Getting Down to FACTS

# Supporting Immigrant-Origin Students in California's Schools

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With the largest immigrant population of any state in the nation and the largest share of immigrant-origin children (Mejia & Johnson, 2026), California has long been at the forefront of developing policies, curricula, and pedagogical practices designed to promote the school success, English language acquisition, college and career readiness, and overall wellbeing of students of immigrant backgrounds. Yet, the unprecedented attacks on immigrants happening now and the ongoing threat of immigration enforcement, including near or on school grounds, is reshaping students' and educators' daily realities. District and school leaders, politicians, and policymakers are facing new challenges and must assume new responsibilities in order to ensure access to rigorous, comprehensive educational opportunities for all students in California, particularly those of immigrant backgrounds. This report focuses exclusively on the public preK-12 sector; however, institutions of higher education face both unique and overlapping challenges that warrant careful attention as well (Brumer, 2025).

Currently, there are 10.9 million immigrants living in the state of California. This figure represents roughly 28 percent of the state's total population and 22 percent of all foreign-born people in the United States (Mejia & Johnson, 2026). While only five percent of all children in California were born outside of the United States (Urban Institute, 2026), around 45 percent of children in California under 18 have at least one immigrant parent (Mejia & Johnson, 2026), the largest share of whom come from Mexico (46%). This is followed by East Asia or the Pacific Islands (15%), the Middle East or South Asia (11%), Central American or the Spanish Caribbean (10%), and Southeast Asia (5%) (Urban Institute, 2026). In addition, of the nearly three million undocumented immigrants estimated to be living in California at this time (Migration Policy Institute, n.d.), around 130,000 of them are school-aged children. Moreover, one in five children in California lives in a mixed status family in which at least one parent is undocumented (State of California, n.d.)

Immigrant and immigrant-origin[1] students enrolled in California's public schools are highly diverse in terms of language, racial/ethnic, religious, geographic, and socio-economic backgrounds. They are also widely distributed across the grade span. The largest proportion of immigrant-origin students in California public schools (32 percent) are in grades one through five, followed by 25 percent in grades nine through twelve, and twenty percent in the middle grades (six to eight). Over six percent of immigrant-origin students also attend kindergarten, and seven percent are in public pre-school. Another seven percent of children aged three to five are not enrolled in school (CA Department of Education, 2026a). This distribution requires schools at all levels to have adequate resources and expertise to meet immigrant-origin students' heterogeneous learning and developmental needs.

The population, on average, of children of immigrants in California's public schools differs from their non-immigrant-origin peers in meaningful ways. Whereas in 2023, a full 14 percent of California's public-school students who have at least one immigrant parent were classified as "English Learners" (ELs) (also referred to as Emergent Multilingual Learners "EML" in California), only two percent of students with no foreign-born parents were classified as EL. Additionally, over 40 percent of immigrant-origin students were categorized as low-income with 16 percent having a family income below the poverty line; conversely, 28 percent of children of U.S.-born parents in California in 2023 were low-income and less than 12 percent had a family income below the poverty line (Urban Institute, 2026).

Taken together, these data provide some initial foundation for understanding the characteristics of California's students most likely to be directly affected by Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) agents' continuing campaign against immigrants—a campaign being waged in homes, schools, courthouses, places of worship, and other community spaces across the state and nationwide. While the assets, challenges, and educational trajectories of first- and second-generation immigrant children can vary in important ways, including as a result of their own citizenship status (Figlio & Özek, 2020; Hao & Woo, 2012; Portes & Rumbaut, 2024), these students share a common experience of growing up in immigrant-led households, which, in turn, can influence their school access, engagement, and outcomes (Sattin-Bajaj, et al., 2023).

[1] Immigrant student refers to a student who was born outside of the United States; immigrant-origin refers to a student who has at least one foreign-born parent. This includes both first-generation immigrant students and second-generation U.S.-born children of immigrant parents.

Today, immigrant communities are feeling more vulnerable than ever; it is therefore necessary to consider the implications of ICE's ramped up incursions for the broadest group of young people—that is, all immigrant-origin students. Using a wider lens facilitates a more comprehensive estimation of the effects of the current conditions and clearer identification of those education and other policies that are functioning well to protect and support immigrant-origin students, those that may be obstructing their progress, and where there are gaps. As such, this report focuses on the profiles, educational trends, and policies associated with the student subgroups that are most likely to be immigrant-origin and therefore most likely to be directly impacted by immigration enforcement.

There is no one indicator used to identify all students who have at least one immigrant parent nor are there policies explicitly designed for this larger group of students. As a result, efforts to understand the policies that touch on immigrant-origin students' experiences in California's public schools must examine distinct aspects of their education. This includes, but is not limited to their classification as English learner students (EL), newcomer immigrant students, and migratory students.

The following report examines the status of immigrant-origin students in California's K-12 public schools and the federal and state-level policies influencing their educational access, opportunities, and outcomes. It combines description of federal and state education policies and the California state laws guiding district- and school-level response to immigration enforcement with analysis of novel empirical data about pre-service and in-service teachers' experiences educating immigrant-origin students. It also includes discussion of educators' sense of preparedness to meet the needs of this heterogeneous group of learners. The research questions motivating this report are as follows:

1. Which federal and state policies facilitate immigrant-origin students' educational access, school integration, and opportunities for success and which limit them?
2. In what ways do the California Teacher Performance Expectations (TPEs) that set teacher credentialing standards address the key issues affecting immigrant-origin children and which of the skills, knowledge, and expertise that teachers need to successfully educate immigrant-origin students do the TPEs overlook?
3. In which domains do pre- and in-service teachers feel prepared to educate immigrant-origin children and in which do they feel unprepared?

4. What policy changes could increase educational opportunity for immigrant-origin students, reduce their educational exclusion, and better support teachers in their work with immigrant-origin students, particularly during periods of intensified immigration enforcement threats?

The report begins with an overview of the basic demographic characteristics of immigrant-origin students in California, paying special attention to the particular outcomes of students classified as English learners (ELs), "newcomer" immigrant students who have been enrolled in school in the United States for three years or less, and "migratory students" who are eligible to receive services through the Migrant Education Program (MEP). Next, it provides a systematic description of the major federal and state education policies shaping immigrant-origin students' educational rights and the additional supports they may receive. This includes the funding, mandates, and resources allocated to students who are classified as ELs, policies directed toward the educational needs of newcomer immigrant students, and those associated with the Migrant Education Program. Furthermore, the report describes those policies guiding teacher preparation and credentialing that are salient to immigrant-origin students' education, particularly those that relate to requirements regarding training to teach English language development (ELD) and exposure to aspects of growing up in immigrant-led households that may affect students, such as the impact of undocumented status and family migration experiences. Part of this section of the report reviews the laws passed in California since the first Trump Administration that are explicitly geared toward protecting immigrants from immigration enforcement actions in "sensitive" spaces such as schools. These include mandates and guidance to schools regarding (non)-cooperation with ICE and how to respond to ICE agents' attempts to enter non-public spaces or access information about students and parents.

The report then turns to a summary of research on the effects of immigration enforcement on children and young people. Evidence is presented about the educational, mental health, and behavioral effects of immigration enforcement on students and school personnel, and there is a discussion of research on the ways that growing up in mixed-status families affects children and young people. This section highlights some of the practices and strategies that schools and school leaders have implemented to support students and families in the face of rising enforcement fears, activity, and anti-immigrant hate.

The final section of the report presents data from three separate empirical studies examining pre-service teacher preparation in California and in-service educators' experiences working with newcomer immigrant students. These studies serve to identify some of the gaps in educator training and professional development vis a vis understanding and knowing how to support and educate immigrant-origin students. Taken together, this lays the groundwork for a series of policy recommendations in the following areas: (1) Educator preparation and training to effectively teach immigrant-origin students; (2) Resources and supports for newcomer immigrant students; (3) Social-emotional wellbeing and mental health supports for immigrant-origin students; and (4) Response to immigration enforcement threats. The report ends with a discussion of concrete suggestions for policy interventions to improve immigrant-origin students' educational opportunities and increase relevant training and supports for educators in California.

## Indicators of immigrant-origin students' educational performance and outcomes in California

The academic engagement and outcomes of immigrant-origin students in California and the heterogeneity of educational experiences within this population can be understood by examining performance indicators for three separate, yet often overlapping students sub-groups: students classified as EL, "newcomer" students, and "migratory" students. Of these three groups, the largest number of students are classified as ELs, with the majority of both newcomer and migratory students also receiving the EL designation. Each sub-group differs in terms of size, average educational performance, and the specific programs and policies related to their classification. Newcomer and migratory students in particular have unique, albeit diverse, circumstances that often require specialized expertise and supports. Yet, immigration enforcement threats may affect all of these students and profoundly shape their day-to-day experiences both inside and outside of school. Data on immigrant-origin students' educational outcomes in California's public school presented below sets the stage for subsequent discussion of the policies influencing EL, newcomer, and migratory students' educational rights, requirements, and access.

## Newcomer or recent immigrant students

Recent immigrant students, often referred to as "newcomer" immigrant students, comprise an important subgroup of the larger immigrant-origin student population enrolled in California's public schools. While the total number of newcomer immigrant students is smaller than the population of students classified as English learner (EL), a group that is primarily composed of second generation, U.S. born children of immigrants (Stavely & Willis, 2025), the particular experiences and educational needs of newcomer students demand significant investment on the part of the CDE and specific training and supports for educators. Based on the definition found in Title III Part A, Sections 3201 (5) of the federal Every Student Succeeds Act, which determines eligibility for funds earmarked for this subgroup, newcomer "immigrant students" are children and youth between the ages of three and twenty-one who were born outside of the United States and have not attended school in the United States for more than three full, cumulative academic years (Every Student Succeeds Act, 2015). Local Education Agencies (LEAs) in California report the number of immigrant students enrolled annually on Census Day, the first Wednesday in October.

Nationally, newcomer immigrant students comprise roughly 30 percent of all foreign-born children in the United States and one percent of all children aged 5-17 (Sugarman, 2023). They are a highly diverse group representing students with some of the lowest socio-economic backgrounds as well as those from families in the top income brackets who enter school with high levels of English proficiency (Sugarman, 2023). Newcomer immigrant students also come from distinct racial/ethnic backgrounds, and their racialized experiences in schools and society can impact their integration, opportunities, and educational trajectories (Lee, Park, & Wong, 2017; Sáenz & Manges Douglas, 2015). Finally, some (increasingly small) proportion of newcomer students are refugees, having been granted asylum status, which makes them eligible for separate resources and services, along with legal permission to be in the country (UNHCR, n.d.)

Few studies of immigrant student achievement disaggregate outcomes by the number of years a student has been in the U.S. As a result, newcomer immigrant students' actual performance is often poorly understood. Among the limited studies that have accounted for students' time of arrival, evidence shows considerable challenges acquiring English and achieving sustained school success. Umansky and colleagues (2018) found that in two (unidentified) states, students whom they referred to

as “recently arrived immigrant English learners” (RAIELs) rapidly improved in English proficiency during their first three years in the U.S. However, few of them reached English proficiency or performed at grade level after three years. Moreover, between 40 and 70 percent of immigrant students who arrived during high school ended up graduating at rates far below the non-immigrant, non-English learner comparison group.

In another five-year longitudinal study of more than 400 newcomer immigrant students aged 9-14 from Central America, China, the Dominican Republic, Haiti, and Mexico attending 50 different schools in seven school districts in the Boston and San Francisco Bay areas, Suárez-Orozco, Suárez-Orozco, & Todorova (2008) identified a set of factors that most strongly predicted these students’ academic trajectories. They found that household composition (specifically, living with two adults); school segregation and poverty; student perception of school violence; English language proficiency; reported psychological symptoms; being overage for their grade; and student gender were all significant predictors of students’ academic outcomes over time. Moreover, experiencing family separations, having multiple school transitions, limited contact with English-speaking peers, and undocumented status were linked to less school engagement and lower achievement among the newcomers in their sample. These studies point to some of the obstacles and potential places for policy intervention to improve newcomer students’ opportunities for educational success.

