **It is not appropriate for educators to encourage families to make a certain choice. Carefully consider how to communicate about these issues so that conversations are not construed as encouragement to make one decision or another.**
- If you are already holding events for immigrant families' questions and concerns, consider including this topic as one of a list of topics addressed.
- If presenting this information publicly, preface it by saying something along the following lines: "Our goal is not to encourage you to make one decision or another. Instead, we want to make sure you have as much information as possible to make the best decision for you and your family."

Recommended resources

- [Toolkit: Helping Immigrant Families Navigate Migration Decisions and Schooling in Another Country](#)
- [OSU Researcher Finds Barriers for U.S.-Born Children Thrust Into Mexican Schools](#) (WOSU Public Media)
- [Deportees' US-Born Kids Struggle in Mexican Schools](#) (*The Columbus Dispatch*)
- [This New Mexico School Welcomes Families Who Live Across the Border](#) (PBS *NewsHour*)
- [As American Kids Pour Across the Border, Mexican Schools Struggle to Keep Up](#) (*USA Today*)

Recommended videos

- [Difficult decisions immigrant families are making about special education and their kids](#) (Lydia Breiseth, Director, Colorín Colorado)



Encouraging Staff Collaboration

We began the “Community Support Team” to bring together cultural liaisons, district leaders, social workers, and teachers to provide guidance on what was happening in the field, helpful resources and how to best share them...It’s very helpful to have this group to discuss and contribute ideas and members to do fact-checking or check in with others with related experience. Team members said they really appreciated the time to be together and share their thoughts and feelings with others.

– [Kristina Robertson](#), English Learner Program Administrator, Roseville Public Schools, Minnesota

Key Takeaways

- Collaboration can greatly improve the ways schools support immigrant families by bringing multiple perspectives to the table, increasing opportunities to share information, and allowing staff to identify ways to make their outreach more efficient and effective.
- In addition, teachers’ unions can play an important role in collaboration and outreach to immigrant families.



See this information online

Encouraging Staff Collaboration

- View online: <http://www.colorincolorado.org/immigration/guide/collaboration>
- Download PDF: <http://www.colorincolorado.org/immigration/guide/collaboration-pdf>

Complete guide: <http://www.colorincolorado.org/immigration/guide>

Excerpted from *How to Support Immigrant Students and Families*.

Overview

The staff who work with English Language Learner (ELL) and immigrant families (ESOL specialists, ELL/bilingual paraprofessionals, parent liaisons, interpreters, etc.) are a valuable asset. They know these students and families well, perhaps better than anyone in the school, and will be able to bring important insights to any conversations regarding the questions and concerns of students and families. Including them as equal and respected members of the team is a critical step towards collaboration. Nevertheless, they cannot be expected to manage these issues singlehandedly, nor to be experts on the issues and questions (particularly around legal topics) that immigrant families may have.

The most successful approaches to collaboration will be school-wide/program-wide, led by administrators and involving all:

- ESOL teachers, bilingual staff and liaisons, and interpreters
- classroom teachers and counselors
- custodial, cafeteria, administrative, and bussing staff
- administration
- substitute teachers
- school resource officers/security personnel.

These professionals will have a wide range of interactions with students at different times and in different settings. Not only are there certain guidelines they should be following related to immigrant students, but they can be a valuable source for support and ideas. As a team, you can brainstorm ways to engage members of the staff around these issues. Here are some strategies for engaging staff and encouraging collaboration.



Designate a point person on immigration issues

Why this matters

Having a lead contact on immigration issues can make it easier for the whole staff to stay updated. This might be a parent liaison, social worker, ELL or bilingual teacher, or someone else who has contacts with families and community organizations that are monitoring changing events closely. This person can also stay up-to-date on policy, what other districts are doing, and when outside guidance will be needed.

Tips for getting started

- Identify a staff member who is well-versed in immigration issues, or interested in learning. If it is a role you'd like to take on, consider volunteering!
- Look for resources that will help you stay-up-date, as well as professional networks and resources (both in the community and online).
- Find your “go-to” contacts who can answer questions and provide guidance on legal questions.

