

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:

- [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)
- [College Access and Paying for College for Undocumented Students](#) (Immigrants Rising)
- [Position Paper on Undocumented Students: The Rights of Undocumented Students](#) (National Association of Secondary School Principals)
- [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)