In the State of California specifically, the most recent data reported from Fall 2024 showed just over 235,000 “immigrant students” enrolled in California public schools, up from roughly 190,000 the previous year (SY 2023-24), and 165,000 immigrant students the year prior to that (CA Department of Education, 2025f). A proportion of these students are considered Students with Limited or Interrupted Formal Education (SLIFE) (CA Department of Education, 2026d), with reading and math levels at least two years below grade level in their home language (Finn, 2023). There are no official data released on the number of SLIFE students in California or nationally, but there continues to be strong demand for resources, training, and supports for educators to help these students develop necessary academic skills to be able to access mainstream curriculum and succeed in U.S. schools (Decapua, Marshall, & Tang, 2020).

Without publicly accessible, disaggregated data on immigrant students in California, it is difficult to determine how this sub-group is faring relative to their non-newcomer and non-immigrant origin

peers. However, a recent analysis found that roughly 90 percent of newcomer students in California were classified as EL (Finn, 2023), which is consistent with statistics from other states where newcomers tend to be overwhelmingly designated as English learners (Umansky, et al., 2018). In one of the few analyses that exist of newcomer immigrant student outcomes in California schools specifically, researchers found that recent immigrant students enrolled in the Oakland Unified School District (OUSD) between 2018-2022 had substantially lower graduation rates (45 percent versus 80 percent) and lower A-G completion rates[2] (23 percent versus 45 percent) than their non-newcomer peers (Hansen & Finn, 2023). In addition, newcomer immigrant students were five times more likely to drop out of high school than their non-newcomer counterparts (Hansen & Finn, 2023). Results were similarly troubling when comparing patterns among newcomer immigrant students and non-newcomer EL students in OUSD during this same period. Non-newcomer ELs graduated at considerably higher rates than newcomers (72 percent), and they were four times less likely to drop out. Educators, researchers, and advocates point to California's low overall levels of funding and limited expertise within the CDE and in school districts across the state for addressing newcomer immigrant students' diverse and extensive academic and social-emotional needs as factors contributing to these outcomes (Finn, 2023).

## English learner students

The English learner student population in California public schools is a large and heterogeneous group comprising first-generation immigrant students and second generation, U.S. born children of immigrants. According to the most recent data released by the California Department of Education (CDE), 40 percent of students speak a language other than English at home (CA Department of Education, 2025b), and just over 900,000 students (17.4% of the student population) are classified as ELs. Roughly two-thirds of EL students are in kindergarten through sixth grade, and 80 percent of them have Spanish as their home language. Significantly, the CDE reports over 40 home languages spoken by the EL student population with Mandarin (2.3%), Vietnamese (1.73%), Russian (1.45%) Farsi (1.4%) and Arabic (1.39%) the most prevalent after Spanish.

[2] A-G requirements are a uniform minimum set of 15 yearlong high school courses required for admission as a freshman to the University of California (University of California, n.d.)

Students in California are classified as EL after a multi-step process that begins when a school determines that a student's English language proficiency should be assessed based on responses to the Home Language Survey (HLS), a required questionnaire given when a child is first enrolled in a California public school (CA Department of Education, 2025d). If a language other than English is identified as the language most used and spoken by adults at home on the HLS, a student is then administered the initial English Language Proficiency Assessment for California (ELPAC) within 30 days and classified as either EL or initially fluent English proficient (IFEP) (CA Department of Education, 2025d). Some students reclassify as English proficient after a few years while others, labeled "long-term English learners" (LTELs), have been enrolled in school in the United States for six years or more but have not yet been reclassified as fluent English proficient, limiting their chances to take elective courses in secondary grades.

The data dashboards made publicly available on the CDE website provide a portrait of EL student performance and the persistent disparity in their levels of academic achievement relative to their non-EL peers[3]. During the 2024-25 school year, EL students—a population comprising both LTELs and non-long-term English learners—scored on average 123.6 points below standard on the state math assessment, Smarter Balanced Summative Assessment or the California Alternate Assessment (California School Dashboard, 2025a). By comparison, students classified as "English only" scored 31.3 points below standard on average. On the college and career readiness indicator used in the state, only 24.3 percent of EL students were considered "prepared" compared to 51.7 percent of all students (California School Dashboard, 2025b).

Chronic absenteeism rates are the primary indicator that the CDE uses to measure academic engagement. During the 2024-25 school year, 17 percent of all students were chronically absent, meaning that they had been absent ten percent or more of the instructional days in which they were

[3] Researchers have shown the challenges in accurately assessing EL student performance given the changing composition of this sub-group. Due to ongoing reclassification of students who demonstrate proficiency on the summative ELPAC and other measures, it is often difficult to capture growth in student performance over time, particularly for those who were ever classified as EL but may have reclassified. These difficulties have prompted growing calls for collecting and publishing data on "Ever ELs"—that is, students who were classified as EL at any time in their schooling. See Saunders & Marcelletti (2013) and Thompson, Umansky, & Rew (2023) for a more thorough discussion of this issue.

enrolled (California School Dashboard, 2025b). For their part, 18 percent of EL students were chronically absent and 22.5 percent of LTELs were (data for the broader EL group were disaggregated by non-LTEL and LTEL students). In light of these patterns, the nearly 10 percentage point difference in graduation rates between EL students (80 percent) and all students (88 percent) is unsurprising.

The rates of progress on the ELPAC offer another view into student academic performance and growth and may, in part, help explain the other results. During the most recent 2025 administration of the summative ELPAC, 45 percent of EL students progressed at least one level (out of four total levels) compared to their level from the prior year, while 36 percent maintained their level, and another 17.4 percent decreased at least one level (California School Dashboard, 2025b). Overall, data from EL students in California from kindergarten through twelfth grade show systemic challenges in advancing all students' English language development and ensuring timely reclassification as fluent English proficient. This, in turn, may influence test performance, student engagement, graduation, and preparedness for college and careers after high school.

## Migratory students

Students receiving services through the federally funded Migration Education Program in California are the smallest of the three sub-groups of immigrant-origin students discussed in this report. A student is classified as "migratory" if they have a parent or guardian working in the agricultural, dairy, lumber, or fishing industries and their family has moved residences or across school district boundaries due to economic necessity at least one during the past three years (CA Department of Education, 2025e). A young adult may also meet the criteria if they have moved on their own and engage in or sought to obtain work in those fields. Within the broader category of migratory students, there is a subgroup who is identified as "Migratory Priority for Service" (PFS). These are students who have made a "qualifying move" within the last year and who are failing or at greatest risk of failing to meet state academic standards or who already dropped out of school (CA Department of Education, 2025e).

California has the largest number of students who receive services through the MEP in the country, with one out of three students classified as "migratory" living in the state. In the most recent school year for which program data are available, nearly 79,000 young people in California between the

ages of three and 21 were identified as migratory, and more than 540 school districts in the state educated students who were eligible for services through the program (Gurrola, Severino & Tran, 2024). Migratory students are three times as likely as all other students to be classified as English learners: during the 2022-23 school year, 65 percent of all migratory students were classified as EL. Moreover, migratory students in grades six through twelve are twice as likely to be classified as LTEL as non-migratory EL students (Gurrola, et al., 2024).

Of the 25 home languages reported for migratory students in California between 2018-19 and 2022-23, Spanish was by far the most prevalent with nearly 95 percent of students reporting Spanish. This was followed by Mixteco, an indigenous Mexican language (3.5 percent), and Punjabi (less than one percent). Notably, the prevalence of Mixteco and Zapoteco, both indigenous languages spoken in Mexico, has increased among the migratory student population in the past six years (Gurrola, et al., 2024).

California's students who receive services through the MEP show some of the lowest levels of academic engagement and performance of any student sub-group highlighting the significant challenges to their access to consistent, high quality formal educational opportunities. During the 2022-23 school year, migratory students were 23 percent less likely than all other students to score at proficiency on the state ELA assessments and 20 percent less likely to do so in math (Gurrola, et al., 2024). In addition, migratory students' four-year high school graduation rates were roughly four percentage points lower than all other students, and their dropout rates were two percentage points higher (Gurrola, et al., 2024). While there has been some reduction in the disparity in test performance and high school dropout rates between migratory students and their peers, there remain troubling gaps in these and other indicators of student engagement, achievement and wellbeing (Gurrola, et al., 2024).

Data collected from MEP staff and parents of migratory students receiving services through the MEP highlight some of the key areas of identified need to best support this group of students living under uniquely challenging circumstances. In an analysis of online surveys administered through the MEP to out of school youth, parents, and MEP staff in 20 local offices, researchers found that across all grade spans, MEP parents cited supports social-emotional learning, supports for accessing mental health services, and supports for accessing health services as the most critical areas of need (Gurrola,

Severino & Tran, 2024). MEP staff also identified these needs as of primary importance for students in grades K-8. They also emphasized supports in graduating from high school, instructional supports in math, English language arts (ELA), and English language development (ELD) as essential for students in high school and similarly important for students in lower grades. Finally, access to technology in the form of internet connection and devices such as computers, laptops, or Chromebooks were named as barriers to MEP students' opportunities for educational success by both parents and MEP staff (Gurrola, Severino & Tran, 2024).

In sum, these data provide baseline information about the size, characteristics, and educational performance of the large and diverse population of California's public-school students who are considered immigrant-origin. The policies and guidance that the CDE has developed to address some of these students' academic and other needs will be reviewed below.

## Education policies influencing immigrant-origin students' education in California

The education of immigrant-origin students in California public schools is largely determined by a series of federal, state, and local policies that specify their educational rights and requirements, allocate funding, and set professional standards for educators. Federal and state education agencies also provide guidance and implementation support to Local Education Agencies (i.e., school districts) and to educators who are tasked with the everyday work of interpreting learning standards, choosing and delivering curriculum, and preparing students for post-secondary college and careers. In addition, federal immigration policies and state and local cooperation with federal immigration agents can directly impact immigrant-origin students. Immigration policies are not prescriptive about education, and, the 1982 Supreme Court ruling in *Plyler vs. Doe* guarantees all children the right to a free, public education regardless of their immigration status or religious beliefs (American Immigration Council, n.d.); however, there is clear evidence that immigration policies have consequences for students' educational engagement and outcomes (Amuedo-Dorantes & Lopez, 2015, 2017; Dee & Murphy, 2020; Kirksey & Sattin-Bajaj, 2021, 2023, 2025).

The influence of these interconnected layers of policy on immigrant-origin students' educational access and opportunities can be understood through the lens of Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory. This framework identifies five core environmental levels or "systems" that affect an individual's development (Bronfenbrenner, 1977), and it emphasizes the value of considering the interactions among each one. These include a person's immediate surroundings and direct interactions such family, school, peers, and neighborhood (microsystem), laws and policies in a society (macrosystem), and the broader historical events (i.e., Trump's second presidency and heightened immigration enforcement) that comprise the chronosystem. In the section that follows, some of the key policies in the macrosystem shaping immigrant-origin students' educational experiences and outcomes are discussed. Specifically, those federal and state policies geared toward the educational needs of newcomer immigrant students, EL, and migratory students are highlighted and certain policies in the areas of teacher preparation and credentialing that relate to immigrant-origin students' education are reviewed. Recent laws by the California State Senate and State Assembly that have been passed in response to changing federal approaches to immigration enforcement and the State Attorney General's guidance to school districts are discussed as well.

## Teacher preparation and credentialing

Pre-service teacher training, including course content, field placements, philosophies, and approaches to pedagogy, along with in-service professional development and ongoing learning opportunities, can have important implications for all students' experiences in school. For teachers of immigrant-origin students in particular, expertise in helping them acquire English language skills at every age and grade level, using integrated English language development strategies in content areas, and understanding how to leverage students' immigrant backgrounds to engage in culturally relevant, culturally responsive teaching in the classroom are additionally important (Bajaj, et al., 2022; García, Kleifgen, & Cervantes-Soon, 2025; Suárez-Orozco, Strom, & Larios, 2018). What is more, teachers' knowledge about the impacts of undocumented status and family migration experiences on students can influence their capacity to build strong relationships with students of immigrant backgrounds (Gonzales, 2010; Rodriguez, 2021). Yet, research shows that despite instruction on English language development strategies being a standard part of many teacher training programs and a common topic for in-service

teacher professional development sessions, educators continue to feel underprepared in these areas (Damaschke-Deitrick et al., 2023; Kim & Cooc, 2023; Kirksey, 2022; Rogers, et al., 2017).