Recommended resources

- [Glossary of Common Terms: Immigration](#) (Immigrants Rising)



Consider creating an immigrant support team

Why this matters

A number of districts around the country are creating immigrant (or “community”) support teams to pull together multiple perspectives on how best to support students. This might include administrators, parent liaisons, ESOL/bilingual teachers, classroom teachers, counselors or social workers, other staff members, parents, students, and community members.

Tips for getting started

- Discuss the needs that are most urgent to address.
- Consider whether a similar model might be useful in supporting other populations or whether you can learn lessons from other school-/district-wide teams.
- Start with small goals that are achievable and realistic for the group.
- Spend some time getting to know each other and building trust.
- Take time to reflect and relax as a group.
- Identify possible partners in the community.

Recommended resources

- [All Hands on Deck: Creating Immigrant Support Teams in Topeka](#) (Sarah Fladwood-Handley – Elementary ELL Coach, Topeka, Kansas)
- [Finding Answers for Our Immigrant Students and Families](#) (Kristina Robertson, ELL Program Administrator – Roseville Public Schools, Minnesota)



Immigrant support teams

Harrisonburg, VA

Superintendent [Scott Kizner](#) writes about his (former) district’s crisis team:

Staffs representing the departments have been assigned to keep informed of events and information pertaining to immigration. The team consists of our community coordinator, head of psychological services, assistant superintendents, HS principal, EL coordinators. We are also working with [New Bridges](#), an agency that serves immigrants...This group is prepared to respond to situations quickly if necessary.



Immigrant support teams (continued)

Topeka, KS

ELL elementary coach Sarah Fladwood-Handley describes the [immigrant support teams](#) created in Topeka, KS, which have had far-reaching effects:

After creating our plan and holding our initial parent sessions, with the support of district administration, we suggested each school form Immigrant Support Teams that could include, but are not limited to: ELL teachers, administrators, social workers, counselors, interpreters, and front office staff. The Immigrant Support Team could:

- *create a plan in the event a student's family member is detained, not able to be located, or other related crisis*
- *provide support for students experiencing immigration-related crisis and/or stress*
- *help educate classroom teachers and staff regarding students' rights, present ideas for teachers, and be knowledgeable about resources.*

So far schools have received this information very well and most schools have begun to form their teams. Many schools are also putting immigration-related stress as a topic for discussion at mental health team meetings.

Roseville, MN

Kristina Robertson describes her efforts to create a [Community Support Team](#), which also included cultural liaisons from the African-American and Native American communities. The group's collaboration was particularly important following a local crisis – the shooting of Philando Castille by a police officer. Philando was a nutrition services worker in a neighboring district who had close ties to students and staff in Kristina's district:

The shooting shook our community. We have been working with youth and families to address that tragedy and to develop ways to increase safety, so it seemed like a natural connection for our Community Support Team. That's why we didn't have "Immigrant" in the title. We want the team's work to be flexible and to encompass whatever concerns may arise in our community.



Collaborate with the local teachers' union

Why this matters

An additional ally in this work may be your local, state, or national teachers' union. The American Federation of Teachers and National Education Association have done extensive work supporting immigrant students, families, and educators, including:

- “know your rights” training (both in-person and online)
- sharing educator testimonials
- offering guidance on what steps teachers can take to support students
- providing support for “DACA-mented” teachers (teachers with DACA)
- providing legal guidance and support for teachers with questions about advocacy.

One educator wrote in our survey, “Our teacher's union has pulled together a number of resources and toolkits for teachers – the unions can be a great resource.”

Tips for getting started

- Ask your local union about what resources they have on topics of interest.
- Take a look at these national immigration websites for additional resources:
 - [American Federation of Teachers](#)
 - [National Education Association](#)



Clarify what is allowed in terms of advocacy and outreach

Why this matters

Many teachers have questions about what they are allowed to do in terms of outreach to immigrant families. Schools and districts are handling this issue differently, especially regarding the use of school facilities and teacher involvement in sharing information on families' rights. Questions may arise about meeting on school property, inviting outside advocates or lawyers to meet with families, or sending home "know your rights" pamphlets.

