

Creating Sanctuary for Students Fearful of Deportation

WHILE MOST SCHOOL-AGE CHILDREN of immigrants are U.S. citizens, many live in households that include people with various immigration statuses and fear that they or their family members will be deported. The AFT has been hearing from members all around the country that children are showing signs of social-emotional stress as a result of being undocumented themselves or knowing that a family member is undocumented.

Deportations separate families and leave many more in fear of separation. Teachers, counselors, and other school personnel are often the first to address the mental health concerns of their students regarding immigration, and have witnessed firsthand the negative impact on students' ability to focus in school.

Children involved in or fearing deportation raids may experience emotional and behavioral changes, sleep and eating disturbances, excessive crying, anxious behavior, nightmares, aggressive and withdrawn behavior (especially in older youth), poor academic performance, and social withdrawal and isolation.

Schools should be safe havens for all students and families, including unaccompanied and refugee children, regardless of citizenship status and national origin. To ensure that all children feel safe, welcomed, and supported—no matter where they or their parents were born—educators can do the following:

- Make students feel comfortable by talking to them with a colleague who can help with counseling needs one-on-one, away from peers.
- Offer students the chance to express themselves privately through drawing, artwork, or writing. This can be an important safety valve during particularly stressful periods and also can provide a way for students to respond to events in or beyond the classroom.
- Give students strategies to manage stress: ask what they do when they feel stress, anger, sadness, or other difficult emotions. They may never have thought about it before! Offer some additional ideas for managing difficult emotions, such as taking a couple of deep breaths, sitting in a quiet corner to calm down, drawing or writing, exercising, or talking to a friend or trusted adult. Consider inviting a school counselor into the classroom to lead a discussion and share strategies.
- Contact local and national organizations, such as the National Immigration Law Center, United We Dream, and First Focus, that support and provide resources for immigrant families. The Immigration Advocates Network offers resources by state: www.bit.ly/2zJdBK.
- Ensure the classroom atmosphere is nonthreatening. Find ways to involve apprehensive students, such as by creating a buddy system so that peers make students feel welcome and by introducing them to supportive and helpful personnel in the building. Just as important, reach out to families through an interpreter or materials written in their home language.

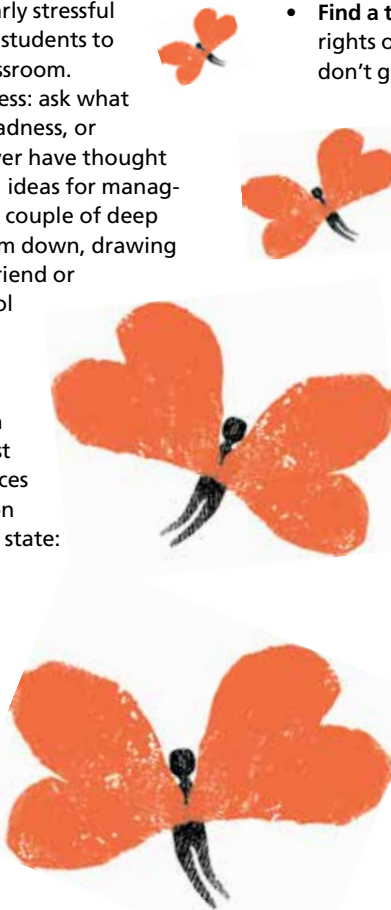
What Educators Should Know about the Rights of Immigrants and the Threat of Deportation

Under federal law, all children, regardless of their citizenship or residency status, are entitled to a K–12 education. Unless the Department of Homeland Security's sensitive locations policy is reversed, it will continue to limit immigration enforcement from taking place at "sensitive locations." These include schools, licensed daycares, school bus stops, colleges and universities, educational programs, medical treatment facilities, and places of worship. Under the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA), schools are prohibited, without parental consent, from providing information from a student's file to federal immigration agents if the information would potentially expose a student's immigration status. School districts are responsible for ensuring the safety and well-being of all students.

What Students and Families Should Do If ICE Authorities Come to Their Homes

- **Do not open the door** without them passing a signed warrant under the door.
- **Do not say anything** beyond "I plead the Fifth and choose to remain silent."
- **Do not sign anything** without speaking to an attorney.
- **Document and report the raid** immediately to the United We Dream hotline (844-363-1423). Take pictures, videos, and notes. Write down badge numbers of agents and exactly what happened.
- **Find a trustworthy attorney** by contacting a local immigrant rights organization. If detained, you may be able to get bail—don't give up hope!

—AFT EDUCATIONAL ISSUES DEPARTMENT



AFT Resources on Immigrant Rights

Immigration: Protecting Our Students
<http://go.aft.org/AE417tft1>

Know Your Rights
<http://go.aft.org/AE417tft2>

School Response Plan (scroll down to "Threats to Immigrants")
<http://go.aft.org/AE417tft3>

A Guide for Educators and School Support Staff
<http://go.aft.org/AE417tft4>

Serving and Supporting Immigrant Students: Information for Schools
<http://go.aft.org/AE417tft5>