Teachers' preparation to promote EL students' language development notwithstanding, other aspects of immigrant-origin students' lives and experiences, including the effects of immigration enforcement threats, deportation, and undocumented status, have been largely ignored in the field of teacher education nationally (Goodwin, 2002, 2017; Sattin-Bajaj, et al., 2023) and absent from teacher credentialing standards in California in particular (Sattin-Bajaj & Nguyen, 2025). In other words, there are few, if any, state-level policies specifically geared toward the training, skills, and expertise that teachers need to effectively educate immigrant-origin students, including newcomer immigrants and migratory students who may have unique and extensive needs. Some of this training and development may occur at the LEA-level when districts make decisions about hiring, desired educator experiences, and the types of professional learning in which to invest for their school personnel; however, the CDE has yet to develop formal mandates and instead provides resource guides and optional recommended practices (CDE, 2025d).

The sole policies related to teacher preparation for educating immigrant-origin students in California focus on the area of English language development. Since 1999, all teacher education programs in California have been required to incorporate some instruction and methods related to facilitating EL students' language acquisition. Later, in 2004, a settlement was reached in the class action suit of *Williams et al., vs. California.* Filed by nearly 100 students in San Francisco county, the lawsuit alleged that the State of California and state agencies failed to provide equal access to instructional materials, adequate school facilities and qualified teachers to students, including ELs (CA Department of Education, 2024). As a result of this settlement, the state expanded the compulsory training that all teacher candidates must receive with regard to English language instruction. Thus, since 2004, all teacher candidates in California graduate with an English learner authorization, which qualifies them to teach the English language development course mandated for students classified as English learners. A report from the ACLU concluded that "Williams is working" (Chung, 2013) on the basis of a reduction in the number of teachers in California who were teaching ELD without the credential. However, as the data demonstrate, there remain ongoing disparities in educational outcomes between students classified as English learners in California and those who are not.

## Educational policies related to English language development and English learner students

Unlike in a number of other areas of education policy that tend to be driven by the state, the federal government has long had an influential role in determining policy and providing federal funding for EL students' education[4]. The 1968 passage of the Bilingual Education Act, an amendment to the 1965 Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA), provided funding for educational programs for EL students for the first time (Boyle, Bergey, & Garrett, 2024). This was followed by a series of Supreme Court cases—*Lau v. Nichols* in 1974 and *Castañeda v. Pickard* in 1981—which solidified requirements on the part of school districts to furnish appropriate language supports to ensure English learners' meaningful access to education (Boyle, et al., 2024). Later, with the 2001 passage of the federal No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB), EL students were identified as a discrete subgroup for whom "Adequate Yearly Progress" targets had to be met, and states were mandated to develop English language proficiency standards and aligned assessment to measure their growth (Boyle, et al., 2024). Finally, Title III of NCLB remains the most significant federal policy and funding stream for EL student education; with stated purpose of "ensuring that EL students, including immigrant children and youth, attain English language proficiency and meet the same challenging state academic standards that other students are expected to meet" (Section 3102), local education agencies are required to use Title III funds to supplement state investments in English learner students' education with the state monitoring receiving districts to ensure EL students meet expected progress targets (Every Student Succeeds Act, 2015).

As the state serving the largest total number of EL students, California has also passed and implemented a series of policies designed to promote their English language development and overall educational achievement. California Senate Bill 550, passed in 2004 as part of the Williams settlement, mandated that "adequate" instructional materials specifically designed for EL students' needs be provided. Next, the shift in 2013 to the Local Control Funding Formula (LCFF) in California resulted in more funds being directed toward EL student education. It also introduced a new requirement that

[4] Since the start of Trump's second term in office, there has been eroding support from the federal government for education and other funding for EL and immigrant students as demonstrated by frequent calls to eliminate Title III and dismantle the Department of Education entirely (see Villegas, 2025 for an overview).

districts have committees composed of parents whose children were classified as ELs give input about spending, programs and services (CA Department of Education, 2026b). With the 2017 approval of the California English Learner Roadmap by the State Board of Education (also known as the EL Roadmap policy), the state gave formal guidance to LEAs about how to welcome, understand, and educate English learners enrolled in California public schools, and it produced a number of documents to facilitate implementation of the policy (CA Department of Education, 2025c). Last, California Assembly Bill 2735, made effective during the 2019-20 school year, prohibits public schools from denying EL students in middle and high school enrollment in core curriculum courses or those required for high school graduation and ensures that English learners are not placed in alternative or inferior courses. Beyond the laws and policies, the California Department of Education produces a host of instructional and implementation materials made available to districts and schools identifying best practices for EL student education (CA Department of Education, 2025c).

## Educational policies related to newcomer immigrant students

Unlike the educational services and funds for EL students, most of the policies that impact newcomer student education in California are developed at the state or LEA level. One exception[5] is the specific provision in Title III allowing states to award subgrants to LEAs that have five or more eligible immigrant students and experience "significant" growth in the number or percentage of immigrant students enrolled in schools that year compared to the average of the two preceding fiscal years. States may not allocate more than 15 percent of their total Title III funds to be used toward immigrant subgrants, but there is some flexibility in how these funds may be spent within this subgrant program (Every Student Succeeds Act, 2015).

In California, the passage of Assembly Bill 2121, which was made effective in 2019, marked an important moment of recognition of the particular needs of recent immigrant students in high school. This bill extended exemptions that had already been in place for students in foster care, homeless students, former juvenile court students, and students in military families from all local high school coursework and requirements beyond statewide graduation requirements to both newcomer

[5] The Office of Immigrant Youth at the California Department of Social Services also administers a number of separate federally- and state-supported programs focused on refugee youth but they are not included for discussion here (CDSS, n.d.)

immigrant students and migratory students (CA Department of Education, 2025a). With this bill, newcomer students were also allowed to enroll in a fifth year of high school if necessary to complete state-only graduation requirements. Significantly, newcomer students who were enrolled in programs explicitly designed for recent immigrants were exempted from provisions in AB 2735 prohibiting the exclusion of EL students from standard instructional programs so long as they can be "caught up" after exiting the newcomer program. More recently, in 2024, California Assembly Bill 714 was enacted to establish a state-wide definition of "newcomer pupil" that corresponded with the federal government's definition used in Title III (CA Department of Education, 2026d). In addition, this bill required the CDE to develop a list of best practices and requirements for teaching newcomers and to "consider" including content about newcomer immigrant students in the next revision of the English language arts and English language development curriculum framework. Finally, it recommended that the CDE provide resources about newcomers in new instructional materials for educators in grades one through eight.

One final program administered outside of the California Department of Education that has implications for the services and resources provided to some newcomer immigrant students is the state-funded California Newcomer Education and Well-Being (CALNEW) program, managed by the Office of Immigrant Youth in the California Department of Social Services. This program awarded $6.9 million dollars to 20 school districts and one County Office of Education in the state during the 2024-25 school year. Its specified aims are to provide support services to low-income newcomer students and their family members using school sites as a hub, with a particular focus on academic engagement, and students' social and emotional wellbeing. Approximately 50 percent of all newcomer immigrant students in the state are educated in those 20 districts; however, the remaining "low-incidence" districts, which serve an average of 21 newcomers, have no access to these additional funds or expertise. Furthermore, these low-incidence districts often lack capacity and economies of scale to provide tailored services to this population of students (Finn, 2023).

## Educational policies for migratory students

A final set of policies address the educational needs of the smallest sub-group of immigrant-origins: those who meet the specific criteria to be classified as "migratory." These students' eligibility for services through the federally-funded MEP must be verified through interviews with

program staff. While funds for the MEP do not come from the state, state law determines the administrative framework for providing MEP services via the regional offices.

The federal government requires states to develop and implement a state service delivery plan (SSDP) of the Migration Education Program that addresses the following mandates: (1) Provision of educational programs to migratory students during the school year, summer, and breaks from school; (2) ensuring that migratory children are not penalized for having moved across schools or districts; (3) guaranteeing migratory children's access to appropriate educational opportunities so that they may meet academic standards; and (4) assisting migratory children in the face of cultural and language barriers, educational disruptions, social isolation, and health issues (CA Department of Education, 2025e). All funds spent through the MEP must be used on services that are supplemental to existing categorical funding from the state and federal governments. The SSDP guides program planning, monitoring and evaluation of the program for a period of five years.

Two kinds of programs are run through California's MEP. Statewide programs generally focus on efforts to identify and recruit migrant families to the program and to encourage parent involvement and student engagement. The Binational Migrant Education Program is one such state-wide program. It is coordinated between the United States and Mexico and provides direct services to migratory students who travel between the two countries. Teachers from Mexico also come to the U.S. in the summer to train California teachers on educational practices and customs in Mexico to help them better meet migratory students' needs (CA Department of Education, 2026c). The Migrant Student Information Exchange is another state-wide initiative that allows states to share information about migrant students' education. Last, the Mini-corps provides state-wide instructional and tutorial services to students with the aim of developing a group of bilingual and bicultural teachers with particular expertise in working with migrant students (CA Department of Education, 2026c).

Local-level programs through the MEP are generally run collaboratively with school districts. They focus on facilitating districts' enrollment of migratory students as well as improving teaching and learning practices geared to this sub-population. Local programs also provide targeted professional development for educators, help establish school-family-community partnerships, develop standards, and oversee assessment, funding and governance (CA Department of Education, 2025e).

While funding and legislation regarding migratory students' educational services comes largely from the federal government, California Assembly Bill 1319, enacted in 2019, formally codified the rights of "migratory pupils" (Assembly Bill 1319, 2019). Specifically, it detailed these students' right to remain at their "school of origin" regardless of their change in residence, similar to the affordances provided to homeless students under the federal McKinney-Vento Act (Agulia & Torres, 2020).

Overall, the federal and state policies related to the educational access, services, resources, and opportunities for immigrant-origin students address key dimensions of these students' experiences that have been identified, if not adequately addressed, for decades. They establish requirements, programs, resources, and standards related to English language acquisition, academic skill development for older newcomers, attending to students' social-emotional needs, and continuity in education for highly mobile, migrant students. In addition, state-level policies determine the minimum training and preparation that educators must receive to educate students classified as English learners.

Newcomer students, migratory students and EL students' rights to and need for access to high quality, equal instruction, educational services, supports and programming remain a central focus of the CDE. At the same time, the current federal administration's rampant enforcement actions against immigrant communities has necessitated an additional set of policies, procedures, and guidance to assist districts and schools in preparing and responding to ICE threats and the consequences for students, school personnel, and school communities. As with many issues concerning immigrant populations, California has been a leader in developing best practices, resources, and laws to protect and promote immigrants and their children's wellbeing. Below, I review the major policies and guidance produced in the State of California specifically related to the role of LEAs and schools in the preservation of students' educational rights, student privacy, and safety.

## Policies and guidance for California public schools in response to increased immigration enforcement

The first set of state-wide bills created in response to ramped up immigration enforcement were enacted during Trump's first term in office. Senate Bill 54, known as "The Values Act," became effective in January of 2018 and formally established California as a "sanctuary state" (Senate Bill 54, 2017). The law stipulates that no state or local resources may be used to aid federal immigration enforcement in

schools, hospitals, and courthouses that were designated as “safe spaces”. More specifically, the law prohibits any of California’s law enforcement agencies—including school police and security departments at K-12 public schools and publicly-funded post-secondary educational institutions—from engaging in immigration enforcement activities. This means that police officers and sheriffs are forbidden from asking people about their immigration status, arresting them solely on the grounds of having a deportation order, or from sharing personal information such as home addresses with ICE or Border Patrol (unless publicly available). Such actions frequently occur in places where local law enforcement is deputized to operate as federal ICE agents via 287(g) agreements (American Immigration Council, 2021).

SB 54 also prohibits local police or sheriffs from holding individuals in jail for extra time to allow immigration officers to question or arrest them or allowing ICE access to information to people held in local jails. Such practices are widely used in counties (outside of California) where the Secure Communities program is in place (American Immigration Council, 2011). Finally, the bill requires that the state Attorney General make publicly available a set of model policies for how public schools, libraries, courthouses, shelters, and other state-operated organizations could maximally limit assistance with immigration enforcement “to the fullest extent possible consistent with federal and state law” (Senate Bill 54, 2017).