Districts have different kinds of approaches to this kind of outreach, including:

- clear guidance to staff about what is permitted, such as the example of Superintendent [Scott Kizner](#) of Stafford County Schools, VA (formerly the leader of Harrisonburg, VA schools)
- quiet support of teachers sharing contact information of immigrant organizations
- explicit prohibition of any activity on this issue.

Often teachers themselves are looking for guidance from the district. One teacher noted, "In my city, in Texas, there are 5 different school districts and each district has their own interpretation of what teachers are allowed to do, which limits us."

Tips for getting started

For school/district leaders

- Find out whether your district has a policy regarding educator advocacy and outreach, and if so, learn what it includes.
- Talk with educators to find out what their questions are, which may already be addressed by current policy. Chances are that if a few teachers have questions, others do too. Staff may wish to be supportive of students but fearful of repercussions.
- Take steps to clarify related policy for staff, and consider creating a policy if none exists.

For educators

- Ask building leaders, district officials, and your local teacher's union about what is permitted. Your state may also have some guidance on this issue.
- Share what you learn with colleagues and leaders in your building and district.





Asking until you get an answer

A teacher who responded to our 2017 survey noted,

I haven't been able to find resources for teachers like me, who are in districts where they're not getting the directive or support from administration. I need to understand what the parameters are for what I can and should say to support students without putting myself at risk of being reprimanded or fired.

We followed up with this educator, and as it turned out, she had asked her questions so many times that she had been scheduled for a meeting with her superintendent. He was surprised to learn of the impacts of these issues on their district's immigrant families.

That meeting led to a district-level communication effort and clarification of policy – and to [an article on Colorín Colorado!](#) Her story is a powerful example of the impact that one person can have, as well as of the kinds of advocacy that educators are doing every day on behalf of their students.

She wrote in our article,

I was affirmed in my instinct that I had to keep talking to everyone I could in any kind of leadership position in order to try to serve my students well. Everyone knew that I was acting out of concern for my students, so they were open to talking with me. My persistence eventually got me both the audience, and information, I needed.

I also learned that arming myself with information before I had these conversations was really useful – I needed to feel confident in what I knew and clear about what I was asking for. It helped to rehearse what I wanted to say to the superintendent before the meeting – so I could share the stories and information in a clear, concise way and link those stories to my requests for clarification and information.

Editorial note: Given the sensitive nature of the topic, the teacher requested that we not share her name or school district.



Share personal stories

Why this matters

A personal story can be a powerful tool. Stories help colleagues, leaders, and community members understand how or why a particular issue is impacting a student or family in ways that other kinds of information may not. For example, when Mandy Manning, the 2018 National Teacher of the Year, traveled to Washington, DC to receive her award, she took the opportunity to [share a stack of her immigrant/refugee students'](#) letters with the White House as a way of lifting up her students' experiences.

Note: You can learn more about Mandy's experiences from [her interview](#) with Colorín Colorado, as well as from her remarks at a Migration Policy Institute panel discussion about UNESCO's 2018 report, [Migration, Displacement, and Education: Building Bridges, Not Walls](#).

Tips for getting started

If you decide that you would like to include some personal stories as part of outreach or training efforts:

- invite individuals who have publicly shared their stories to talk with colleagues, such as students, parents, staff members (i.e., [teachers working with DACA](#)), and community members
- share student stories on their behalf, respecting privacy
- share online videos of students, teachers, and celebrities talking about these issues.

You can also help students tell their stories with the ideas shared in the Colorín Colorado article [Building Bridges Through Storytelling: What Are Your Students' Stories?](#)

Note: Do careful planning before these activities. Never assume that an individual is willing to talk about their story publicly, or that others know the same information that you do. Also, keep in mind that some students [may not wish to share information](#) about their home country, immigration story, or place of birth in classroom activities (see more on [the topic of immigrant students' silence below](#)).



