


**TO:** Local Education Agency Superintendents

**FROM:** Carey M. Wright, Ed.D., State Superintendent of Schools 

**DATE:** February 20, 2025

**SUBJECT:** Response to Immigration Enforcement in Schools – Best Practices for Educators

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### **Response to Immigration Enforcement in Schools – Standing Weekly Item**

This week's update provides guidance on the role of educators in affirming and supporting students and families. Educators must work within their systems/classrooms to create safe, inclusive, and affirming learning environments for every student, regardless of background or immigration status.

#### **What is the role of educators in supporting students?**

Maryland educators are responsible for creating a welcoming and inclusive school environment where all students, regardless of immigration status, feel safe and supported.

In February 2023, the Harvard Graduate School of Education published *Making Schools a Welcoming Place for Immigrants*, written by Dr. Elizabeth Ross. Dr. Ross reminds all that when immigrants are attending school in the United States, they may be suffering from trauma based on a variety of reasons. Educators are encouraged to pay attention to school climate.

Some tips shared by Dr. Ross for improving school climate for immigrant students include:

- Do not ignore bullying. Some immigrant students are hyper-visible and targeted in schools because of what is occurring. Be sure to intervene quickly with restorative practices methods.
- Build strong, personalized relationships with students and all members of the school community. Emotionally supportive school environments, where students have a sense of belonging and feel respected and valued, promote engagement, motivation, and achievement. Do not forget the unique socioemotional needs and challenges of children from immigrant families.
- Encourage family engagement. Reach out and listen to all families and use their feedback to shape decisions. Communications need to be culturally relevant and may have to be provided in several languages. Build up trust by working with community liaisons and leaders.
- Include all of your students in the curriculum. Incorporate global perspectives and projects that allow students to explore their own languages, cultures, and histories. Decorate spaces with a variety of cultural backgrounds in mind.
- Provide professional learning opportunities to train teachers how to use culturally sustaining practices. Training may also be needed to help educators challenge their own preconceived ideas and assumptions about immigrant families.

### **What messages should a teacher share if they learn from a student that their parent was detained by immigration authorities?**

Teachers can offer emotional support to the student or connect the student with a counselor or trusted staff member for emotional support and provide information on available community resources. Teachers or staff should not ask the student about their immigration status, or the immigration status of family members, but rather offer general encouragement and remind the student that they are welcome in the school.

Should an immigration enforcement officer request student records, the officer should be directed to school administration, and the administration will contact district legal counsel. No materials or information should be provided without legal authorization.

### **What are key takeaways for educators?**

- Schools must remain safe zones for students. Educators should not inquire about, disclose, or act upon a student's immigration status.
- Schools must not share student information with federal agencies unless legally required.
- Educators should follow district guidance and legal protocols if immigration enforcement requests information or access to a school.
- Local superintendents and their legal teams must develop clear response plans to protect students and comply with federal and state laws.

This guidance ensures that all Maryland educators uphold their professional responsibilities in fostering equitable access to education while remaining neutral on personal beliefs regarding immigration.

### **Additional Information**

An MSDE resource for bullying prevention is the *Bullying Prevention Webinar Series* which will provide strategies that can be utilized in situations of bullying of any type. MSDE is launching a six-part *Bullying Prevention Webinar Series* (February through May 2025) to equip educators with data-driven strategies for preventing and addressing bullying, harassment, and intimidation in Maryland schools. The professional learning series will provide practical interventions, targeted support for vulnerable students, and leadership strategies to enhance school climate. The series is an opportunity to engage with state-specific data, strengthen prevention strategies, and ensure alignment with Maryland's Model Policy to Address Bullying, Harassment, or Intimidation, to create safer, more inclusive learning environments. Participants may register for one or all six webinars by using [this link](#).

Once registered, the participant will receive a confirmation email and reminders leading up to each session. Space is limited.

MSDE will continue to provide updated information for the public about Immigration Enforcement Actions at Schools on its [website](#).

Questions about immigration enforcement in schools may be directed to Phil Lasser, Senior Executive Director, Strategic Initiatives, at [phil.lasser@maryland.gov](mailto:phil.lasser@maryland.gov)