Around the same time as the passage of SB 54, California Assembly Bill 699, the Safe Schools for Immigrants Act, was enacted. This bill requires all school districts in California to have policies to restrict providing assistance to federal immigration enforcement agents at public schools. It also prohibited schools from collecting any information related to immigration status during enrollment (Assembly Bill 699, 2017). Furthermore, the bill mandated adoption of model policies provided by the Attorney General or equivalent policies within six months of its enactment. Such policies, based on those developed by the State Attorney general per SB 54 referenced above, were required to include steps for how to respond to ICE agents’ request to access school grounds to engage in enforcement activity, how school superintendents and/or designated officials would be notified in the case of such requests; and how schools should respond to requests from ICE agents for students’ or families’ personal information to be used for immigration enforcement (Assembly Bill 699, 2017).

The Safe Schools for Immigrants Acts (AB699) explicitly added students' "immigration status" to the list of characteristics protected by the state's anti-discrimination laws as well. Moreover, it included a number of other provisions to protect immigrant and immigrant-origin students in the face of growing enforcement. Beyond banning collection of immigration information, AB 699 also required that any inquiry or attempts by ICE to enforce immigration laws be reported to the school's governing board(s). Further, the bill directed schools to avoid making referrals to Child Protective Services and pursue alternatives in the event that a parent is detained or otherwise unavailable due to immigration enforcement activity, and it mandated that school boards inform immigrant parents about their children's rights to a free, public education regardless or their immigration status or religious beliefs as found in the 1982 Supreme Court ruling in *Plyler vs. Doe.* AB 699 ordered school boards to provide "Know Your Rights" information to families detailing the rights and protections in place for immigrants in the face of enforcement actions (as found in materials drafted by the Attorney General). Finally, the bill required school boards to formally educate students about the harms of bullying based on immigration status or religious beliefs (Assembly Bill 699, 2017).

These two state laws laid the groundwork for the subsequent set of bills passed and enacted in California soon after Trump took office for a second term. While immigration enforcement priorities and approaches during the first Trump Administration deviated significantly from those in place during Obama's time in office, his second term has been marked by an even greater turn toward harsh, punitive, and large-scale enforcement. The removal of prosecutorial discretion during Trump's first term—that is, giving prosecutors and immigration officials the authority to decide whether to bring charges against a person and prioritizing detention and deportation violent criminals—and re-instating the Secure Communities Program and 287(g) agreements (Pierce & Bolter, 2020) changed conditions in the United States for immigrants and increased their sense of risk and insecurity. However, since January 2025, the reality of daily life for immigrants has been fundamentally altered and confidence in adherence to democratic ideals, laws, and basic respect for human rights has been shattered. Almost immediately upon returning to office for a second term, Trump rescinded protections against enforcement activity near schools and other "sensitive locations" (Damiano Pearson, 2025). Moreover, the training that immigration officers received was substantially cut (Ray & Sanchez, 2026) and individual's basic rights to refuse ICE entry into private spaces without a signed judicial warrant were

violated (Winger, 2026). Consequently, advocates and policymakers in California and across the country have worked quickly to pass a slew of new laws designed to heightened protections and increase guidance to schools and many other institutions working with and in service of immigrants and their children.

Senate Bill 98, also known as the Sending Alerts to Families in Education (SAFE) Act, was enacted in September of 2025 with the express purpose of directing K-12 school districts, colleges and universities to develop procedures to notify parents and guardians of students (K-12) along with teachers, school administrators, and other school personnel and students, faculty, and staff (post-secondary) when there is or has been confirmed ICE present on campus (Senate Bill 98, 2025). In addition, the bill required school districts to review, or update their comprehensive safety plan within six months of the bill's enactment. Assembly Bill 59 or, the Safe Haven Schools Act, was enacted at the same time as the SAFE Act, and it provided more detailed guidance on the prohibitions against ICE officers' access to non-public school areas or to student or family information without the required documentation (valid judicial warrant, subpoena, or court order). The bill stipulated restrictions against immigration enforcement officers' access to non-public spaces on campus (e.g. classrooms) without proper legal permissions; legislated a requirement that school staff request valid identification from any ICE officer seeking to gain entry to the school site; and it barred school personnel from disclosing any information about students or their family members to ICE agents without written parental consent or a legal warrant. This new law extended and strengthened the protections enshrined in the Safe Schools for Immigrants Act (AB699) from 2018.

Soon after these two laws were enacted, Assembly Bill 419 or the "Know your Educational Rights" Act was passed, requiring that schools post the state Attorney General's guide for students and families about immigration enforcement actions at California schools, and, specifically, their rights. This bill specified that such information be made available in English and in Spanish in the LEA's main administrative building as well as on its website (Assembly Bill 419, 2025). When Assembly Bill 495, the "Family Preparedness Plan Act of 2025" was passed, made effective in January of 2026, it superseded both AB 419 and 49 and implemented updated guidance for how schools should respond to immigration enforcement. This included new rules about who may be considered a minor's caregiver in the absence of a parent or guardian and what reporting requirements LEAs must follow in the event of

immigration enforcement activity on school grounds. Finally, AB 495 extended the requirements enumerated in the law to licensed child daycare facilities and license-exempt California state preschools (Assembly Bill 495, 2025).

Many of these laws direct LEAs and schools to refer to the Attorney General's guidance and model policies in their adoption and implementation of the required policies and procedures enumerated in the bills. In fact, these laws mandated that the Attorney General produce such a guide and gave explicit deadlines to deliver it.[6] *Promoting a Safe and Secure Learning Environment for All: Guidance and Model Policies to Assist California's TK-12 Schools in Responding to Requests for Access and Information for Immigration Enforcement Purposes* (Bonta, 2025), which was first published in December of 2024 and updated in December 2025, therefore serves as a critical component of the State of California's overall policy architecture related to the education, safety, and wellbeing of immigrant-origin students in the context of heightened enforcement threats and activities. The purpose of this guide is to present the governing laws and exemplary policies for dealing with and responding to potential immigration enforcement actions on school grounds.

To start, the guide details laws and recommended procedures for gathering and handling student and family information during enrollment. Next, it addresses questions of how to maintain necessary privacy protections for students, families, and employees and how to respond to requests for information about these parties from immigration enforcement agents according to the parameters dictated in the law. The guide also offers step-by-step instructions and recommendations for how school officials should respond when ICE officials request access to school sites for enforcement purposes based on what the state laws mandate and prohibit in these circumstances. Additionally, the guide presents suggested procedures for responding to the detention or deportation of a student's caregiver including new requirements for designating a guardian or caretaker as legislated in AB 495. Last, it introduces model policies for how to respond to bullying or hate crimes stemming from national origins or ethnicity (e.g., immigrant background). This guide serves as the most comprehensive

[6] The model policies developed by Attorney General Robert Bonta in 2024 and updated in 2025 (Bonta, 2025) are distinct from those created after the passage of Senate Bill (54), the Values Act, in 2017. The policies created after SB 54 were primarily focused on establishing baseline prohibitions against local law enforcement collaboration with federal immigration authorities. By contrast, the model policies and guidance found in *Promoting a Safe and Secure Learning Environment for All* (Bonta, 2025) are more proactive and geared toward preparing for anticipated federal actions through updated model policies, protections for sensitive locations, and increased requirements for notification about enforcement actions.

resource for LEAs and schools about how to operate under current conditions of increased immigration enforcement threats and how to continue to provide secure, supportive learning environments for students in the context of increased volatility and fear.

While these model policies and guidance are an essential starting point, there is a need for rapid-response research that can shed light on the district- and school-based practices that are showing the most promise in helping students and families navigate through the current terrain. More information and examples are needed of where and how LEA's are providing safe places where students and school personnel can engage in meaningful learning.

## Safe-zone initiatives in California schools

The official laws in place in California furnish LEAs and schools a foundation for the kinds of policies, procedures, and practices to implement to minimize risk for immigrant-origin students and families, facilitate their continued attendance, and promote educational engagement and success. One way that hundreds of school districts have attempted to signal their commitment to protecting immigrant students and families is by formally adopted safe-zone resolutions. These may take on a variety of forms, ranging from presenting their approach to responding to ICE agents requests for school access or personal information, to providing counseling, legal services, and other resources to immigrant students, to offering increased training for school personnel to recognize and respond to students' needs using culturally appropriate and trauma-informed strategies (Amuedo-Dorantes & Bucheli, 2025). By 2021, over 300 school districts in California had safe-zone resolutions (Amuedo-Dorantes & Bucheli, 2025). Researchers investigating the effects of safe-zone policies on students and school outcomes in California found strong positive effects for Hispanic students, English learners, and low-income youth. Student test scores and graduation rates improved, and they reported having stronger relationships with teachers and peers in districts with safe zone policies in place. Moreover, educators working in districts with safe-zone policies felt more supported and better equipped to meet students' needs (Amuedo-Dorantes & Bucheli, 2025). These findings are consistent with the results of a binational study of U.S. citizen children with deported or undocumented parents that found that adolescents who attended schools in safe-zone districts were more likely to earn higher grades, less likely to repeat a grade, and less likely to have conflicts with peers or teachers

(Amuedo-Dorantes et al., 2022, 2023). The benefits grew the longer students were exposed to or attending schools with safe-zone protections.

The empirical evidence base about the ways that children and young people are affected by immigration enforcement threats and activity, restrictive, anti-immigrant policies, and by growing up with undocumented family members is an important starting point for identifying areas of need and opportunities for new policies appropriate to the realities of today. In the next section, I summarize the relevant research literature on immigration enforcement effects on students.

## Research evidence on effects of immigration enforcement on children and young people

The totality of the devastation wrought by immigration enforcement and the threats of such "episodes" (Dreby & Macias, 2023) for students, their families, and their school communities can be difficult to measure given the diffuse short-and long-term academic, social, economic, health and mental health effects. Researchers have attempted to understand the consequences of immigration enforcement in a number of ways. Some scholars analyze data collected in the aftermath of immigration enforcement events and during periods of heightened threat of enforcement; others track outcomes for students in geographic and political contexts with restrictive and anti-immigrant policies in place. Another subset of work focuses on the experiences and outcomes of children in mixed-status families as means to try to assess how growing up with undocumented parents affects students' educational trajectories, regardless of their own immigration status. Together, the existing evidence paints a picture of the extensive and widespread consequences for children and young people of living, studying, and growing up under conditions of threat and constraint.

Significantly, aside from studies focused exclusively on undocumented students and/or children of "likely unauthorized parents" (Amuedo-Dorantes & Lopez, 2015, 2017), much of the research on immigration enforcement seeks to capture the implications for a broad swath of students that includes both those children and young people hypothesized to be most directly impacted by immigration enforcement activity and their non-immigrant origin peers (Kirksey, et al., 2020; Kirksey & Sattin-Bajaj, 2021). Moreover, data limitations and privacy concerns make it difficult, and often undesirable, to

precisely identify students who may be most immediately affected by enforcement (due to their parents' or their own immigration status). As a result, proxies such as classification as English learner and/or racial/ethnic background (Hispanic) are often used to approximate the population of students who may be expected to experience the greatest hardship.

In what follows, I summarize key findings from research evidence about the educational, mental health, and behavioral effects of immigration enforcement for students and school personnel. I also include discussion of research on the ways that growing up in mixed-status families has been found to affect children and young people. Given California's status as a sanctuary state, evidence about the consequences of living in highly restrictive environments is less pertinent to understanding the conditions of immigrant-origin students and potential policy interventions to improve them; thus, this body of research is not included in the discussion. This section closes with a review of some of the research highlighting practices and strategies that schools and school leaders have implemented to support students and families in the face of rising enforcement fears, activity, and anti-immigrant hate.

## Effects of exposure to immigration enforcement events

The dramatic rise in the frequency of immigration enforcement events on or near school grounds has brought the relationship between enforcement and students' educational and social-emotional wellbeing into sharp relief. While data on the number of ICE actions near schools are not available, researchers at the Migration Policy Institute have estimated that arrests by ICE have more than quadrupled and average daily detention has doubled since Trump took office for a second term (Chishti, Bush-Joseph, & Putzel-Kavanaugh, 2026). Yet, even before ICE officers were conducting "operations" near schools, there was growing evidence showing the powerful, negative educational, social, and mental health consequences of all forms of immigration enforcement for young people, regardless of where the actions occurred.

