

# A Public School's Guide to Enrolling And Supporting Immigrant Students

Schools are legally obligated to enroll immigrant students regardless of legal status and offer them equal access to educational programs.



## Rights

**Some key rights applicable to immigrant students and families.**

**Enrollment:** All students have the right to a free, public K-12 education, regardless of their immigration status.

**No proof of citizenship required:** Schools should not require Social Security numbers or any other form of proof of citizenship from parents or students as part of the enrollment process. Schools typically only need to collect a student's name, date of birth, and address.

**Translation services:** Immigrant families have a right to translation services for many interactions with their children's school. Families fill out a questionnaire, often called a home-language survey, asking what languages they speak at home to help the school determine the language(s) to which it needs to translate all forms and written communications. These include social media posts, communications from school and district administration, letters from teachers and other staff members, and forms connected to Individualized Education Programs. Families also have the right to language interpretation during all meetings and other interactions related to educational services provided on campus.

**Immigration officer access:** A 2021 U.S. Department of Homeland Security memo lists schools and places where children gather, such as school bus stops, as protected areas when it comes to immigration enforcement. This means that front-desk staff are not obligated to allow immigration enforcement officials onto school campuses. An exception is when an official presents a judicial warrant signed by a federal or state judge. Front-desk staff can inform immigration officials that they cannot enter without a school district attorney present to verify such warrants. Immigrant students' information is also protected from release under the Family Education Rights and Privacy Act, or FERPA.



## Best practices

**Some best practices for front-desk staff when interacting with immigrant families.**

**Be clear during enrollment:** Front-desk staff should be clear in explaining to immigrant families what information is (and is not) required to enroll students and how schools will use students' personal information.

**Collect multiple emergency contacts:** Front-desk staff should ask families to provide multiple people as designated contacts in emergencies, including if a student's parents are detained by an immigration official. Staff should remind families that such contact information is necessary to ensure someone can pick up a student in a parent's absence. Otherwise, the school will be obligated to contact police and, possibly, child protective services.

**Be flexible about accepting different forms of ID:** If a school's safety protocol requires guests to present a photo ID to enter the school, front-desk staff should be able to accept alternatives to a driver's license, such as passports, city IDs, or special documentation from a local consulate. Staff should explain to families why they need to present such identification and clarify which forms they can accept.

**Provide information about support services:** Families often turn to schools as an information hub for services, including access to food, housing, clothing, and health care. Front-desk staff should have information available to families about how they can access such services through trusted local organizations.



## Glossary

**A list of terms school personnel, including front-desk staff, might encounter when enrolling and supporting immigrant students.**

**Undocumented:** The adjective is used to indicate that a person does not have legal status in the United States. An undocumented individual may or may not have a record of entering the country.

**Mixed-status family:** A family in which different members have different legal statuses. Often, a student might have U.S. citizenship, but their parents are undocumented or have a temporary legal status such as legal residency.

**Newcomer student:** A student who has been enrolled in U.S. schools for three years or less.

**Temporary Protected Status:** A designation granted to foreign countries by the U.S. Department of Homeland Security. During a designated period, eligible people from countries with a TPS designation cannot be deported and they can obtain work permits.

**Migrant student:** A student who is highly mobile or has parents or guardians who are highly mobile. Such students could be from families that migrate to work agricultural or fishing jobs, or in other seasonal industries or positions. These students may lack legal immigration status.

**Unaccompanied minor:** A child under 18 who does not have a parent or guardian in the United States available to care for them, and who lacks legal immigration status in the United States.