

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 rose in number and severity during the 2016 presidential campaign and continue to be reported at an elevated 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. Similarly, high school and college students who were formerly protected by Deferred Action by Childhood Arrivals face an uncertain future as that program's March termination date approaches. Schools and colleges across the country are witnessing firsthand the impact of these developments, and many are struggling with how best to provide a safe and inclusive learning environment for all students.

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

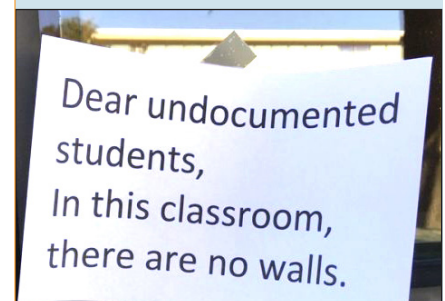
1. Affirm support for vulnerable students and families through direct communication in English and other relevant languages.

- 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 a wide variety of educational institutions, including all three major public higher education systems in California¹ and by districts in places like **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 caregivers to discuss the current policy climate and its impact on students, families, and communities. If necessary, provide translation services for those whose primary language is not English.
- 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. For example, **Santa Fe Public Schools** in New Mexico has created one, which it publicized in a communication from the superintendent and on its website.



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

1. California Community Colleges, California State University, and University of California.

2. Make sure that students and families from immigrant and refugee backgrounds have access to reputable 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, consult 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 who lack legal 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; for instance, the Sacramento City Unified School District has developed an [infographic](#) which can be found online. A variety of templates are available, e.g., E4FC has a [printable sign](#) available online.
- b. Reinforce broadly and publicly—and perhaps in a communication from the superintendent or chancellor—that all students have the right to attend school regardless of immigration status, and that schools are forbidden from asking about the immigration status of students 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 welcomes all students. To date, nearly 150 schools and districts across the nation have passed resolutions to create safe and welcoming environments for all students. There is a [growing movement](#) among colleges and universities to take similar steps, including a push by some institutions 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 examples of such policies, refer to Stanford Law School’s Law and Policy Lab’s [brief on the issue](#).



For Additional Information

- Informed Immigrant: [Resources: Information for Educators & Schools](#)
- 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](#)

For additional information and links to more organizations serving immigrants and refugees, visit www.gcir.org.