

Best Practices for K-12 Educators and Resources Guide

MIRA is New England's largest coalition advocating for the rights and integration of immigrants and refugees. This guide provides K-12 educators in Massachusetts with best practices to support immigrant students and their families.

Consider the experiences of immigrant students and their families.

Consider what life was like for the immigrant family you are working with and their life since arriving in the United States. Research shows that while immigrating, [75% of children](#) experience separation from a caregiver. The immigrant students in your classroom may have already been separated from their family members due to immigration or be fearful of family separation. Immigrant students and their families may have complicated immigration statuses, some with no current paths to citizenship.

Understand immigrant student stressors possibly impacting student performance.

In addition to academic stress, immigrant students may be burdened by stress related to harassment/bullying, expectations at home, family finances, health of themselves or their family members, immigration and legal concerns, or stress related to their own identities (e.g. race, gender, faith background, country of origin, or sexuality).

If students are fearful of leaving their home due to immigration concerns, check in with your students virtually and provide home visits when necessary.

Familiarize yourself with Know Your Rights and Family Preparedness materials.

Learn about immigrant rights when interacting with immigration enforcement on the [MIRA's Know Your Rights webpage](#).

By attending a Know Your Rights training, you will learn who is at risk of deportation, how people come in contact with immigration enforcement, and what to do if you know someone who has been detained. The training discusses steps families can take in case of family separation and the paperwork families can consider when identifying a trusted adult to take care of their children in their absence.

Know Your Rights videos, printable materials and Family Preparedness Packets are available in English, Spanish, Haitian Creole, and Portuguese.

KNOW YOUR RIGHTS

IF ICE AGENTS COME TO YOUR HOME:

- DO NOT open the door unless they have a warrant signed by a judge. (If so, ask them to pass it under the door.)

AT WORK OR IN A PUBLIC PLACE:

- DO NOT run. Stay calm and ask, 'Am I being arrested or detained?' If not, walk away calmly. If yes, know your rights:

IN ANY SITUATION:

- You have the right to REMAIN SILENT. You do not have to answer any questions.
- You have the right to CALL YOUR ATTORNEY.
- DO NOT SIGN ANYTHING before consulting your attorney.

HAVE AN EMERGENCY PLAN:

- Keep all your documents in a safe place. Make sure you and your family always have your lawyer's number on hand.
- Download the Notifica app at Notifica.us and set it up to quickly alert your emergency contacts if you're detained.

Pay attention to students' mental health and connect them to mental health resources.

If you see changes in a student's mental health, ensure that students are connected to a mental health professional. A mental health professional will be able to identify the root cause of the student's stress. Remember to manage your expectations of your students, especially during these stressful times and to not project your own anxieties onto the student. You can incorporate grounding exercises, additional breaks, and self-care practices in the classroom.

Incorporate stories of power and strength in the classroom.

Share [immigrant stories](#) of power, strength, and resilience found in literature and media. There are books about immigration at all reading levels. For youth that have expressed fears of family separation, you can consider sharing with them a 7-minute animated video about immigrant rights and family preparedness (available in [English](#) and [Spanish](#)).

Additional stories to share with youth and young adults include [Walking Undocumented: The Story of Wildin Acosta](#) and [Immigrants Rising: Life Outside of the US](#).

Be a safe and confidential person students can talk to.

If a student confides in you, do not share details of their stories with their peers. On occasion, students may wish to be connected to other students with similar immigrant experiences or take part in small group conversations.

When speaking to immigrant students about their futures, encourage them to pursue their academic and career goals while also envisioning backup plans for themselves in case their life changes or they need to relocate.

You can also introduce students to tools on being adaptable, dealing with uncertainty, and [being resilient](#). Encourage students to focus only on what they can control, focus on maintaining a routine, and limit their exposure to the news.

Provide resources.

When speaking with high school students, you may want to share information about where they can access [federal financial aid](#), [state financial aid](#), [scholarships](#), or [institutional aid](#) to attend college.

Additionally, immigrants regardless of immigration status can apply for a driver's license in Massachusetts. You can share with your students [more information about applying for a driver's license](#).

Additional Guidance

Know the law.

Plyler v. Doe was a landmark 1982 Supreme Court case that ruled that states cannot deny public elementary and secondary education to students based on their immigration status. Children can attend school regardless of their own or their parents' actual or perceived national origin, citizenship, or immigration status. A school district can not prevent a child from enrolling in or attending school if the parent or guardian chooses not to provide the child's social security number.

Develop internal protocols to respond to immigration enforcement.

Before an ICE officer or law enforcement enters a school, they must present a judicial warrant with the name of the individual in question or a search warrant with the school's address. The warrant must be signed by a judge.

Among staff and leadership consider internal protocols to [respond to immigration enforcement](#). You may choose to direct immigration officers to the superintendent.

Protect student information.

To [protect student information](#), you can conduct a deep dive of internal organizational data and technology use policies. Understand that even with a subpoena, the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (often called "FERPA") protects students' education records, which schools generally may not produce without taking certain steps to notify the student or parent.

Immigration enforcement can, however, ask for "directory information" without consent of families unless the family has opted out. Be sure that families know they can opt out of having their information in the school directory and the schools social media.

Protect your employees.

If you are an employer and you are concerned about your employees, the National Immigration Law Center has [A Guide for Employers](#).