

# Introduction

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

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

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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).

## 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*.