

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)

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)