Studies tracking effects of immigration enforcement activity have primarily focused on the following indicators: student test scores; absenteeism—both in the initial days after a specific "episode" and longer-term in schools located in areas where enforcement activity has been intense or frequent; student mobility; college readiness and post-secondary enrollment patterns; and students' sense of safety in schools. On average, results indicate large and significant negative effects on student test

scores in math and English language arts (ELA) associated with increased enforcement activity. The biggest declines have been measured for Hispanic students and students classified as English learners and in schools where ICE activity had occurred more frequently (Bellows, 2019, Figlio & Özek, 2025; Kirksey & Sattin-Bajaj, 2023, 2021). Significantly, many studies show spillover effects for those students who are hypothesized to have a lower chance of being related to individuals targeted for detention or deportation (based on their English proficiency and racial/ethnic background), although the size of the negative effects tend to be smaller (Bellows, 2019; Kirksey & Sattin-Bajaj, 2021, 2023).

Absenteeism is another major indicator demonstrating the consequences of exposure to immigration enforcement for students. Multiple studies have shown spikes in absenteeism for students enrolled in schools near where ICE operations took place, especially immediately after they occurred (Dee, 2025; Heinrich, et al., 2023; Kirksey, 2020; Kirksey & Sattin-Bajaj, 2021, 2023). One recent analysis of student attendance in five school districts in California's Central Valley found that daily student absences increased by 22 percent in the two-month period after ICE conducted a series of targeted raids in the surrounding areas in January 2025 (Dee, 2025). The largest jump in absences occurred among the youngest students. In another study using a difference-in-difference design to compare student attendance and chronic absenteeism rates for students in Connecticut and Rhode Island during Biden's time in office and the second Trump presidency, Mumma (2025) found declines in average monthly attendance and increases in chronic absenteeism rates for EL students in Connecticut. The number of daily absences for EL students in Rhode Island also grew since Trump took office in January 2025. A nationally representative survey of 606 high school principals conducted between June and August 2025 by researchers at the Institute for Democracy, Education and Access at UCLA (Rogers, et al., 2025) corroborated these patterns. Sixty-four percent of survey respondents reported that students in immigrant families had missed some school due to policies or rhetoric related to immigrants in the previous school year (Rogers, et al., 2025).

Increased student mobility and changes in student enrollment have been linked to enforcement activity as well. Student mobility—that is, transferring to a different school or school district—tends to rise after ICE episodes (Kirksey & Sattin-Bajaj, 2023). Moreover, drops in overall school enrollment among Latinx students is associated with a higher numbers of ICE arrests nearby (Bucheli, Rubalcaba and Vargas 2021), more frequent raids (Santillano, Potochnik and Jenkins 2020), or the adoption of

287(g) agreements (Dee & Murphy, 2020). The longer-term implications of these disruptions to students' school and home lives can be seen in the results of a workplace raid in Texas. This study found a significant reduction in students' four-year college enrollment rates among Hispanic students attending schools most proximate to the site of the raid and an increase in the proportion of Hispanic students working during high school in these same districts (Kirksey & Sattin-Bajaj, 2025).

Students' sense of safety, belonging, and experiences with bullying are also impacted by immigration enforcement activity and heightened tensions around immigration. One study of students in seven large school districts in California found that as the frequency of immigration-related arrests in their communities increases, Hispanic students report a lower sense of in-school safety (Kirksey & Sattin-Bajaj, 2021). Results from a nationally representative survey of high school principals nationwide indicated that 36 percent of students from immigrant backgrounds reported having been harassed or bullied at school (Rogers, et al., 2025). These findings were consistent with data from surveys conducted with principals and teachers during Trump's first time in office showing increased hostility, political tensions, and anti-immigrant rhetoric in schools and growth in immigrant-origin students' stress and discomfort in schools (Rogers, et al, 2017, 2019).

Alongside the declines in students' academic performance and engagement resulting from immigration enforcement activity, researchers have tracked serious negative consequences for students' and adults' mental and behavioral health. Children who have had a parent detained or deported have a higher incidence of post-traumatic stress disorder (Rojas-Flores, et al. 2017), anxiety (Allen, et al. 2015), and depression (Gulbas, et al. 2016; Zayas et al. 2015) than their peers who have not experienced a similar traumatic event. After a large-scale raid in Morristown, Tennessee in 2018, Heinrich and colleagues (2022) found increases in diagnoses of depression and substance use disorder as well as higher rates of self-harm and suicide attempts among children living in close proximity to where the enforcement episode took place. Last, in her extensive qualitative work with children in immigrant families, including those who have experienced parental deportation, Joanna Dreby (2012, 2015, 2025) and Dreby and Macias (2023) identified severe economic hardship, fear, anxiety and uncertainty that often persisted into adulthood. This and other work (Koball, et al., 2015) highlight the importance of tracking the longitudinal outcomes of young people exposed to immigration

enforcement episodes and those living in environments of perceived threat to fully capture the implications of these events and contexts of violence.

Finally, the economic devastation associated with parental detention and/or deportation warrants mention given the direct and immediate consequences for children and young people. Research shows that family income and financial stability can decline precipitously after immigration enforcement actions, with one study conducted in six different locales that had experienced target immigration enforcement estimating that families lost between 40 to 90 percent of their income within six months of a parent's immigration-related arrest, detention, or deportation (Capps, et al., 2015). In another study using Census data, researchers found that household income falls up to 45 percent when a family member is deported (Preston, 2020). Moreover, there is evidence of increased rates of foreclosure associated with immigration enforcement (Rugh & Hall, 2016). Further, studies examining the aftermath of large-scale ICE raids on communities have documented steep rises in food insecurity, housing instability, and economic vulnerability in the near term with many of the challenges persisting over time (Capps, et al., 2007; Chaudry, et al., 2010; Lopez, et al., 2022). The detrimental effects of living in such conditions of uncertainty and deprivation are borne out in their capacity to attend school, engage in learning, and realize their academic potential.

## Consequences for educators

While the majority of the research examining the educational impacts of immigration enforcement has focused on students' engagement, achievement, and wellbeing in schools, an emerging body of work explores the implications of heightened enforcement, anti-immigrant polices, and xenophobic rhetoric for school personnel. There is compelling evidence about the powerful, negative effects for educators associated with working in environments where immigration enforcement threats are prevalent and in a highly polarized national context where attacks on immigrants are commonplace (Rogers, et al., 2017, 2019). Researchers documented high levels of stress, burnout, and anxiety among educators during Trump's first term in office (Barajas-Gonzalez, et al., 2024; Gándara & Ee, 2022; Rogers, et al., 2019; Sanchez, Freeman & Martin, 2022). Moreover, in the wake of increased pressure related to rising immigration enforcement and deportation fears,

teachers have reported low levels of self-efficacy and feeling inadequately prepared to respond to immigrant-origin students' and families' needs (Rogers, 2017; Kirksey, 2022).

The intensity of the current immigration enforcement regime is decidedly different from prior federal approaches to immigration policy, including during Trump's first administration; however, school leaders have been responding to the challenges associated with enforcement fears and immigrant students' and family members' precarious immigration status for decades. Research documenting leadership practices and decision-making practices that have contributed to reduced uncertainty among immigrant parents, students, and school personnel offers some models for effective school-based responses to the contemporary challenges that immigrant-origin students and the larger school communities are experiencing (Crawford, 2017, 2018). Putting in place concrete policies around communication, privacy, and bullying and investing in efforts to build relationships, foster dialogue, counteract deficit orientations, and bolster school personnel's confidence and capacity in the face of enforcement threats have all been shown to render benefits for immigrant-origin students and school communities more broadly during times of acute crisis (Crawford, 2017, 2018). Other studies have highlighted promising district practices that promote welcoming, safe spaces for immigrant-origin students, signal affirmation for immigrants, mobilize resources to meet their basic needs, invest in shared knowledge and capacity-building, and create opportunities and conditions for discussion and exchange (Lowenhaupt, et al., 2021). Finally, teacher behaviors that allow legally vulnerable students to feel secure, express themselves, and connect with other students who may be struggling with similar feelings and circumstances can be important school-based factors that protect and support students (Dabach, 2015; Mangual Figueroa, 2017; Rodriguez, 2017; Rodriguez, Monreal, & Howard, 2024).

## Impacts of growing up in mixed-status families

Questions about the ways that parents' and guardians' undocumented status can influence children's educational experiences, participation, and outcomes have prompted considerable scholarly investigation. An estimated 6.3 million children under the age of 18 currently live with at least one undocumented immigrant parent in the United States—over five million of whom are U.S. citizens themselves (Gelatt, et al., 2025). California alone is home to roughly 20 percent of all children who have undocumented immigrant parents (Gelatt, et al., 2025) rendering issues surrounding

undocumented status and what schools and other institutions can do to attenuate any associated disadvantages for students even more relevant.

The impacts of growing up with undocumented family members have been examined in a number of different ways. In one line of inquiry, researchers have focused on students' and families' use of public services and engagement with educational institutions. This body of work shows that undocumented immigrant parents tend to be more reluctant to access resources and services to which their children may be entitled (i.e. health, educational), which may have repercussions for their opportunities and development (Acevedo-Garcia, et al., 2021; Bernstein et al. 2019; Vargas 2015; Vargas and Pirog, 2016; White, Yeager, Menachemi, & Scarinci, 2014; Yoshikawa, 2011). Research by Yoshikawa (2011) found that children of undocumented immigrants were enrolled in preschool at lower rates than their peers. More recent studies showed that undocumented parents were less likely to participate in school-based events and activities than other immigrant and non-immigrant parents (Bernstein, et al. 2019; Dreby 2015).

Other work has tracked a range of "penalties" for children associated with living in conditions of constraint due to restricted economic opportunities, financial instability, high stress levels, and limited rights. Undocumented immigrant parents' circumscribed employment and other income-generating opportunities (Enriquez, 2015; Yoshikawa, Godfrey & Rivera, 2008), poor working conditions, and lack of benefits (Donato, et al. 2008; Hall, Greenman & Farkas, 2010), all of which may contribute to food, housing, and financial insecurity (Acevedo-Garcia, et al., 2021; Brabeck & Xu, 2010). This, in turn, can result in children taking on responsibilities to work and contribute financially to their home (Enriquez, 2015). The necessity to work can shape students' academic engagement and performance during secondary school and influence their post-secondary trajectories.

Using assessment data for students of immigrant backgrounds with "legally vulnerable" parents, Brabeck and colleagues (2016) showed that children of undocumented immigrants performed worse on standardized tests than their peers, but the effect was attenuated when parents accessed social services. Furthermore, in their work looking at the educational outcomes of children of "likely unauthorized parents," whom they identified using data on parents' ethnicity and citizenship traits in the supplement to the Current Population Survey, Amuedo-Dorantes and Lopez (2015, 2017) found that increases in immigration enforcement significantly raises these children's probability of repeating a

grade and their likelihood of dropping out of school. The extreme toll of living in a state of constant threat plays out in students' everyday classroom behaviors, engagement, and academic performance.

The mental health consequences of growing up in communities in which members of mixed status families are blocked from accessing the same services and opportunities as people without similar forms of legal vulnerability are also borne out in the research evidence. This work is complementary to, but distinct from, studies that document the effects of immigration enforcement activity overall for students, without disaggregating outcomes for students living with undocumented parents. According to parents' and clinicians' reports, children of undocumented immigrant parents have greater incidence of post-traumatic stress disorder and "internalizing problems" than their peers whose parents are permanent residents and legal citizens (Rojas-Flores, et al. 2017). Moreover, in Brabeck and Xu's (2010) study surveying immigrant parents of different degrees of "legal vulnerability," based on their own immigration status and experiences with ICE, undocumented immigrant parents were more likely to indicate that their children's emotional wellbeing was poor. Last, Hainmueller and colleagues (2017) found that children of mothers who were eligible for Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals[7] (DACA) had 50 percent fewer diagnoses of anxiety and adjustment disorders than children whose mothers did not meet the DACA birth date cutoff.

