

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)