Recommended resources

- [Building Bridges Through Storytelling: What Are Your Students' Stories?](#) (Colorín Colorado)
- [Rusul Alrubail: I was a refugee. I'm haunted by today's images of child refugees](#) (*PBS NewsHour*)
- News coverage of Lizandro and Diego Claros Saravia, brothers deported after an immigration check-in from [The Washington Post](#), [NBC News](#), and [Sports Illustrated](#)
- [Common Bond for Miami Schools Chief, Student: Being Undocumented](#) (*Education Week*)

Resources from Re-imagining Migration

- [Educator Spotlight: Engaging Stories of Migration to Tell Our Own](#)
- [Poem – “Refuge”](#): JJ Bola reading his poem about his experiences as a refugee from the Democratic Republic of Congo (video)
- [Poem – “Where I’m From”](#): A poem by a student, Karolen, inspired by [Jean-Michel Dissard’s I Learn America Project](#)

Recommended videos

- [Videos: ELL and Immigrant Student Stories](#)
- [A Long Journey on a Cattle Raft](#) (Diana Alqadhi, English Language Development Specialist – Dearborn, Michigan)
- [Student Reporting Labs: Immigration Videos](#) (*PBS NewsHour*)
- [Syrian children in Turkey heal through storytelling](#) (*PBS NewsHour*)

Note: See additional examples of personal stories in our section on the [impact of immigration issues](#) on students.



Moving stories app

The [Moving Stories app](#), offered by Re-imagining Migration, allows students to record their families' stories and view other students' stories. The App and these accompanying lessons provide an opportunity to build empathy and understanding across diverse student experiences. It also offers empowering experiences for (often) invisible students in the classroom.

Providing Social-Emotional Support for Staff

It is very important for teachers and staff to exercise, talk to friends, and find what gives them joy daily.

– [Nereida Robles](#), Social Worker, Santa Cruz Public Schools, California

Key Takeaways

- Immigration issues can have a personal impact on staff as well as students.
- Some educators who serve immigrant students are reporting higher levels of stress, along with a greater workload and a loss of sense of community within their school.
- School leaders can play a critical role in creating a supportive environment for staff.



See this information online

Providing Social-Emotional Support for Staff

- View online: <http://www.colorincolorado.org/immigration/guide/support-staff>
- Download PDF: <http://www.colorincolorado.org/immigration/guide/staff-pdf>

Complete guide: <http://www.colorincolorado.org/immigration/guide>

Excerpted from *How to Support Immigrant Students and Families*.



Overview

Helping students and families address the challenges they face can be emotionally taxing. Some of the respondents to our survey noted this:

- *Our teachers and staff, as all teachers, see a lot of heartache, witness effects of deportation. It would be good to have resources on how to debrief, seek respite, reenergize, etc.*
- *Teachers are having difficulty coping with the responsibility of helping children, many of whom are traumatized. More attention needs to be paid to counseling teachers so that they may better cope and keeping them informed of best practices for helping the kids.*

This is now borne out by research conducted by a team of researchers at UCLA who interviewed teachers through a national survey. Teachers who responded to the survey reported:

- Symptoms consistent with Secondary Traumatic Stress (STS), which is “the emotional duress that results when an individual hears about the firsthand trauma experiences of another”
- A significant increase in anxiety and stress
- A sense of helplessness
- Impacts on physical well-being as well as emotional and mental well-being, such as getting less sleep due to worry or working longer days
- An increased workload as educators take on more responsibilities, look for more resources and information, and address more challenges.

One community school coordinator wrote, "I have spent more weeks working 50 - 60 hours to assure that our community feels safe, to prevent increases in student absences, and to encourage student involvement in education opportunities than ever before..." (Sanchez, Freeman, and Martin, 2018, p. 1-2).

Note: See more on the impacts of secondary traumatic stress on educators in [this article from KQED's MindShift blog](#).



Serving students who have experienced trauma

In addition, educators who serve students who are refugees, have been displaced by natural disasters, or have experienced other types of trauma may benefit from opportunities to debrief with colleagues and support each other.