Finally, students who are undocumented themselves comprise another sub-group of young people whose experiences and outcomes have been measured separately, although there may be some overlap with findings about children in mixed status families. Most of the empirical analyses of undocumented students have focused on older students, looking at post-secondary aspirations, enrollment patterns, and outcomes. Research shows that undocumented high school students tend to be less motivated to pursue higher education than their peers with legal immigration status (Cebulko, 2014; Gonzales, 2011; 2016). Limited access to financial aid for higher education along with other restrictions on enrollment by state create substantial deterrents against undocumented students'

[7] DACA was established under Obama via executive action in June 2012 with the aim of protecting undocumented immigrants brought to the United States as children from removal proceedings and to receive authorization to work for renewable two-year periods. Eligibility is limited to people who arrived in the U.S. prior to turning 16 and before June 15, 2007; were under the age of 31 as of June 15, 2012 (i.e., under age 44 as of 2026); are currently enrolled in school, have completed high school or its equivalent or be a veteran; and have no lawful (immigration) status as of June 15, 2012. While over 900,000 people have benefitted from DACA protections, no new DACA applications have been accepted since Trump ended DACA in 2017; only DACA renewals continue and the program is being challenged in court (KFF, 2025; National Immigration Law Center, 2025).

pursuit of post-secondary education or prompts enrollment in two-year rather than four-year colleges and universities (Abrego, 2008; Bjorklund, 2018; Diaz-Strong, 2021; Gurantz & Obadan, 2022; Serna, et al., 2017; Suárez-Orozco, et al., 2015). Moreover, these barriers may contribute to some undocumented students' decisions to enter directly into the workforce after high school instead of enroll in college (Gonzalez, 2016). Inadequate high school guidance and support to help undocumented students navigate varying state policies on enrollment and financial aid eligibility (Briceno Mosequera, 2024a; Diaz-Strong, 2021; Gonzales, 2011, 2016; Nienhusser et al., 2016), large administrative burdens associated with applying to college (Briceno Mosquera, 2024a, 2024b; Flores, 2016; Sahay, et al., 2016), and fear of disclosing their status during the college and/or financial aid application process (Sahay, et al, 2016) have also been identified as factors influencing the post-secondary enrollment (and non-enrollment) patterns among this student subgroup.

In sum, there is considerable evidence about the varied and serious implications that immigration enforcement activity, threats of detention and deportation, and living in legally precarious conditions can have for students and the educators who work with them. This research provides a starting point for identifying some of the most significant challenges in the lives of immigrant-origin students and some promising or effective policies and practices that leaders and educators can pursue inside and outside or school. It also illuminates the immigration-related issues about which educators should be informed.

In what follows, I present findings from three inter-related empirical studies designed to explore state-level guidelines on teacher preparation for educating children of immigrant backgrounds and pre- and in-service teachers' sense of preparedness to respond to some of the obstacles that immigrant-origin students face, including the ramifications of undocumented status and immigration enforcement. Guided by an expansion of Goodwin's (2002, 2017) framework identifying the "key issues affecting the lives of immigrant children," (Sattin-Bajaj, et al., 2023), this new research introduces educators' perspectives on their capacity to effectively serve immigrant-origin students, especially during periods of crisis. It also sheds light on educators' views about the gaps in their training, skills, and the supports made available to help so they may fulfill their responsibilities to students of immigrant backgrounds. Moreover, this research points to potential factors contributing to teachers' inadequate preparation and potential areas of intervention to improve immigrant-origin students'

access to supportive and rigorous academic opportunities and safe and supportive schools. Before turning to the new empirical research, I review some of the related literature about educator preparation and the conceptual and theoretical ideas informing the empirical studies.

## Educators' preparedness to meet immigrant-origin students' needs

The existing policy landscape in California reveals how policymakers have identified and attempted to address the educational, health, economic, and social-emotional needs of immigrant-origin students in public schools and what they have done to promote equitable access to educational opportunities, particularly in the context of heightened immigration enforcement threats. These policies shape educators' day-to-day work with immigrant-origin students and highlight state education leaders' priorities. Evidence about the effects of immigration enforcement on children also illuminates the consequences of ICE activities and helps guide evaluation of the areas receiving adequate and inadequate policy coverage.

The current circumstances for immigrants in the United States have raised new and critical concerns about what schools must do to ensure immigrant-origin students' safety, protection, educational engagement, and wellbeing, including via enhanced training and supports for the educators interfacing with students and families every day. In recent years, there has been growing scholarly interest in questions surrounding educators' knowledge about immigration policies, undocumented status, and anti-immigrant rhetoric and how prepared they feel to meet immigrant-origin students' academic and social-emotional needs in the classroom (Conner & Weiner, 2020; Gándara & Ee, 2022; Kirksey, 2022; Rogers, et al., 2017). With more than one in four students under the age of 18 living with at least one immigrant parent in the United States today (Batalova, 2026), building teachers' confidence and skills to effectively educate, engage, and form relationships with students of immigrant backgrounds has become increasingly salient. Yet, research shows that teacher preparation programs and state credentialing standards have largely overlooked these areas as part of their requirements (Goodwin, 2002, 2017; Sattin-Bajaj & Nguyen, 2025).

The consequences of having an educator workforce that is uninformed or worse, possesses erroneous or deficit-based conceptions about immigrant parents and their children, can be severe. Studies show that bias and misinformation can negatively impact immigrant-origin students' ability to build relationships with teachers, damage their sense of belonging in school, and hurt their educational performance (Gonzales, 2010; Rodriguez, 2021). Moreover, inadequate teacher training about immigration and its influence on students' lives can produce lower educator self-efficacy as it relates to teaching and engaging with immigrant-origin, refugee, and linguistically and culturally diverse students (Damaschke-Deitrick et al., 2023; Kim & Cooc, 2023; Kirksey, 2022). Conversely, teachers who have developed sociopolitical awareness of issues related to immigration and documentation status and work to connect with immigrant-origin students can contribute to their greater educational investment, higher aspirations, and more school connectedness (Connery & Weiner, 2022; Mangual Figueroa, 2017; Rodriguez, Monreal, & Howard, 2024). The imperative to cultivate educators' awareness and capacity has never been more apparent; however, sizable gaps remain in the provision of such professional learning opportunities both for pre- and in-service teachers.

Evidence on educators' sense of preparedness to address issues related to immigration enforcement or other aspects of students' immigrant backgrounds underscores the meaningful discrepancy between the resources and training that currently exist and what is needed. In both California and nationally, novice and veteran teachers report feeling poorly informed about migration and ill-equipped to respond to the consequences of anti-immigrant vitriol, policies, and enforcement actions (Gándara & Ee, 2022; Kirksey, 2022; Rogers, et al., 2017). A survey of new teachers in California found that only about half felt prepared to support students whose lives were touched by immigration enforcement. However, the teachers who had been exposed to discussions about immigration policy in their preservice training were more likely to report feeling prepared (Kirksey, 2022). The extant literature underscores the importance of greater investment in understanding educators' experiences and addressing gaps in their training so that they feel confident to teach and build relationships with all students in their schools and classrooms.

## Expanded framework for preparing teachers to educate children of immigrant backgrounds

Nearly twenty-five years ago, education scholar A. Lin Goowin (2002) pointed out this lacuna in teacher education after conducting an exhaustive review of the teacher education literature. She found that the topic of immigrant students' experiences and needs was virtually absent from two decades of teacher education research. The few references she found to educating immigrant students were, "skewed toward language issues and second-language learning" (Goodwin, 2002 p. 160). Consequently, Goodwin (2002) put forth a list of key issues affecting immigrant students that she asserted all educators should be familiar with, which included (1) immigrant students' previous schooling; (2) dislocation; (3) cultural disorientation; and (4) the role of language in their lives. In subsequent work, a team of graduate student co-authors and I (Sattin-Bajaj, et al., 2023) expanded the list to include issues that impacted first- and second-generation children of immigrants citing language brokering[8] and its impacts on parent/child dynamics; immigration policies and climate; the impacts of undocumented status; and migration-related trauma as aspects of many immigrant-origin children's experiences with which educators should be familiar. Together, this work has established a threshold of information that may help educators understand their immigrant-origin students and feel more prepared to teach them. Moreover, it enumerates a base of knowledge against which existing policies, credentialing standards, and teacher self-reported awareness can be compared. The three studies introduced below draw on the "Expanded framework for preparing teachers to educate children of immigrant backgrounds" (Sattin-Bajaj, et al., 2023) presented in table 1 to assess the strengths and gaps in the existing policies, practices, requirements, and professional learning opportunities for educators working with immigrant-origin youth today.

[8] Language brokering refers to the phenomenon of multilingual children being tasked with translating and interpreting for adults. Research has shown the ways that this responsibility can produce harmful effects for immigrant-origin children and negatively impact their family dynamics (McQuillan & Tse, 1995; Orellana et al., 2003; Reynolds & Orellana, 2009; Suárez-Orozco & Suárez-Orozco, 2002).

**Table 1: Key Issues Affecting Children in Immigrant Families**

| |
|---|
| 1. Previous Schooling (Goodwin, 2002) |
| 2. Dislocation (Goodwin, 2002) |
| 3. Cultural Disorientation (Goodwin, 2002) |
| 4. Language (Goodwin, 2002) |
| 5. America post-9/11 (Goodwin, 2017) |
| 6. Legacy of NCLB & Promise of ESSA (Goodwin, 2017) |
| 7. 2007 Economic Crisis (Goodwin, 2017) |
| 8. Language brokering & impacts on parent/child dynamics (Sattin-Bajaj, et al., 2023) |
| 9. Immigration policies & climate (Sattin-Bajaj, et al., 2023) |
| 10. Impacts of undocumented status (Sattin-Bajaj, et al., 2023) |
| 11. Migration-related trauma (Sattin-Bajaj, et al., 2023) |

In what follows, each study is briefly introduced with the main research questions, methods, and sample presented. Then, key findings are discussed. The report ends with implications for policy.

## Migration-related knowledge and skills in the California Teacher Performance Expectations

In California (and elsewhere), state teacher credentialing standards formally determine "the body of knowledge, skills, and abilities that beginning general education teachers have the opportunity to learn in approved teacher preparation programs" (California Commission on Teacher Credentialing, 2016). The TPEs inform the structure, focus, and course content of teacher preparation programs by determining the knowledge and skills that will be evaluated in the Teacher Performance Assessment (TPA), an assessment required to earn a credential in the state. These signal state education leaders' priorities for the educator workforce and the minimum expertise required of all new teachers in California's public schools.

To better understand how much weight and attention the California Commission on Teacher Credentialing (CCTC) has given to the influence of growing up in immigrant-led households on students' education experiences and development, we analyzed the TPEs, focusing explicitly on whether any of the key dimensions of immigrant-origin students' lives identified in the expanded framework (Sattin-Bajaj, et al., 2023) were named. Specifically, the study sought to answer the following question: Which topics related to migration, immigration policies, immigration enforcement and their effects on students and families are included in the California TPEs? Using manifest and latent content analysis techniques (Catanzaro, 1988; Hsieh & Shannon, 2005), we analyzed the six TPEs based on the six domains of the California Standards for the Teaching Profession (CSTP) and the 45 elements within the TPEs that detail the specific knowledge, pedagogical techniques, practices, and orientations expected of new teachers (Sattin-Bajaj & Nguyen, 2025). We found that the topic of migration, including immigration policies, undocumented status, and migration-related trauma, was not mentioned in any of the California TPEs. Conversely, we noted that in four of the six TPEs, reference was made to the skills and knowledge that educators were expected to generate through their preparation programs relative to facilitating emergent multilingual learners' English language development. While this attention to language is both important and necessary given that many immigrant-origin students are also building proficiencies in English, it overlooks the significant and nuanced ways in which teachers can and should adapt their practice in response to children of immigrant backgrounds' diverse assets, needs, and experiences.

## Teacher candidates' exposure to immigration-related topics and sense of preparedness

On the basis of the findings from the content analysis of the California Teacher Performance Expectations, we launched another study to examine what teacher candidates in California were actually exposed to in the context of their teacher education programs (TEPs). The study combined analysis of course syllabi, questionnaires and interviews with teacher candidates in the final months of their credential programs, and interviews with program administrators and instructors at three TEPs based at public universities in California. Using these multiple data sources, we investigated what, if anything, teacher candidates were taught about migration, immigration policies, the impact of growing

up in mixed-status families, the consequences of language-brokering, forms and responses to migration-related trauma and the other domains from our expanded framework of key issues affecting immigrant-origin students (Goodwin, 2002, 2015; Sattin-Bajaj, et al., 2023). Below I present findings from the teacher candidate surveys (N=180) and semi-structured interviews with a sub-set of teacher candidates (N=22) who volunteered to participate in interviews after completing the questionnaire.

