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The Fear is Everywhere

In a new UCLA IDEA survey, high school principals across the United States report troubling impacts of immigration enforcement on students, families and schools. Significant majorities report concerns of student well-being, lost enrollment and declining attendance. Many cite increased incidents of bullying.

More than three-quarters have developed plans to respond to immigration enforcement actions.

(Los Angeles) The UCLA Institute for Democracy, Education and Access (UCLA IDEA) today published, "[The Fear is Everywhere: U.S. High School Principals Report Widespread Effects of Immigration Enforcement.](#)"

The paper presents the results of a new nationally representative survey of more than 600 high school principals responding in summer of 2025 to questions examining the educational impact of intensified immigration enforcement during the first months of the second Trump administration. The research, which also draws on interviews with 49 of the principals, provides a timely and detailed portrait of the broad impact of immigration enforcement with significant majorities of principals across U.S high schools reporting troubling effects of immigration enforcement.

"Given the harsh, even hateful rhetoric and aggressive immigration actions of the Trump administration, the effect on students and schools should not be surprising to anyone," said UCLA education professor John Rogers, director of UCLA IDEA and lead researcher of the project. "But the widespread nature of harmful impact and deep level of concern are alarming. As one principal told us, the fear is everywhere."

The survey results and interviews make it clear that intensive immigration enforcement poses challenges to principals across the United States and undermines the purpose of public education. Key among the findings:

- More than two-thirds (70.4%) of U.S. public high schools were impacted due to heightened concerns of students from immigrant families about their well-being and the well-being of their families
- A strong majority of U.S. public high schools experienced declines in the attendance and learning of students from immigrant families. More than half of principals (57.8%) reported that "immigrant parents and guardians left the community during the school year." Almost two-thirds

of principals across the nation (63.8%) reported that "students from immigrant families missed school due to policies or political rhetoric related to immigrants."

- More than one-third (35.6%) of U.S. public high schools experienced incidents of bullying directed toward students from immigrant families, with principals reporting that some of their students have threatened Hispanic classmates with comments such as, "Can I see your papers?" or "Go back home."
- A large majority of U.S. public high schools have taken actions to address the needs of students from immigrant families. More than three-quarters of principals (77.6%) report they have "created a school plan to respond to visits from federal agents." Nearly half (47.2%) of principals reported that they have "created a school plan to address student needs if parents or guardians experience deportation." Almost half of principals (44.8%) reported that they have "created professional development for staff on how to support students from immigrant families."

"The fact that more than three-quarters of principals said they have created a plan to respond to intensified immigration enforcement is astonishing and a critical indicator of the level of fear and anxiety that has spread across American schools," Rogers says.

In addition to responses to survey questions, principals across every region of the U.S. spoke at length in interviews about the fear among students and families and the challenges faced by schools.

Principals frequently addressed the fear and anxiety many of their students are experiencing. A Florida principal said that several immigrant parents have confided, "My child is afraid to come to school."

A New York principal said, "Immigrant students are suffering the most. Chronic absenteeism, post-traumatic stress disorder and anxiety are interfering with their opportunities for success. They and their families live in a culture of fear."

Many principals pointed out that immigrant parents have been forced to shelter in their homes to avoid encountering ICE officers. A principal in Tennessee said immigrant parents have not been able to "go to the grocery store, so the students weren't eating properly." A Nebraska principal said that as parents or guardian stay home or have been detained, some students "stopped coming to school as regularly because they didn't want to leave their very young siblings alone at home."

"High school principals across the United States are describing heightened distress amongst students from immigrant families. with majorities reporting immigrant families have moved out of their communities and almost two-thirds reporting declines in the attendance," concludes Rogers. "Combined with anti-immigrant rhetoric from national

politicians, these dynamics are affecting daily life in U.S public schools. As one California principal told us, “It just doesn’t feel very American.”

The report, “The Fear is Everywhere: U.S. High School Principals Report Widespread Effects of Immigration Enforcement,” is based on an online survey conducted between June and August 2025, with 606 principals of public high schools in United States. Some principals also submitted written comments addressing the impact of immigration enforcement.

The researchers also conducted 49 follow-up interviews in July, August, and early September with a cross-section of principals who participated in the survey.

The report will be published and available on the UCLA Institute for Democracy and Access [website](#) on December 9, 2025.