For example, even though Puerto Rican students are U.S. citizens, those who came to mainland schools after Hurricane Maria experienced [similar challenges as many newcomers and refugees](#). Educators working with these students talk about the importance of:

- checking in with colleagues
- having time to discuss what they are hearing from students
- looking for ways to support staff working long hours.



Learning how to listen

Social worker Nereida Robles from Santa Cruz, CA, who works with a number of immigrant students from Central America, shares the following ideas in her interview with [Colorín Colorado](#):

If educators and social workers find a safe way to share their experiences with others who understand the stress and anxiety of this type of work, that can be very relieving. The district social workers talk to each other and seek support and guidance. My former supervisor also offered time to listen to my experiences while working with the newcomer students. Teachers also need to support each other by learning how to be good listeners to their students. Because the Newcomer students' experiences are so vastly different than their teachers, it is very difficult for teachers to step into their shoes.

One way to do so is to coach other teachers to learn to listen. It is imperative for teachers and school staff to fully realize that the [behavior of these students](#) cannot be interpreted in the same way as other non-traumatized students. Teachers can ease their stress by looking for their students' strengths and how best to bring out those strengths in the classroom.



Keep in mind that immigration issues may also affect staff personally

Why this matters

You may have immigrants or members of immigrant families on your staff who have their own personal concerns about the impact of immigration policies, such as changes to Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA), Temporary Protected Status (TPS), extended separations from family members, or the proposed changes to “public charge” rules. Staff members may have also experienced bullying or harassment (either in the school setting or beyond), and may be particularly attuned to steps that leaders are taking to create a welcoming environment for immigrants.

Tips for getting started

- In all of your discussions and decisions related to immigration issues, remember that these topics may be quite personal for staff members as well as students. For example, a welcoming message should be inclusive of staff as well as students and families, and inappropriate comments should be avoided **at all times**, not just in front of students.
- Provide all staff with opportunities to privately and/or anonymously ask questions, express concerns, and make suggestions around these issues. They may have their own concerns or information about what students are feeling and experiencing.
- At the same time, avoid making assumptions about staff’s own situations or relationships with students based on their ethnic/cultural background. Approach any conversations about these topics with sensitivity and an open mind.
- Celebrate staff’s contributions and diversity publicly. For example, show appreciation for a family liaison’s language skills or share an example of a teacher who made a difference for an immigrant student. Not only does this create a culture of respect, it shows other staff members what is possible, highlights the diverse skill set of the staff, and may provide some additional ideas for collaboration.
- Remind all staff of policies related to workplace harassment and discrimination as needed.

Recommended resources

To learn more about teachers working with DACA, see our [related resources section](#).



Take steps to prevent burn-out

Why this matters

It is important to build opportunities to reflect, recharge, and rest into everyone's schedules, including your own. If you are a school leader, this is a particularly critical area where leadership is needed.

Tips for getting started

- Ask teachers and staff what they would find helpful, enjoyable, and restorative. Perhaps some would like to try some activities as a team, while others might like a little bit of flexibility on their own. You can do this by creating and prioritizing:
 - outlets for the stress
 - opportunities for reflection
 - discussion about healthy boundaries
 - ways to support each other and have fun
 - activities such as restorative circles.
- Talk about stress management openly and often. Share ideas with each other.
- As difficult as it can be, fit in some down time to rest and recharge when you can. Encourage colleagues to do the same.
- Take care of yourself and your health.
- Take about the importance of setting healthy boundaries.

Recommended resources

- Our [end-of-year reflection guide](#) includes discussion questions that can be used all year.

Recommended videos

- [Advice for ELL teachers: Be good to yourselves](#) (Kristina Robertson, ELL Program Administrator – Roseville Public Schools, MN)



Strengthen professional networks

Why this matters

A strong professional network can benefit educators by providing:

- important information and resources
- valuable relationships
- opportunities to grow and learn
- new ideas
- encouragement and motivation.

This is especially helpful when tackling a complex, emotionally-charged issue like immigration, particularly if educators connect with organizations that can provide sound advice and resources.

