CALIFORNIA
DEPARTMENT OF JUSTICE

Know Your Educational Rights

Immigration Enforcement Actions at California's TK-12 Schools

Guide for Students and Families

Your Child Has the Right to a Free Public Education

DECEMBER 2025

All children have a right to equal access to free public education, regardless of their or their parents'/guardians' immigration status.

All children in California:

- Have the right to a free public education.
- Must be enrolled in school if they are between 6 and 18 years old, unless otherwise exempt.
- Have the right to attend safe, secure, and peaceful schools.
- Have a right to be in a public school learning environment free from discrimination, harassment, bullying, violence, and intimidation.
- Have equal opportunity to participate in any program or activity offered by the school without discrimination.

Information Required for School Enrollment

Schools must accept a variety of documents from the student's parent or guardian to demonstrate proof of child's age or residency and schools are not required to keep a copy of the document used as proof of a child's age.

Information about citizenship/immigration status is never needed for school enrollment. A Social Security number is never needed for school enrollment.

Confidentiality of Personal Information

Federal and state laws protect student education records and personal information. These laws generally require that schools get written consent from parents or guardians before releasing student information, unless the release of information is for educational purposes, is already public, or is in response to a court order or subpoena.

Some schools collect and provide publicly basic student "directory information." If so, the school district must provide parents/ guardians with written notice of the directory information policy, and provide the option to refuse release of your child's information.

Family Safety Plans if you are Detained or Deported

You can update your child's emergency contact information, including secondary contacts, to identify a trusted adult guardian who can care for your child if you are detained or deported.

You can complete a Caregiver's Authorization Affidavit or consult with legal counsel regarding options like a Petition for Appointment of Guardian to give a trusted adult the authority to make educational and medical decisions for your child.

Right to File a Complaint

Your child has the right to report a hate crime or file a complaint to the school district if they are discriminated against, harassed, intimidated or bullied because of their actual or perceived nationality, ethnicity, or immigration status.

For more information on resources for responding to immigration enforcement activities at California schools, or to file a complaint, please contact:

Bureau of Children's Justice
California Attorney General's Office
P.O. Box 944255
Sacramento, CA 94244-2550
Phone: (800) 952-5225
E-mail: BCJ@doj.ca.gov
https://oag.ca.gov/bcj/complaint

Checklist for Immigrant Students Attending Public Schools and Their Families

1. *You do not have to share the following information with school officials:*

- You do not have to share information, including passports or visas, regarding the immigration status of students, parents, guardians, or other family members.
- You do not have to provide Social Security numbers (SSN) or cards.
- When completing the "Free and Reduced-Price Meals" form, only provide the last four digits of the SSN of the adult household member who signs the application.
- If the family meets the income eligibility requirements and no adult household member has an SSN, your child still qualifies. Check the "No SSN" box on forms where applicable, to ensure that applications are complete.
- If any household member participates in CalFresh, CalWORKs (California Work Opportunity and Responsibility for Kids), or FDPIR (Food Distribution Program on Indian Reservations), no adult household member needs to provide the last four digits of their SSN to qualify the student for free or reduced-price meals at school.
- When providing information for proof of a student's residency or age, you do not have to use documents that could reveal information related to immigration status.

2. *Take steps to protect student information:*

- Ask for the school's written privacy policies regarding student information.
- Review the school's policy for "directory information"—which allows for public release of basic student information—and consider whether to opt out of releasing of that information.

3. *Take steps to prepare for situations where one or more parents or guardians are detained or deported:*

- Develop and keep in a safe place a "Family Safety Plan" (example: Step-by-Step Family Preparedness Plan / Plan de Preparación Familiar: (Guía Completa) | Immigrant Legal Resource Center | ILRC) that includes the following information:
- Name of a trusted adult to care for your child if no parent or guardian can.
- Emergency phone numbers and instructions on where to find important documents (birth certificates, passports, Social Security cards, doctor contact information, etc.).
- Make sure that your child's school always has current emergency contact information, including alternative contacts if no parent or guardian is available.
- Discuss with family members whether to complete a "caregiver authorization affidavit" to authorize a relative to enroll a minor student and consent to school-related medical care on behalf of the minor. Note that under a new law effective January 1, 2026, a relative is an adult related to the child by blood, adoption, or affinity within the fifth degree of kinship, including all stepparents, stepsiblings, and all relatives whose status is preceded by the words "great," "great-great," or "grand," or the spouses of any of these persons.

Resources

The following resources are available to immigrant families responding to detentions or deportations:

- The Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) detainee locator: https://locator.ice.gov/odls/homePage.do. **Please Note**: This site is intended only for locating individuals who are already detained, and not for general immigration status inquiries.
- Immigration lawyers in private practice, accredited representatives (who assist immigrants in immigration proceedings), or legal-aid organizations:
    - State Bar of California Attorney Search: http://www.calbar.ca.gov/Attorneys
    - California organizations accredited by Board of Immigration Appeals (BIA) to represent immigrants before the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) and Executive Office of Immigration Review (EOIR): Recognized Org and Accredited Rep Roster by State and City.
    - California Courts Self-Help Centers: Find Your Self-Help Center | California Courts | Self Help Guide.
    - Legal-aid offices and lawyer-referral services: http://www.courts.ca.gov/getting-legal-help.
    - The consulate or embassy of the parent's or guardian's country of origin.