This study was conducted during a period of two academic years (2020-21, 2021-22) at three different institutions. After collection and analysis of course syllabi, I led interviews with TEP administrators and course instructors to learn how topics surrounding students' immigrant backgrounds, including immigration enforcement threats and how to respond, were covered in courses and in the program. In the final months of the program, all teacher candidates enrolled in the three participating TEPs were invited to participate in an anonymous online questionnaire that included roughly 30 open- and close-ended questions about their knowledge of and experiences with immigrant students and families prior to starting the TEP, what they learned during their program, and their reported level of preparedness to work with immigrant-origin students.

A total of 180 teacher candidates completed the questionnaire: this represented a response rate of 81 percent at one TEP, 78 percent at the second, and 48 percent at the third and largest program. Survey participants were overwhelmingly female with an overrepresentation of teacher candidates who identified as Latinx and either first- or second-generation children of immigrants relative to the total population at each of the TEPs and to the national average (NCES, 2023). The main results discussed below are combined across all programs for the purposes of this report.

A meaningful proportion of teacher candidates came into their credential program with limited knowledge about immigration enforcement and its impacts on children. As shown in table 2, over one quarter of respondents (26 percent) reported that they were "not at all" or "minimally" informed about immigration enforcement and its impacts on children and families before starting the TEP. This was more than the 21 percent of teacher candidates who responded that they were not at all or minimally informed about immigrants' experiences in the United States prior to the start of their teacher preparation program.

**Table 2: Teacher Candidates' Reported Level of Information about Immigrants and Immigration-enforcement Prior to Enrolling in their Teacher Preparation Program**

*Before you started the TEP program, how informed were you about immigrants' experiences in the United States?*

| Program | Not at all or a minimal amount (%) | Moderate or some amount (%) | A lot (%) |
|---|---|---|---|
| TEP 1 (n=42) | 31 | 40 | 29 (12) |
| TEP 2 (n=59) | 24 | 42 | 34 (20) |
| TEP 3 (n=64) | 11 | 40 | 48 (31) |
| Total N=165 | 21% (n=34) | 41% (n=68) | 38% (n=63) |

*Before you started the TEP program, how informed were you about working immigration enforcement and its impacts on children and families?*

| Program | Not at all or a minimal amount (%) | Moderate or some amount (%) | A lot (%) |
|---|---|---|---|
| TEP 1 (n=41) | 44 | 41 (17) | 15 (6) |
| TEP 2 (n=59) | 31 | 44 (26) | 25 (15) |
| TEP 3 (n=64) | 10 | 55 (35) | 35 (22) |
| Total N=164 | 26% (n=42) | 48% (n=78) | 26% (n= 43) |

Significantly, when asked about how prepared they felt overall "to successfully educate children growing up in immigrant families" in the final month of their program, 35 percent of respondents reported that they felt either "not at all" or "slightly prepared." The breakdown by TEP can be found in table 3. These findings were not entirely surprising given our analysis of the course syllabi from the three programs showing that such topics received some attention, although it was often surface-level or combined with discussions of EL students or students from culturally diverse backgrounds (Sattin-Bajaj & Nguyen, 2025). Ultimately, we understood the results of the course syllabi analysis and TC's reports on the questionnaire to reflect the challenge for TEPs of prioritizing topics that are not formally recognized or required by the California Commission on Teacher Credentialing, which is responsible for developing the TPEs.

**Table 3: Teacher Candidates' Reported Sense of Preparedness after Completion of their Teacher Preparation Program**

| Overall, how prepared do you feel to successfully educate children growing up in immigrant families? | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| Program | Not at all or a minimal amount (%) | Moderate or some amount (%) | A lot (%) |
| TEP 1 (n=36) | 52 | 48 | 0 |
| TEP 2 (n=55) | 47 | 49 | 4 |
| TEP 3 (n=49) | 10 | 85 | 6 |
| Total N=140 | 35% (n=49) | 59% (n=86) | 6% (n=10) |

Teacher candidates overwhelmingly believed that it was essential for them as teachers to be knowledgeable about immigration. In response to a question asking how important they think it is for teachers to "know about immigration in the U.S., the influence of migration in students' lives, immigrant-origin students' experiences, and how to successfully educate children growing up in immigrant families," 74 percent said it was "extremely important" (see table 4 below). Moreover, when asked how important it is for teachers to know about these topics compared to others, 71 percent it was equally as important as knowing how "to support emergent multilingual learners' language development" with another 25 percent saying it was more important. Despite this, when asked about their sense of preparation in specific domains related to immigrant-origin students, 55 percent of teacher candidates reported feeling unprepared in terms of "understanding the impacts of immigration policies on students," and 45 percent indicated feeling unprepared as it relates to "understanding trauma related to migration and immigration-enforcement." By contrast, only 17 percent reported feeling unprepared to support EML students' language development.

**Table 4: Teacher Candidates' Reported Sense of Importance of Knowledge Regarding Immigration and Its Impact on Students**

| How important do you think it is for teachers to know about immigration in the U.S., the influence of migration in students' lives, immigrant-origin students' experiences, and how to successfully educate children growing up in immigrant families? | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| Program | Not at all or a minimal amount (%) | Moderate or some amount (%) | A lot (%) |
| TEP 1 (n=36) | 9 | 25 | 66 |
| TEP 2 (n=55) | 4 | 21 | 75 |
| TEP 3 (n=50) | 0 | 22 | 78 |
| Total N=140 | 3% (n=5) | 22% (n=32) | 74% (n=104) |

Open-ended responses and semi-structured interviews with teacher candidates provided greater insight into their experiences and the gaps they noted in their training and preparation. In response to a question prompting respondents to "please write in any other ways that you were exposed to anything related to immigration in the U.S., the influence of migration on students' lives, immigrant-origin students' experiences, and how to successfully educate children growing up in immigrant families in your training through the TEP," one teacher candidate wrote, "I do not feel that I got any direct training on how to successfully educate children growing up in immigrant families. This topic, in fact, was often brushed over, and it was mostly the teacher candidates raising questions about how to best support these students in our classrooms." Another teacher candidate explained that "The ways that immigration was brought into the TEP courses was mainly through court cases and how language oppression and segregation was very real in our communities. It brought to light conversations on how to educate immigrant students and support their families but there was not an in-depth conversation or topic of discussion." Finally, when asked to write about "What else would you have liked to have learned, discussed or been exposed to in relation to immigration in the U.S., the influence of migration on students' lives, immigrant-origin students' experiences, and how to successfully educate children growing up in immigrant families in your TEP program," a teacher candidate wrote that they "would have liked more explicit emphasis on the immigrant experience,

rather than including immigrant students under the larger umbrella of black and brown students in schools. Specific approaches to working with families when you do not speak the same language as them would also have been really helpful." This response echoed a common critique of homogenizing all students of color and failing to identify their unique, discrete experiences and needs. Taken together, evidence from teacher candidates in three teacher education programs in California demonstrate the sizable hole in their training as it relates to awareness of the influence of immigration in students' lives. They also called for more structured learning and capacity-building around how to best meet immigrant-origin students' needs, particularly in the face of anti-immigrant policies and actions.

## In-service teachers' perspectives and preparedness to teach newcomer immigrant students

These first two studies examining pre-service teacher education surfaced new questions about the experiences of in-service educators who had already spent time leading their own classrooms and working with immigrant-origin students. Therefore, a third study was designed to explore how both veteran and novice teachers, along with their colleagues working as bilingual paraprofessionals, school counselors, family liaisons, and school administrators, engaged with children in immigrant families. This research focused on educators' experiences, the distinct needs they found that their immigrant-origin students had—in particular, newcomer immigrant students, and how equipped they felt to educate children of immigrant backgrounds and respond to the range of issues they faced, especially during Trump's presidency.

This multi-sited comparative case study consisted of extensive school- and classroom-based ethnographic observation, student and school personnel interviews, and document analysis. It provided further insight into the realities and desires of educators working with immigrant-origin students and the local contexts in which they interacted with students every day. Moreover, the study allowed for an on-the-ground look at the ways that federal, state, and district policies (both immigration policies and education policies) shaped and constrained educators' abilities to approach their immigrant students' educational needs with flexibility and innovation and where policies and guidance were entirely missing.

Over the course of two school years (2023-24) and (2024-25), I spent approximately 275 hours observing and assisting as a volunteer bilingual aide and interpreter in classrooms at two junior high schools in a medium-sized public California school district where roughly 60 percent of students are Hispanic, 15 percent are classified as ELs, and there is a small, but meaningful population of newcomer immigrant students (roughly seven percent in each of the two case study schools). In addition, undocumented immigrants are estimated to comprise roughly 10 percent of the region's total population. Data collection also included interviews with 32 members of the school staff including principals, teachers, school counselors, family liaisons, and other support staff and interviews. Significantly, the first year of data collection occurred during the last year of Biden's presidency; in the second year, Trump was re-elected and assumed office.

Educators in both schools struggled considerably with helping immigrant-origin students meet the academic and language demands of junior high school while also attending to their social emotional needs. The struggles were particularly acute for teachers and paraprofessionals working with newcomer immigrant students classified as EL who were adjusting to a new country, a new language, and a foreign cultural and social context. The challenges educators identified centered on the lack of direction they received about appropriate teaching strategies and expectations for EL students with limited English proficiency, the district's poor quality curriculum for English language development, their own minimal expertise and training in how to provide ELD instruction; the need for intensive literacy and numeracy support for large numbers of students, in particular newcomer students with limited or interrupted formal education; inadequate mental health services, including few bilingual therapists or people with knowledge of migration-related trauma; and the need for clarity and training for navigating difficult situations arising from heightened immigration enforcement including deportations of classmates and family members.

Teachers sought—and rarely received—adequate guidance about what to teach recent immigrant students and what to expect of them in terms of work product. One seventh grade social studies teacher in her third year of teaching explained her conundrum in the following way, asking "What is my expectation as their teacher? …Am I solely responsible for them [newcomer immigrant EL students] learning the content of my class? Am I supposed to help them acquire English as we go throughout the year?' First, I was met with 'Just translate everything. You are not responsible for having

them acquire the language. Your job is to assess their knowledge of whatever you're learning about in history that year…Then I've also been told at other times, 'You shouldn't have everything completely a hundred percent translated because they are supposed to be learning English as they go through their classes.'" Other teachers bemoaned the meager ELD curriculum adopted by the district and described having no exposure or preparation from their TEP or from the district about how to successfully teach EL students to develop English language skills and pass the ELPAC.

In high-needs schools where a majority of students may be performing far below grade level on reading and math—which was the case at the two schools where this research was conducted—the demand for intervention services is extensive. The challenges were compounded when educators were unable to determine whether newcomer students were struggling due to language barriers, cognitive delays, missed years of schooling, or a combination of these. The lack of linguistically and culturally appropriate assessments further complicated educators' ability to understand why their students were struggling and coming up with a plan to help.

Questions about how to attend to immigrant-origin students' mental health needs and social emotional wellbeing were paramount as well. Educators expressed frustration with the lack of bilingual, bicultural, on-site social workers and counselors who could help students navigate a host of difficulties ranging from social integration, cultural adjustment, and low self-efficacy, especially among LTEL students who had been unable to be reclassified after many years, to anxiety surrounding ICE presence near school and in the community. Moreover, teachers felt uncertain about how to determine when students should be expected to learn and how to address manifestations of trauma. As one veteran teacher who worked closely with newcomer immigrant students stated, "I'm surely not equipped to know when someone is ready to move on from their trauma. If I have a student in class that I know has her head down on the table who was triggered the other day because she's thinking about when she was kidnapped, how do I say, 'Oh, nope. You don't get to be thinking about that anymore. Now you have to learn…' This uncertainty extended to understanding when and how to use "trauma-informed approaches" and what this might look like in the context of a seventh-grade earth science class or a lesson on algebra.