Tips for getting started

- Encourage staff to build a network of support around the issues that matter to them (not just those related to immigration), within and beyond this school. This might include professional learning communities, online networks, or community connections.
- Look for ways to help staff pursue professional development and training that would benefit their work and the entire community, such as conferences or training days. This will also help staff expand their networks.
- Provide opportunities for staff to share networking ideas with each other, such as recommended organizations or associations, online forums, social media groups, or favorite conferences.

Recommended resources

- [ELL Resources in Your State](#)
- [TESOL International Association](#) and [TESOL State/Regional Affiliates](#)
- [Colorín Colorado's ELL Educator Group on Facebook](#)
- [#ELLChat community on Twitter](#)



Share success early and often

Why this matters

Educators are making differences in the lives of their students every day. It can be easy to lose sight of those successes in the face of large, wide-scale challenges beyond your control. However, those small successes add up over time, and sometimes a small detail, action, or conversation can make a big difference in the life of a student.

Not only does sharing these successes help boost morale, it can open everyone's eyes to new possibilities and ideas, including in settings beyond your own. ESOL specialist Katy Padilla notes that her school starts every year by sharing celebrations from the past year – not only does it get the year off on a positive note, but it often leads to new approaches and opportunities for collaboration as people hear what worked for others.

Tips for getting started

- Build in time for sharing successes during regular staff meetings, events, and communication.
- Consider creating a central place where people can post their successes throughout the year, such as a bulletin board in the teachers' lounge.
- Encourage teachers to do the same for their students in the classroom.
- Consider team-building activities where each staff member writes down something positive about every member of the team and places it in that person's folder. Everyone gets a folder full of positive comments and it encourages the staff to take a fresh look at the team and identify strengths that can be harnessed throughout the year. (See more ideas that can be adapted for staff in our section on [teaching empathy and appreciation](#).)
- Encourage colleagues to share their successes with others in their professional network.

Recommended videos

- [Sharing success stories with colleagues](#) (Katy Padilla, ESOL Specialist – Fairfax County Public Schools, VA)



What Would Be Helpful in the Future

Educators are continuously thinking about what kinds of resources or guidance they would like to see in the future. We asked what would be helpful in [our survey](#) and participants mentioned:

- legal questions about immigration and individual student rights
- addressing trauma
- teaching about immigration
- guidance on how to:
 - educate administrators/office staff on policies impacting immigrant children
 - share information with colleagues who have different political points of view.

We are also pleased to know that Colorín Colorado has been able to provide some guidance on these topics, and we will continue to share Recommended resources as they become available. The teacher who had worked with her superintendent to clarify district policy wrote us to say,

I am so grateful to your organization, and others, for providing us with timely and relevant information; it allowed me to enter this meeting feeling informed and confident, and I think it was because of that that I was able to make some progress. For teachers who are trying to juggle a thousand different balls at the same time, this kind of concrete information and support is so valuable.

Two of our survey respondents replied,

“Thank you for all you do! I’m so glad Colorín Colorado is there for us – I can access trusted resources.”

“Thank you for this survey – I’m looking for every outlet possible to engage in this conversation.”



See this information online

- **What Would Be Helpful in the Future:** <http://www.colorincolorado.org/immigration/guide/future>
- **Reflection Questions:** <http://www.colorincolorado.org/immigration/guide/reflection>
- **Complete guide:** <http://www.colorincolorado.org/immigration/guide>

Excerpted from *How to Support Immigrant Students and Families*.



Reflection Questions: Part II

Here are some questions to help you pull out some key points from this in-depth information, as well as think more deeply about your own role.

We conclude this guide with the question we asked at the beginning – how can you expand your sphere of influence? As the examples in the guide illustrate, educators of ELLs and immigrants are finding new, creative answers to that question every day.

Reflection after reading

- Which strategies seem most promising for our setting and why?
- What steps can we take to work towards those strategies?
- Which strategies can we implement in the next month? In the next year?
- What are some additional strengths of our team, school, district, students or families that occurred to me while reading?
- What are some additional challenges?
- What opportunities might those challenges present?
- What areas of support are most critical for our families currently?
- Who are some allies in the school, district, or community who can support this work?

