



Fact Sheet

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Latino Children and Their Families Experience Disproportionate Mental Health and School Safety Effects from Anti-Immigrant Policies & Immigration Enforcement

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1. Overview

The well-being of children is inextricably linked to the well-being of the caregivers and educators in their lives. Nationally, 1 out of every 4 children is Latino or Hispanic;¹ about 1 in 4 U.S. children have an immigrant parent,² and within the Latino community, 50% of children have an immigrant parent.³ Immigrants constitute 20% of the Early Care and Education workforce,⁴ and about 15,000 teachers are DACA recipients.⁵

In Texas, immigrants make up 18% of the population,⁶ and Latino youth comprise about 53% of all children in public schools.⁷ In January 2025, the “sensitive locations” guidelines, which protected certain areas - such as churches, schools, and hospitals from immigration enforcement, were rescinded.⁸ An executive order was also issued to “faithfully execute the immigration laws of the United States.”⁹ These policy changes, which adversely affect the sense of safety in Latino and immigrant communities, stand to harm the mental health of undocumented and U.S.-born minority communities.

2. Key Facts

- **Fact 1:** Chronic uncertainty and threat due to a racialized, restrictive immigration climate can harm children and youth by increasing symptoms of anxiety, inattention, sleep difficulties, and decreased emotional regulation capacity. ^(10,11)
- **Fact 2:** Restrictive immigration policy changes and ICE raids are associated with school-related challenges such as absenteeism, lower scores on standardized tests, and lower family engagement with schools. ⁽¹²⁻¹⁵⁾
- **Fact 3:** Schools offer important services and support systems for children’s mental health. They are part of a child’s village, specifically their microsystem, along with their family and home environment, peer relationships, and individual needs.
- **Fact 4:** Educators worry about the impact of restrictive immigration policy changes on their own families; this worry is associated with psychological distress and sleep problems, impacting their overall well-being and straining educators’ ability to do their school work effectively. ^(10, 16)

3. Background

Restrictive, ramped-up immigration enforcement has spill-over effects, “reaching beyond the supposed target population of undocumented immigrants to those documented, including legal permanent residents, U.S.-born Latinos/as, and other U.S.-born residents.”¹⁷ Research has documented the negative impact of immigration raids and harsh immigration enforcement on child and community health. An analysis of the academic performance of students in Texas schools exposed to the workplace raid in Allen, Texas, found Latino students experienced lower scores and passing rates in standardized tests taken within 40 days of the raid. This decline was more pronounced for Latino students attending schools closer to the raid site.¹⁴

Similarly, analysis of the impact of the workplace raid in Sumner, Texas on students found a sharp drop in reading and math scores among Latino students, but not among non-Latino white students.¹³ These findings highlight the disproportionate impact of immigration raids on Latino students.

Schools are sacred places where children, their families, and caring adults come together, with a central focus on educating and supporting the development of children. Educators have important and challenging jobs yet are often underpaid and undervalued. Immigration threat due to restrictive, anti-immigrant sociopolitical climates adds stress to their job and negatively impacts children’s mental health from multiple problem areas.

For example, educators' mental health is disrupted through increased psychological distress and sleep problems due to concerns for themselves, their families, and their students. Immigrant families may experience increased psychological distress, food insecurity, decreased access to social services, and their associated consequences on children’s mental health. These consequences can have a bidirectional relationship, creating a cycle of distress between children and educators.

Research centering on educators’ voices highlights the importance of school policies and practices that may be supportive to breaking or at least reducing this cycle of distress. Data shows that educators benefit from community-based support systems at schools that promote communal coping - including peer support to process concerns, and transparent and timely organizational communication and action. These practices are associated with decreased emotional exhaustion among educators and increased educator ability to provide emotional support to children experiencing distress due to the immigration climate.¹⁰

4. Policy Implications

To protect student and educator mental health, schools can implement policies that delineate transparent, timely, and evidence-based information, mechanisms of support, and action steps to minimize distress, confusion, and inaction related to the immigration threat at schools. Examples of these policies include the ImmSchools Safe Zone Resolution¹⁸ and the Center for Law and Social Policy (CLASP) Guide to Creating “Safe Space” Policies for Early Childhood Programs.¹⁹

School Districts can develop district-wide policies that schools can easily adapt to minimize administrative burden on individual schools. Districts and sites should consider addressing the hostile immigration climate at the organizational, interpersonal, and personal levels. For example, school leaders could support professional development and training sessions that build awareness among administrators, educators, and staff about racial identity, racism, and sociopolitical stressors. Knowledge and awareness of sociopolitical stressors and one’s racial identity are necessary to promote authentic connection and communal coping. Increased funding will be necessary to support these educator and student mental health services.

Although some states, including Texas, prohibit the delineation of “Sanctuary” status in their cities, City and County officials can support the implementation of public health education efforts to ensure all schools maintain the safety and well-being of all students. Policymakers can support funding and cross-sectoral coordination between public schools and immigrant-serving organizations at the state and district levels to improve access to information that affects immigrant communities.

5. Data & Sources

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