
METHODOLOGICAL APPENDIX

THE FEAR is everywhere

U.S. High School Principals
Report Widespread Effects
of Immigration Enforcement

December 2025

This [methodological appendix](#) is a companion document to the report, “‘The Fear is Everywhere’: U.S. High School Principals Report Widespread Effects Of Immigration Enforcement.” The full report, published in December 2025, is available online at <https://idea.gseis.ucla.edu/publications/fear-is-everywhere/>

Study Overview

In late spring and summer 2025, our team at UCLA's Institute for Democracy, Education, and Access, in partnership with the Civic Engagement Research Group at UC Riverside, carried out a national mixed-methods study examining efforts at U.S. public high schools to educate students for participation in a diverse democracy. Focusing on the 2024-2025 school year, the research explored whether and how various social and political pressures at the local, state, and national level affected the education, civic development, and well-being of young people.

The impact of immigration enforcement efforts on U.S. public high schools was one of many social and political pressures considered in this study.

We collected data using a nationally representative survey of U.S. public high school principals and a set of in-depth follow-up interviews with a stratified subsample of participants. This design allowed us to document broad national trends while also developing a richer understanding of school-level experiences.

Survey Data Collection

We administered a survey to a national sample of high school principals using the Qualtrics platform. The survey was designed to gather information about: a) provision of civic learning opportunities; b) experiences of different social and political pressures; c) interactions amongst diverse students; and d) efforts of school leaders to foster a safe and inclusive learning environment. It also asked about principal beliefs and background characteristics. The survey included one open-ended item that invited principals to share further thoughts on the topics addressed in the survey. Most principals completed the survey in 20 minutes or less and received a \$25 gift card for participation.

To contact principals, we used multiple recruitment channels. We purchased email addresses from Agile Education Marketing and distributed survey invitations through Constant Contact, Qualtrics, and Outlook. We monitored delivery and bounce patterns, and sent reminder messages. The survey administration lasted from May 29 to August 17, 2025 and was sent to 8,985 school principals. Our survey analysis draws on 606 principals from across the United States who completed the central questions in the survey and whose schools had up to date demographic information.

To bring our sample into alignment with the population of U.S. public high schools, we weighted our survey responses by several factors including: a) school size; b) student demographics—race (% of white students); c) student demographics—SES (% of students eligible for Free or Reduced Priced Lunch); d) school geographic location (in an urban, suburban, town, or rural community); e) school regional location (in Northeast, South, Midwest, or West); and f) community partisan leaning. Data included in the weighting were drawn from the Common Core of Data and the EDGE files, as well as results of the 2024 U.S. presidential vote at the congressional district level.

Interview Data Collection

At the end of the survey, principals were asked whether they were willing to participate in a follow-up interview. 42% of principals who completed the survey agreed to be interviewed. Using this pool, we purposefully selected a diverse subsample of principals based on the student and community characteristics of their schools.

We conducted 49 semi-structured interviews over Zoom during the summer. Interviews were designed to explore principals' efforts to educate for a diverse democracy during the 2024-2025 school year amidst various social and political pressures. One of our questions asked principals about whether and how their school had been impacted by and responded to immigration enforcement efforts. The interviews, which lasted about 45 minutes, were open-ended and emic in approach, allowing principals to describe their experiences in their own terms. Principals who participated in the interview received a \$50 gift card as a thank-you for their time.