Personal reflection

- What are some things I can do personally to support my immigrant students and families?
- What are my goals in terms of this work?
- What are my strengths?
- What are the challenges I face?
- What professional activities, networks, resources, and connections can I pursue to support this work, both within and beyond my setting?
- How can I bring this work or my students' lives and experiences into the curriculum?
- What are some changes I would like to see in my school, district, or community?
- What can I do to help make that change?
- What gives me hope?
- How can I take care of myself while doing this work?
- What is an example of a time when I made a difference in the life of a student?



Appendix: Strategies by topic

Serving immigrant students and families

- [Immigrant Students' Legal Rights: An Overview](#)
 - Ensure all staff understand immigrant students' rights
 - Review and update enrollment policies / forms
 - Protect student privacy
 - Find out what resources your district and state have available on this issue

- [Making Students and Families Feel Welcome](#)
 - Let all families know that they are welcome
 - Create a welcoming school environment
 - Get to know students and families
 - Learn more about special populations of ELL/immigrant students
 - Identify student and family strengths

- [How to Build Partnerships with Immigrant Families](#)
 - Create different channels for communication in families' languages
 - Revisit data about immigrant students
 - Encourage family leadership
 - Reach out to community organizations that represent and serve your families

- [Special Considerations for Young Children](#)
 - Look for ways to build relationships with families
 - Review program enrollment guidelines
 - Ensure staff are familiar with other policies and issues related to immigrant students
 - Look for ways to offer social-emotional support to children throughout the day
 - Provide training on the impacts of trauma and anxiety on young children



Social-emotional support for students

- [Addressing Students' Basic Needs](#)
 - Keep in mind that immigrant families' economic situations may change
 - Ensure that students experiencing homelessness have appropriate services and support

- [How Immigration Issues Impact Students](#)
 - Separation and reunification
 - Impacts of immigration enforcement
 - Being undocumented
 - What is DACA?
 - What is TPS?
 - Ideas for professional development

- [Providing Social-Emotional Support for Students](#)
 - Help students maintain their routine
 - Encourage teachers and staff to build relationships with students
 - Provide ideas for age-appropriate ways to express emotions
 - Take a closer look when you notice changes in a student's behavior
 - Look for ways to make connections to the curriculum
 - Teach empathy and appreciation
 - Pay attention to what students do – and don't say – about immigration
 - Use books in the classroom and beyond
 - Learn about how your families approach social-emotional health

- [Addressing Student Anxiety, Depression, and Trauma](#)
 - Identify resources to address student anxiety/depression
 - Learn more about the impacts of trauma and PTSD

Questions and concerns about immigration issues

- [Addressing Immigrant Families' Questions and Concerns](#)
 - Listen to immigrant families' questions and concerns
 - Be honest and discuss the kinds of support you can provide
 - Share information through outreach and events



- [Addressing Questions About Immigration Enforcement](#)
 - Become familiar with “sensitive locations” guidance
 - Review any current district policies regarding immigration enforcement
 - Help families keep their emergency contact information updated
 - Make a plan to care for children stranded following detention
 - Consider creating community partnerships with safety personnel such as fire and police departments
 - Keep informed on current events and changes in policy

- [How to Connect Immigrant Families with Legal Support and Advice](#)
 - Provide families with information about trusted legal resources
 - Take time to listen to families who wish to discuss the decision to return to a home country
 - Consider creating a policy about “letters of support”

Staff training, collaboration, and support

- [How Staff Can Collaborate on Behalf of Immigrant Students and Families](#)
 - Designate a point person to keep updated on immigration issues
 - Consider creating an immigrant support team
 - Collaborate with the local teachers’ union
 - Clarify what is allowed in terms of advocacy and outreach
 - Sharing personal stories

- [Providing Social-Emotional Supports for Staff](#)
 - Keep in mind that immigration issues may also impact staff
 - Take steps to prevent burn-out
 - Strengthen professional networks
 - Share success early and often



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