



## The Fear is Everywhere



As the [image](#) of masked, armed federal agents detaining a five-year-old Minnesota child circled the globe, the fallout of similar immigration enforcement activities has also reverberated through the hallways of America's schools.

In a recent [report](#) published by UCLA's Institute for Democracy, Education, and Access, NEPC Fellow [John Rogers](#) and his co-authors report that nearly two out of three surveyed U.S. principals (64%) said that "students from immigrant families missed school due to policies or political rhetoric related to immigrants." More than half (58%) reported that parents or guardians of immigrant students had suddenly left the community midway through the 2024-25 school year. And 70% said that "[s]tudents from immigrant families have expressed concerns about their well-being or the well-being of their families due to policies or political rhetoric related to immigrants."

These impacts on schools across the nation are shockingly pervasive, and those impacts can be devastating, even for those students not di-

rectly targeted. “Fear undermines the ability of public schools to foster a civic community,” Rogers [told](#) *Education Week* last month.

The data in the UCLA report are the result of an online survey of 606 high school principals that was administered during the summer of 2025. Researchers also conducted follow-up interviews with 49 respondents.

The researchers chose to title the report, *The Fear is Everywhere*. In stark terms, principals’ comments detail the impact of fear caused by the current administration’s immigration enforcement efforts. In addition to flooding communities with large numbers of federal agents, these efforts have included rescinding longstanding guidance restricting aggressive enforcement efforts in and around schools.

“Immigrant students are suffering the most,” said a principal in New York.

Chronic absenteeism, post-traumatic stress disorder, and anxiety are interfering with their opportunities for success. They and their families live in a culture of fear. In several cases, students and their families received email notice from DHS indicating that they had 15 days to self deport because they were from XXX and their visa was discontinued without cause. These were hardworking, contributing members of our community.

Halfway across the nation in Texas, a principal said that “immigration changes have placed these families on high alert and in fear of their safety.”

And in California, a principal somberly compared the impact of the current enforcement efforts to the pandemic: “I’m watching our families live in a certain level of fear beyond what we experienced in COVID,” she said. “I mean COVID was fear, right? This is a whole different level of fear.”

To help safeguard their students, more than three out of four principals (78%) have created schoolwide plans for responding to visits from immigration agents. Nearly half (47%) have also implemented plans for helping students whose parents or guardians are deported. And 45% say they have provided professional development that aims to help school

staff support students from immigrant families.

These activities take money and time: In Minnesota, where enforcement has been especially intense, a [recent lawsuit](#) states that safety officers for the Duluth school district spend close to a third of their time trying to keep schools safe for immigrant students. In a community in the Minneapolis suburbs, fears of federal agents have led to such steep declines in attendance that the district is facing financial consequences under a state law that can lead districts to lose per-pupil funding for students absent more than 15 consecutive days.

All of this takes its toll.

As an Idaho principal told the researchers: “I feel like I’m responsible for [students’] safety—I hate that, because I don’t feel I’m able to protect them.”

### NEPC Resources on Immigration

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