

Creating a Safe Environment for Immigrant and Refugee Students, Families, and Communities

Actions for PreK-12 Schools and Higher Education

Bullying, harassment, intimidation, and other hate-based incidents in schools and on college campuses have risen sharply this academic year and are increasing at an alarming rate. This disturbing trend is creating anxiety and fear for children and youth from immigrant and refugee backgrounds, including those who are second- and third-generation Americans. The prospect of deportation and family separation looms large for those with undocumented parents or those who are themselves unauthorized. Schools and colleges across the country are witnessing firsthand the impact of these developments, and many are struggling with how best to meet their mandate to provide a safe learning environment for all students.

Below are examples of approaches educational institutions and non-profit organizations are taking across diverse regions and contexts to address immediate concerns; respond to emerging needs; and provide a safe haven in which families feel supported and students can thrive socially, emotionally, and academically.

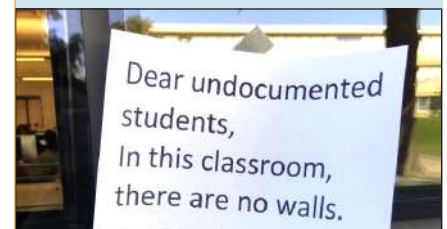
1. Affirm support for vulnerable students and families through direct communication in English and other relevant languages.

- a. Distribute a statement from the superintendent or chancellor reaffirming support for all students, regardless of immigration status. These communications, which can also be sent through school phone systems or by text, should encourage students and their families to report hate-related incidents and provide information on how to do so. Such statements have been issued by all three major public higher education systems in California,¹ **Albuquerque Public Schools**, and **Denver Public Schools**, among others. In a similar effort, a coalition of more than 120 organizations signed an open letter to education officials in California urging them to address growing fear around deportation and a spike in post-election hate crimes and bullying.
- b. Hold PTA or other group meetings with parents and primary caregivers to discuss the current policy climate and its impact on students, families, and communities.
- c. Support the efforts of teachers, counselors, and administrators to engage students and families in discussing and addressing all forms of bullying, hate-related incidents, and possible immigration enforcement activities, as well as their potential impact on student mental health and education outcomes. Provide **resources** and/or engage experienced nonprofit organizations to create a safe space for these types of conversations.
- d. Create a student support hotline. **Santa Fe Public Schools** in New Mexico has created one, which it publicized in a communication from the superintendent and on its website.

1. **California Community Colleges**, **California State University**, and **University of California**. The three systems also sent a **joint letter** to President-elect Donald Trump in support of continuing the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals program.



Educational institutions and non-profit organizations across diverse regions and contexts can address immediate concerns; respond to emerging needs; and provide a safe haven in which families feel supported and students can thrive socially, emotionally, and academically.



A sign of support to undocumented students posted by student Jasmine De La Torre at Fresno State. (Jessica Johnson/The Collegian)

2. Make sure that students and families from immigrant and refugee backgrounds have access to reputable legal resources and information about their legal rights.

- a. Host “Know Your Rights” sessions at your school or another convenient and trusted location so immigrant families understand their legal and Constitutional rights, regardless of immigration status. Many non-profit legal service organizations are willing to do this for free. To find one in your community, use directories hosted by Catholic Legal Immigration Network (CLINIC), Immigration Advocates Network (IAN), and U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Service (USCIS).
- b. Compile and make available a referral list of qualified, local non-profit immigration legal service providers. The following organizations’ directories can help: CLINIC, IAN, and USCIS.
- c. Order “Know your Rights Cards” and make them widely available at your school. The Immigrant Legal Resource Center (ILRC) provides cards for free, or you can download and print them from the National Immigration Law Center (NILC).
- d. Inform students and families on how to avoid fraudulent legal practitioners and scams. Refer to USCIS resources for guidance.
- e. Direct students with Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) status to timely and reliable information and support. See resources from Educators for Fair Consideration (E4FC), Mexican American Legal Defense Fund, NILC, and United We Dream, among others.

3. Create a safe space for all students and families.

- a. Display visuals indicating that your school is a safe place for all students, e.g., this printable sign from E4FC. Media reports cite other examples.
- b. Reinforce broadly and publicly—and perhaps in a communication from the superintendent or chancellor—that all children have the right to attend school regardless of immigration status, and that schools are forbidden from asking about immigration status of children or families. For more information refer to the American Immigration Council’s primer on *Plyler v. Doe*, the Supreme Court case that affirms these protections.
- c. Ensure that your district or campus is a safe haven for all students. Districts in Albuquerque and Los Angeles, for example, have opted to pass resolutions declaring their campuses sanctuary sites. There is a growing movement across the country to do the same among other colleges and universities, including a push on some campuses not to allow federal immigration officials (Immigration and Customs Enforcement, ICE) to enter school campuses or access student data.
- d. Establish procedures/protocols for student safety if a student is in school when a parent or guardian is detained by immigration officials, the emergency contact cannot be reached, and/or there is no one to either get the child home or to school. Share these procedures/protocols with children and families in English and other relevant languages.



For Additional Information

- Immigrant Legal Resource Center (ILRC): *Help for Immigrant Families Post-Election: Guide for Schools*
- Educators for Fair Consideration (E4FC): *Post-Election: What Educators Can Do to Support Undocumented Students*
- Emerson Collective: *Know Your Rights: Post-Election Resources for Immigrant Families*
- Mexican-American Legal Defense Fund (MALDEF): *Immigrants’ Rights FAQs Under a Trump Presidency*
- National Immigration Law Center (NILC): *Know Your Rights: Everyone Has Certain Basic Rights No Matter Who Is President*
- Southern Poverty Law Center: *Teaching Tolerance Project*
- Women’s Refugee Commission: *Make a Plan: Migrant Parents’ Guide to Preventing Family Separation*

The examples in this document were compiled by GCIR, the Grove Foundation, and the Heising-Simons Foundation using resources listed above, among others. For additional information and links to more organizations serving immigrants and refugees, visit www.gcir.org.