



How to Support Immigrant Students and Families: Summary Guide

Introduction

Across the country, educators are looking for ways to support immigrant students and families facing great uncertainty. In response, Colorín Colorado has produced an in-depth guide, *How to Support Immigrant Students and Families: Strategies for Schools and Early Childhood Programs*, which presents more than 50 strategies along with tips, resources, videos, related research, examples from the field, and reflection questions.

The following summary provides an overview of each section of the guide. The full guide is available online (<http://www.colorincolorado.org/guide/immigration>), as well as in a [PDF format](#).

Seeking legal guidance

This guide includes numerous resources that provide useful information for schools and educators. While some of those resources include advocacy information, Colorín Colorado and our parent organization, public broadcasting station WETA-TV-FM, do not take political positions or participate in political advocacy.

In addition, the information in this guide should not be interpreted as legal advice. Any individual or organization seeking legal advice related to immigration issues should consult with the appropriate attorneys, local government officials, or non-profit organizations specializing in immigration law. We also remind educators not to provide legal advice.

About Colorín Colorado

Colorín Colorado is a free, bilingual website that provides research-based information, activities, and advice for the families and educators of English language learners (ELLs). Colorín Colorado is based at public broadcasting station WETA in Washington, DC and is funded by our founding partner, the American Federation of Teachers, as well as the National Education Association.



Highlights: Top Ten Strategies

Our guide on supporting immigrant families includes more than 50 strategies for schools and early childhood centers. Here are some of the most important ones to keep in mind.

Help families keep their emergency contact information updated. This step can make *the* difference in whether a child goes home with a known caregiver if a family member is detained. Remind all families to update their contact information regularly.

Ensure all staff understand immigrant students' rights. All K-12 staff (and particularly staff who enroll families) have an obligation to protect students' privacy and civil rights, as well as their access to an education, regardless of immigration status.

Let all students and families know that they are welcome. A welcoming environment that celebrates students' cultures and encourages family leadership creates a strong foundation for relationships, as well as for addressing challenges.

Create different channels for communication in families' languages. Schools must communicate in families' preferred language. Identifying families' preferred means of contact can also help schools communicate more effectively and efficiently.

Become familiar with relevant immigration policies so that you can answer questions. This may include "sensitive locations guidance" (which directs immigration enforcement to avoid activity in certain public spaces like schools and early childhood centers), district policies on immigration enforcement, discipline policies, and other related program/local/state policies. Ideally, all staff should understand these policies.

Connect families with resources and provide opportunities for them to ask questions. It is critical to hear from your families about their questions and concerns before determining what kind of support will be most useful. This step will help identify which resources are appropriate to share in ways that follow district guidelines.

Reach out to community organizations that serve your families. Community partners can provide valuable support, insight, and volunteers, especially on issues related to meeting students' basic needs and connecting families to legal resources.



Learn how stress, anxiety, and trauma impact students of all ages. The impacts of these stressors will vary by age. Learn how different kinds of stressors affect students in your age group; become familiar with age-appropriate forms of self-expression and social-emotional support; and take steps to prevent and address bullying.

Learn more about the ways immigration issues impact students. Immigration policies affect students in complex ways that students may not discuss openly. Learn more about the immigration issues that may impact your students and families, and how to extend that conversation to your school, program, or community.

Provide opportunities for staff to collaborate, debrief, and recharge. Collaboration gives staff the chance to draw upon different perspectives and expertise – which leads to more effective support for students and families. In addition, providing social-emotional support for staff working on challenging issues (or who are impacted by those issues themselves) can help the team sustain their work throughout the year.



Immigrant Students' Legal Rights: An Overview

Summary

Learn about immigrant students' rights, school districts' obligations to protect those rights, and resources that districts have developed to share information about those rights with the public.