Finally, educators felt both intense pressure and a deep desire to know how to best support their students and create safe spaces inside their classrooms when immigration enforcement fears

became rampant. Even with state- and district policies about how to respond to ICE officers attempting to enter school grounds, school personnel felt unprepared to navigate potentially distressing or uncomfortable conversations with students and families. They articulated a strong desire for model language to use when immigration-related topics emerged (e.g. conversation starters), guidelines about what should and should not be discussed, what information was developmentally appropriate for children to be exposed to at different ages, how to handle student privacy issues, and which resources and services they could share with students and families in crisis situations. While some of these questions were addressed in the Attorney General's guidance and model policies (Bonta, 2025), educators felt at a loss about how to implement them in real time. Finally, while school personnel mentioned it much less frequently than students' struggles, many educators also suffered from anxiety and other mental health issues themselves as a function of the circumstances in which they were working.

Data from in-depth ethnographic work in schools revealed the complexity of the puzzle that school leaders and educators are being asked to solve every day. Students' and families' needs have increased exponentially while educators' time, preparation, and resources have stagnated. Below I highlight some key areas of potential intervention that policymakers should consider to address the ongoing challenges that exist to ensuring that immigrant-origin students are safe and have access to fair, equal, and high-quality educational opportunities in the State of California.

## Evidence-informed Policy Recommendations

Patterns of educational engagement and performance of English learners, newcomer immigrant students, and migratory students demonstrate the need for greater attention to and investment in the educational access and success of immigrant-origin students in the state of California. A review of the major federal and state policies shaping these students' educational rights and services provided—including the teacher credentialing requirements and instructional mandates that influence educators' training and preparation—shed light on the aspects of immigrant-origin students' lives and needs that are addressed and those that are not formally recognized in policy or practice. Finally, new points to gaps in policy and resources that educators say they could benefit from to effectively fulfill their responsibilities to all students, especially those of immigrant backgrounds. The policy

recommendations that follow stem from evidence of these gaps and examples in the field of ways to address them through policy interventions and other programs and initiatives.

## Educator preparation and training

The California Teacher Performance Expectations explicitly acknowledge the importance of new teachers developing skills to help facilitate EML students' their English language acquisition. By contrast, there is no parallel requirement for teachers to develop knowledge and expertise related to a host of other factors that may affect immigrant-origin students, including undocumented status, language brokering and migration trauma. Yet, data from pre-service and in-service teachers show there is a strong demand on the part of these and other educators (school administrators, counselors, paraprofessionals) to know about different aspects of growing up in immigrant-led households that may influence their students and how to best support them during periods of intensified immigration-related stress. Moreover, despite the inclusion of skills and strategies for English Language Development (ELD) instruction in the TPEs and the mandates in place since 1999 that all teachers trained in California TEPs earn their "English learner authorization," veteran and novice teachers alike described feeling poorly equipped to serve as lead instructor for the designated ELD class required for all EL-classified students in their junior high schools, particularly the classes for students at the most basic levels of proficiency. Even those teachers who were not responsible for teaching ELD and preparing students to take the summative ELPAC every spring were unsatisfied with their own knowledge about how to meaningfully incorporate EL students into their classroom communities. Many felt at a loss about how to make junior high school-level content linguistically accessible to EML students and how to use integrated English language development strategies to promote student learning in content areas.

The policy recommendations below touch on diverse aspects of educator preparation and training, ranging from credentialing requirements and degree program offerings to professional learning opportunities for classroom teachers, district administrators, and school leaders managing educational school contexts under heightened threat by ICE.

- The California Commission on Teacher Credentialing (CCTC) should include requirements in the next revision of the California TPEs that all teacher candidates learn about immigration,

immigration policies, and enforcement effects on students, along with strategies to support immigrant-origin students.

- The CCTC, working in collaboration with select TEPs across the state, should develop and disseminate model course syllabi, activities, and materials for TEPs to facilitate the incorporation of new TPEs focused on the "key issues affecting immigrant-origin students" (Sattin-Bajaj, et al., 2023) into their programs and courses
- The CCTC, in collaboration with the CDE, should convene state leaders in teacher education and district administrators statewide to explore the possibility of creating a stand-alone credential area for teachers of English language development focused on skills, pedagogy, and curriculum needed for providing effective, culturally relevant and responsive English language instruction for EL students at all ages and grade levels to achieve timely reclassification.
- The Language Policy & Leadership Office at the CDE, working with county-level education offices dedicated to English learner and multilingual support services, should develop updated and action-oriented training materials, resources, and supports for professional development related to the implementation of integrated English language development (I-ELD) strategies in all subject areas at all levels. County education offices should also make technical support for implementation available on an ongoing basis.

## Resources and supports for newcomer immigrant students

Newcomer immigrant students arrive at their new schools with vast and diverse life experiences along with unique and heterogenous needs. While some of the obstacles that newcomer students face in their schooling are shared with other immigrant-origin students, including acquiring English and being reclassified as English proficient, others are specific to newcomers' particular circumstances such as interrupted schooling, family separations, migration-related trauma, and hardships associated with cultural, social, and linguistic transitions (Decapua, et al., 2020; Goodwin, 2002; Suárez-Orozco, Suárez-Orozco, & Todorova, 2008; Umansky, et al., 2018). Thus, there are specific interventions and policy changes that may improve newcomer immigrant students' successful school integration, educational engagement, and academic achievement. Some of the recommendations below target the

resources and services provided for students themselves; others focus on materials, training, and supports for educators working with newcomer immigrant students.

- CDE officials along with representatives from the state's Advisory Commission on Special Education (ACSE) and district administrators responsible for managing special education in LEAs statewide, should explore alternative assessments or investigate developing new, culturally and linguistically appropriate evaluation instruments to facilitate early detection and diagnosis of learning disabilities for students classified as English learners and those who have limited or interrupted schooling.
- The CDE should prioritize funding to LEAs serving SLIFE students for increased literacy and numeracy intervention supports, including in low-incidence districts that may not be eligible for CALNEW grants through the Department of Social Services' Office of Immigrant Youth or receive additional Title III funds reserved for districts demonstrated sufficient growth in the size of the newcomer immigrant student population.
- The Language Policy & Leadership Office at the CDE in collaboration with the Curriculum Frameworks and Instructional Resources Division and the Multilingual Support Division, should reconstitute the English Language Arts/English Language Development Curriculum Framework and Evaluation Criteria Committee and the Instructional Quality Commission to review and revise the English Language Arts/ English Language Development Framework for California Public Schools adopted by the California State Board of Education in 2014 (CA Department of Education, 2015). With input from educators and local administrators knowledgeable about the strengths and drawbacks of current standards, the framework, and available curricula, these entities should develop improved curricular materials, professional development, and guidance for English language development and English language arts (ELA) courses for newcomers in secondary grades.

## Social-emotional wellbeing and mental health supports

With twenty percent of children in California currently living in a mixed status family (State of California, n.d.) and an estimated three million undocumented immigrants in the state, threats to students' mental health and wellbeing caused by intensified immigration enforcement activity are

pervasive and severe (Allen, et al. 2015; Heinrich, et al., 2022; Rojas-Flores, et al. 2017). What is more, evidence of the spillover effects of immigration enforcement fears and events to students who may be less likely to have family members directly at risk of detention or deportation (Bellows, 2019; Kirksey, et al., 2020; Kirksey & Sattin-Bajaj, 2021) expands the population of young people whose social-emotional wellness may suffer when the presence of ICE agents creates chaos and uncertainty in communities. The positive impacts of providing students with culturally and linguistically appropriate school-based social emotional interventions and supports have been well substantiated in the research literature (Beehler, Birman, & Campbell, 2012; Hoover & Bostic, 2021; Whaley, & Davis, 2007). The recommendations that follow regarding increased supports for students' social emotional and mental health point to district- and school-based initiatives that may have long-term benefits for immigrant-origin students, their families, and their larger school community. These are well-aligned with the goals and priorities emphasized in the multi-billion-dollar investment in the California Community Schools Partnership Program (Maier & Nieburh, 2021), which has recently been launched in hundreds of LEAs across the state, fostering new community-based collaborations and increased commitment to promoting student wellbeing across multiple dimensions.

- The CDE and county education offices should provide resources and incentives to LEAs to recruit and retain bilingual/bicultural mental health professionals with expertise in trauma related to migration experiences, family separations, and immigration enforcement threats in schools with large immigrant-origin and EL student populations. This could include supports for establishing partnerships with community-based organizations that are contracted to provide school-based counseling and therapy. Districts already participating in the California Community Schools Partnership Program may be well-equipped to invest in or expand existing relationships with community organizations.
- State agencies including the California Department of Social Services, the CDE, and the Department of Health Care Services should collaborate to increase funding, training, and other resources to support LEAs and schools in creating or expanding student wellness centers. County education offices should also establish or enhance cross-district networks to facilitate information sharing and disseminate best practices. These efforts should be coordinated with the California School-based Health Alliance, an organization dedicated to advancing health

services in schools that provides technical assistance and training, develop resources, hosts conferences, conducts research, and leads lobbying efforts to improve policies and practices related to school-based care for children (California School-based Health Alliance, n.d.). This alliance can also help policymakers and education leaders identify model wellness centers serving diverse student populations across the state which can inform policy and the training materials.

## Response to immigration enforcement threats

There is incontrovertible evidence about the devastating consequences of exposure to immigration enforcement events for students, educators, and entire school communities (Dreby, 2025; Heinrich, et al., 2022; Kirksey & Sattin-Bajaj, 2025). Moreover, just living in contexts where there is a pervasive threat of immigration enforcement is associated with significant detrimental effects on attendance, test-scores, and sense of safety as well as students' physical and mental health (Amuedo-Dorantes & Lopez, 2015; 2017; Dee & Murphy, 2020). The state Attorney General's guidance and model policies (Bonta, 2025) represent a starting point for LEAs and school leaders; however, educators on the front lines—teachers, paraprofessionals, school counselors, and other personnel—are interfacing every day with students and parents experiencing fear, uncertainty, and hardship and feel ill-equipped to address their needs. Educators are asking for more hands-on, tailored direction and guidance about what to do and say to support immigrant-origin students on a daily basis, not just in response to ICE agents' appearance at the schoolhouse doors.

- The CDE, working with county education offices, should develop and disseminate more explicit guidance, training, and resources to help district and school leaders implement plans to address the day-to-day challenges associated with immigration enforcement threats including increased student absenteeism, mental health issues, and economic hardship associated with parental detention, deportation, and the threats of them. These would build on the model policies and recommendations found in *Promoting a Safe and Secure Learning Environment for All* (Bonta, 2025) and offer more detailed steps and strategies for everyday challenges and experiences beyond the narrow focus on ICE presence near or on school grounds.

- The CDE, working with county education offices, should provide professional learning opportunities, training materials, and concrete, developmentally appropriate strategies for classroom educators to address students' fears and questions associated with immigration enforcement, immigration policies, or other issues that emerge during periods of heightened immigration enforcement and anti-immigrant rhetoric. Starting from the key issues affecting immigrant-origin students, the CDE could solicit inquiries and topics from practicing educators to adapt the content and focus of these resources to what educators identify as the most prevalent or pressing concerns.
- To accommodate students' increased school absences due to fear of ICE presence or detentions on or near school grounds, the CDE should develop policies that allow LEAs to implement flexible ways for students to access content and meaningful instruction if they are unable to attend in-person school. Reviving or updating policies, practices, and infrastructure that were developed during the COVID-19 pandemic to facilitate virtual learning options, the CDE could compline best practices and consult with other states that have pursued such approaches, including districts in Minnesota that did so in the wake of Immigration and Customs Enforcement's targeted campaign against immigrants in the state in recent months (Bright & Elder, 2026).

Effectively ensuring immigrant-origin students' opportunities for educational access and success requires a more comprehensive understanding of their diverse and multifaceted lives and experiences. Now, more than ever, California's education leaders and policymakers must find ways to recognize and respond to the constraints that immigrant families are facing in the state and across the country. Increased training, resources, and guidance for educators and enhanced programs, services, and supports tailored to immigrant-origin students' needs are two essential changes that could begin to address deepening hardships manifested in schools. California has historically led the way in developing innovative and inclusive policies to welcome immigrants and their children and promote personal advancement and success. The present moment calls for leadership that renews and extends the State's longstanding commitment to access and opportunity for all Californians, of which immigrant-origin students comprise a critical part.

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