

FEELING THE IMPACT: THE TOLL OF IMMIGRATION IN SCHOOLS

The stress and anxiety of immigration issues affects everyone in a school community

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PRINCIPAL EVALUATION CRITERIA

Creating a Culture, Engaging Families and Communities, Ensuring School Safety

“We wake up every day with the fear of being deported, of being separated from our families or having to leave the kids.”

In June 1982, the Supreme Court issued *Plyler v. Doe*, a landmark decision holding that states cannot constitutionally deny students a free public education on account of their immigration status. Federal courts have relied on *Plyler v. Doe* to prevent practices that would have a “chilling effect” on a student’s right to attend school.

THE EFFECT OF NEW AND CHANGING POLICIES

However, in the last couple of years, a number of policies and proposals have been implemented on a wide range of immigration enforcement issues. These issues include border security, interior enforcement, tighter vetting on asylum hearings, exclusionary visas to certain groups of people, restricting temporary protected status/DACA, travel bans of certain countries, expansion of family separations, penalties for accessing public assistance, and most recently, proposed family detention centers without time limits.

These policies can potentially impact 23 million non-citizens

who live in the United States, as well as 12 million children who are predominantly U.S.-born.

WHAT RESEARCH HAS SHOWN US

Immigrant families, including those with lawful status, are experiencing resounding levels of fear due to continual changes in immigration policy, media attention to the national rhetoric, recent customs enforcement raids, and senseless mass shootings at targeted populations. One long-time resident explained that there are frequent, conflicting legal changes which create emotional havoc. They feel that at any moment they could be expelled from this country. Undocumented immigrants face the risk of deportation, including long-time residents. Schools are feeling the impact of immigrant students fearing the worst: family separations. (immigrationresearch.org)

“The raids forced hundreds of Mississippi children to face what they feared most: coming home to an empty house and not knowing if

they would ever see their mom or dad again... on their first day of school. Research [from the Urban Institute] tells us that children suffer long-term developmental harm to their health and well-being as a result of the trauma and instability caused by large-scale raids that separate them from parents and loved ones. Raids leave schools, childcare centers, and other providers scrambling to deal with the aftermath of these man-made disasters, and the fear created extends far beyond the individuals and families impacted.” (migrationpolicy.org)

Although schools, hospitals, and churches are designated as sensitive locations (safe spaces from immigration enforcement), many immigrant families are afraid to leave home to participate in everyday life activities. Parents report that they stay indoors and rarely go outside. Children listen to the news. Students don’t participate in summer or extra-curricular programs. They often internalize the anxiety and bring it to school.

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“One of our kindergarten teachers had a little boy who brought a suitcase with him to class for two days. He said, ‘I want to make sure I have my special things when they come to get me,’” says Colorado Education Association Vice President Amie Baca-Oehlert in an NEA document on immigration and student rights.

The Kaiser Foundation has done extensive research of immigrant children reporting difficulty sleeping or eating, increased headaches or stomach aches, depression or anxiety, or being bullied. When students are fearful that their family is at risk, their learning is impacted. Living in a state of persistent stress leads to physical, psychological and emotional consequences affecting brain function in learning and reasoning. (kff.org)

DISTURBING TRENDS

Within the ESD 113 service area, immigrant families and school personnel have shared these disturbing trends:

- Dropping out of Head Start,
- Declining free/reduced lunch enrollment,

- Not seeking medical care or getting immunizations,
- Afraid of losing housing assistance,
- Not signing up for college bound opportunities,
- Not participating in afterschool or summer enrichment programs.

The new federal Public Charge ruling widens the scope of impact, even for those with legal green card status. Teachers, counselors, and administrators report that these fears have led to a form of toxic stress among these students. For many immigrant families, the increased fears are having significant negative effects on the short and long-term health and well-being of children. Fear and anxiety are affecting all immigrants, legal and undocumented. Even non-immigrant friends and peers worry about their classmates who just “move away.”

HOW YOU CAN HELP

It may seem overwhelming for one individual or school to make a difference for these students. What immigrant families have said is they want trusting relationships

and a welcoming environment from school communities: front office professionals, playground assistants, teachers, counselors, nurses, and administrators. Families need extra reassurance that their children are safe in this climate. Listed below are some ideas for consideration:

- “Everyone Belongs.” Be public about ensuring the well-being of all students in classrooms, halls, assemblies, staff lounge, even the bus.
- Show empathy and support. Be an informed advocate. Center for Law and Social Policy (CLASP) is a national, nonpartisan, nonprofit organization advancing policy solutions for low-income people.
- Take advantage of teachable moments to create compassion among all students.

WSSDA Model Policy 4310 and Model Policy/ Procedure 3226

In December 2018, WSSDA revised model Policy 4310 — **District Relationships with Law Enforcement and other Governmental Agencies and Model Policy and Procedure 3226 — Interviews and Interrogations of Students on School Premises.**

These policies were revised to help school districts comply with their constitutional duty to provide undocumented children with a free education, while also protecting their constitutional rights.

Senate Bill 5497 — **Keep Washington Working**

At the close of the 2019 legislative session, Gov. Inslee signed the **Keep Washington Working Bill** into law. The new law enhances public safety, promotes fairness to immigrants and protects the privacy and civil rights of all Washington residents.

Read more about The WSSDA model policies and SB 5497 on our blog at <https://bit.ly/2n6yBBB>.



“ While all children need a physically and emotionally safe school environment with supportive adults, immigrant children also need adults who understand their fears and the toll it takes on their learning.”

- K-12 Immigration Booklist available from Olympia Timberland Library.
- Free Teaching Tolerance Pocket Guide: “Speak Up at School: Respond to Everyday Stereotypes and Bias” (Contact Teaching Tolerance for free print copies).
- Identify a staff member as a bilingual school/community navigator.
- Share available school forms/letters in represented languages.
- Take advantage of an instant interpreter service such as Language Links.
- Invite families to a “Skyward Overview/Sign Up” (where someone

can explain school registration, absences, grading, homework, fees) or “School Website Overview” (bus routes, menu, events calendar, volunteer opportunities).

- Encourage scholarship opportunities such as WASFA and College Bound scholarship.
- Partner with community resources that serve immigrant families for “Know Your Rights” or “Family Safety Plan” workshops.
- NW Immigrant Rights Project
- WA Immigrant Solidarity Network.
- Create a schoolwide protocol to protect students if customs officials come to school.

- Access free materials from Teaching Tolerance Project.
- Booklet, “Responding to Hate and Bias at School: A Guide for Administrators, Counselors and Teachers” (Contact Teaching Tolerance for free print copies).
- Booklet, “Best Practices for Serving English Language Learners and Their Families” (Contact Teaching Tolerance for free print copies).

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GET CONNECTED

Links to the references and resources mentioned in this article can be found on the AWSP blog at <https://bit.ly/2n6j9FB>.



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