Strategies

- Ensure all staff understand immigrant students' rights
- Review and update enrollment policies / forms
- Protect student privacy
- Find out what resources your district and state have available about serving immigrant students

Key Takeaways

- All students have a right to free, public K-12 education, regardless of their immigration status, or that of their parents.
- Schools have an obligation to protect students' civil and privacy rights regardless of students' immigration status. Schools should not ask about immigration status for purposes of enrollment and should review registration forms for unnecessary or inappropriate questions.
- School districts or states might have helpful guidance and resources on this issue.



See this information online

Immigrant Students' Rights: An Overview

- Online article: <http://www.colorincolorado.org/immigration/guide/rights>
- Download pdf: <http://www.colorincolorado.org/immigration/guide/rights-pdf>

Complete guide: <http://www.colorincolorado.org/immigration/guide>

Excerpted from *How to Support Immigrant Students and Families*.

Making Students and Families Feel Welcome

Summary

Learn how schools can help make all families feel welcome within the school, why these messages matter, and how to build upon immigrant families' experiences and strengths.

Strategies

- Let all families know that they are welcome
- Create a welcoming school environment
- Get to know students and families
- Learn more about special populations of ELL / immigrant students
- Identify student and family strengths

Key Takeaways

- Schools and early childhood programs can use a variety of strategies to get to know immigrant families and let them know they are welcome in the school community.
- Sharing these messages of support and using a strengths-based approach to developing relationships can create a strong foundation for school-family partnerships.
- When facing challenging situations, this foundation will allow schools to strengthen relationships with families; make communication and problem-solving more effective; and encourage student attendance and participation, as well as family engagement.



See this information online

Making Students and Families Feel Welcome

- View online: <http://www.colorincolorado.org/immigration/guide/welcome>
- Download PDF: <http://www.colorincolorado.org/immigration/guide/welcome-pdf>

Complete guide: <http://www.colorincolorado.org/immigration/guide>

Excerpted from *How to Support Immigrant Students and Families*.

Building Partnerships with Immigrant Families

Summary

Learn how to build effective partnerships with immigrant families through communication, parent leadership, and culturally responsive outreach.

Strategies

- Create different channels for communication in families' languages
- Revisit data about immigrant students
- Encourage family leadership
- Reach out to community organizations that represent and serve your families

Key Takeaways

- School districts are legally obligated to share information in a language that families understand. Schools can use a wide range of methods for communicating with families in their home languages and making updated information available.
- Schools can also strengthen family partnerships by encouraging parent leadership and collaborating with community organizations.



See this information online

Building Partnerships with Immigrant Families

- View online: <http://www.colorincolorado.org/immigration/guide/families>
- Download PDF: <http://www.colorincolorado.org/immigration/guide/families-pdf>

Complete guide: <http://www.colorincolorado.org/immigration/guide>

Excerpted from *How to Support Immigrant Students and Families*.

Special Considerations for Young Children in Immigrant Families

Summary

Learn how early childhood providers can support immigrant children and families and promote healthy social-emotional and physical development for young children facing uncertainty.

Strategies

- Look for ways to build relationships with families
- Review program enrollment guidelines
- Ensure staff are familiar with other policies and issues related to immigrant students
- Look for ways to offer social-emotional support to children throughout the day
- Provide training on the impacts of trauma and anxiety on young children

Key Takeaways

- Early childhood programs can play a critical role in providing support for young children.
- Early childhood settings are considered “sensitive locations,” where immigration enforcement should not take place.
- Early childhood providers should be familiar with policies related to immigrant students, strategies for supporting social-emotional health, and the signs of trauma and anxiety.

See this information online

Special Considerations for Young Children in Immigrant Families

- View online: <http://www.colorincolorado.org/immigration/guide/preschool>
- Download PDF: <http://www.colorincolorado.org/immigration/guide/preschool-pdf>

Complete guide: <http://www.colorincolorado.org/immigration/guide>

Excerpted from *How to Support Immigrant Students and Families*.

Addressing Students' Basic Needs

Summary

Students may face new challenges in having their basic needs met for a variety of reasons. Learn more about factors specifically impacting immigrant students and how to establish community partnerships that can help address some of those needs.

Strategies

- Keep in mind that immigrant families' economic situations may change
- Ensure that students experiencing homelessness have appropriate services and support

Key Takeaways

- Students may face new or existing challenges in having their basic needs met; for immigrant families, there is a range of economic and other factors that can impact a family's situation.
- Students' housing or caregiving arrangements may also be in flux.
- Staying attuned to clues can help educators identify challenges students are facing.
- Community organizations can play a valuable role in helping to meet the basic needs of immigrant students and families.



See this information online

Addressing Students' Basic Needs

- View online: <http://www.colorincolorado.org/immigration/guide/basic>
- Download PDF: <http://www.colorincolorado.org/immigration/guide/basic-pdf>

Complete guide: <http://www.colorincolorado.org/immigration/guide>

Excerpted from *How to Support Immigrant Students and Families*.

How Immigration Issues Impact Students

Summary

Educators, staff, and school/district leaders may not know how immigration issues affect students or colleagues. This article provides an overview of a few key immigration topics, as well as ideas for including these topics in professional development.

Immigration Topics

- Separation and reunification
- Impacts of immigration enforcement
- Being undocumented
- What is DACA?
- What is TPS?
- Ideas for professional development

Key Takeaways

- Learning more about immigration issues can enhance staff members' ability to offer instruction and support to their students and families. Educators 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*.

Providing Social-Emotional Support for Students

Summary

Learn how individual educators and schools can support immigrant students, help address stress and anxiety, and create a respectful classroom environment.

Strategies

- Help students maintain their routine
- Encourage teachers and staff to build relationships with students
- Provide ideas for age-appropriate ways to express emotions
- Take a closer look when you notice changes in a student's behavior
- Look for ways to make connections to the curriculum
- Teach empathy and appreciation
- Pay attention to what students do – and don't say – about immigration
- Use books in the classroom and beyond
- Learn about how your families approach social-emotional health

Key Takeaways

- Issues around immigration may be affecting students' social-emotional health.
- Educators can use age-appropriate strategies to help address these concerns.



See this information online

Providing Social-Emotional Support for Students

- View online: <http://www.colorincolorado.org/immigration/guide/student>
- Download PDF: <http://www.colorincolorado.org/immigration/guide/student-pdf>

Complete guide: <http://www.colorincolorado.org/immigration/guide>

Excerpted from *How to Support Immigrant Students and Families*.

Addressing Student Anxiety, Depression, and Trauma

Summary

Learn strategies to recognize and address student anxiety and depression, as well as to understand traumatic experiences students might have endured.

Strategies

- Identify resources to address student anxiety / depression
- Learn more about the impacts of trauma and PTSD

Key Takeaways

- Educators working with immigrant and refugee students should be aware of the ways in which anxiety, stress, fear, depression, and post-traumatic stress can affect their students.
- Building relationships with students and families can help identify students' needs, while providing professional development on a variety of topics in a respectful setting can help increase awareness across the staff.



See this information online

Addressing Student Trauma, Anxiety, and Depression

- View online: <http://www.colorincolorado.org/immigration/guide/trauma>
- Download PDF: <http://www.colorincolorado.org/immigration/guide/trauma-pdf>

Complete guide: <http://www.colorincolorado.org/immigration/guide>

Excerpted from *How to Support Immigrant Students and Families*.

Addressing Immigrant Families' Questions and Concerns

Summary

Immigrant families may look to the school for information related to immigration topics. Learn why it is so important to hear from immigrant families about their priorities, questions, and concerns before making decisions about what kinds of support would be most helpful.

Strategies

- Listen to immigrant families' questions and concerns
- Be honest and discuss the kinds of support you can provide
- Share information through outreach and events

Key Takeaways

- Immigrant families may have a range of questions and concerns. Understanding those concerns (and not making assumptions about families' situations) will help schools partner with families more effectively.
- Schools can learn more by providing families with plenty of channels for communication and opportunities to share input.

See this information online

Addressing Immigrant Families' Questions and Concerns

- View online: <http://www.colorincolorado.org/immigration/guide/questions>
- Download PDF:
<http://www.colorincolorado.org/immigration/guide/questions-pdf>

Complete guide: <http://www.colorincolorado.org/immigration/guide>

Excerpted from *How to Support Immigrant Students and Families*.



Addressing Questions on Immigration Enforcement

Summary

Learn more about steps that schools and early childhood programs can take to address questions about immigration enforcement, "sensitive locations" guidance, and policies that schools/programs should have in place in the event of local immigration enforcement activity.

Strategies

- Become familiar with “sensitive locations” guidance
- Review any current district policies regarding immigration enforcement
- Help families keep their emergency contact information up to date
- Make a plan to care for children stranded due to the detention of a parent or caregiver
- Consider partnerships with safety personnel such as fire / police departments
- Keep informed on current events and changes in policy

Key Takeaways

- Immigration enforcement agents have been instructed to avoid activity at certain kinds of education-related locations. These "sensitive locations" guidelines remain in effect, although they could change and leaders should stay up-to-date on these policies.
- Districts can develop policies and procedures to help employees know how to protect students' civil and privacy rights, respond to immigration enforcement, and increase the chances of finding a known caregiver for children whose caregivers are detained.



See this information online

Addressing Questions About Immigration Enforcement and Policy

- View online: <http://www.colorincolorado.org/immigration/guide/policy>
- Download PDF: <http://www.colorincolorado.org/immigration/guide/policy-pdf>

Complete guide: <http://www.colorincolorado.org/immigration/guide>

Excerpted from *How to Support Immigrant Students and Families*.

Connecting Immigrant Families with Legal Advice

Summary

Connecting immigrant families with legal advice and support can have a significant impact on their situation. Here are some tips on figuring out what kinds of trustworthy resources are available for immigrant families.

Strategies

- Provide families with information about trusted legal resources
- Consider creating a policy about “letters of support”
- Take time to listen to families who wish to discuss a possible return to a home country

Key Takeaways

- Schools can help connect families with legitimate legal advice and support, often presented by a community partner or advocacy organization. This information and support may focus on families’ rights, even if they are undocumented, and steps or decisions that could have a big impact on their situation and on their children.
- Partner organizations can help pinpoint appropriate information to share with families.



See this information online

Connecting Families with Legal Support

- View online: <http://www.colorincolorado.org/immigration/guide/legal>
- Download PDF: <http://www.colorincolorado.org/immigration/guide/legal-pdf>

Complete guide: <http://www.colorincolorado.org/immigration/guide>

Excerpted from *How to Support Immigrant Students and Families*.

Encouraging Staff Collaboration

Summary

Learn more about the ways that educators can collaborate on behalf of immigrant families, the roles that various professionals can play in that collaboration, and the kinds of questions educators and staff may have about outreach to immigrant families.

Strategies

- Designate a point person to keep updated on immigration issues
- Consider creating an immigrant support team
- Collaborate with the local teachers' union
- Clarify what is allowed in terms of advocacy and outreach
- Share personal stories

Key Takeaways

- Collaboration can greatly improve support for immigrant families by bringing multiple perspectives to the table, increasing opportunities to share information, and allowing staff to identify ways to make their outreach more efficient and effective.
- Teachers' unions can play a key role in collaboration and outreach to immigrant families.
- Districts can also offer important guidance to staff on what is allowed in terms of advocacy and outreach related to immigrant families.



See this information online

Encouraging Staff Collaboration

- View online: <http://www.colorincolorado.org/immigration/guide/collaboration>
- Download PDF: <http://www.colorincolorado.org/immigration/guide/collaboration-pdf>

Complete guide: <http://www.colorincolorado.org/immigration/guide>

Excerpted from *How to Support Immigrant Students and Families*.

Providing Social-Emotional Supports for Staff

Summary

Learn more about what a supportive environment for staff looks like and how to help staff members manage stress and develop networks of support.

Strategies

- Keep in mind that immigration issues may also impact staff personally
- Take steps to prevent burn-out
- Strengthen professional networks
- Share success early and often

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*.