

KIDS BELONG IN CLASSROOMS

National Organizing Toolkit

As families across the country have reentered their school communities in the back-to-school season—celebrating milestones, picking out first-day outfits, and gathering school supplies—many immigrant children, parents, workers, and teachers, and the US Citizens who love them are facing a very different reality. Instead of joy and anticipation of what the school day may bring, they're living with the constant fear of ICE tearing their families apart.

No child should have to worry about their parents or caregivers being taken from them, especially on the way to school or after-school activities. And no parent should worry about ICE on their child's campus. That's why we're encouraging parents, caregivers, teachers, school workers, administrators, and community allies to organize safe school communities of belonging—to stand up, speak out, and support one another because **we believe all our Kids Belong in Classrooms!**

The following guide provides several ways you can become your school's Kids Belong in Classrooms captain and help build a school community of belonging!

Together we can:

- Create a welcoming environment for all families & school employees that keeps our kids, parents, educators, and school workers safe!
- Stand up against anybody trying to separate children from their families!
- Foster joy, pride, and mental wellness through community-building & support!

There are many ways to support! Please don't feel overwhelmed with so many options listed below! If there's one thing parents understand - it's the never-ending to-do list! Start small with one idea that feels right to you and your specific school community—or come up with your own idea!

Ways You Can Take Action

1. Build a Team & Decide What You Want to Do!
 2. Educate Your School Community On Their Rights!
 3. Build a Kids Belong in Classrooms Morning & Afternoon Dismissal Support Team of Parent Volunteers a.k.a. "A Walking School Bus"
 4. Ask Your School To Make An Emergency Preparedness Plan
 5. Foster joy, celebration, connection & cultural pride!
 6. Advocate for Local Policy Change to Support School Communities
 7. Deepen Connection with the Community Around Your School
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1. Build a Team & Decide What You Want to Do!

- ☐ Find a couple of parents/caregivers interested in working together.
- ☐ Get together on Zoom or in person for coffee to discuss what you're interested in working on.
- ☐ Build a Group Text with parents in your school community. Consider an app like [Signal](#) for encrypted messaging.
- ☐ Introduce yourselves to your school administrators & PTA/Parent Association if applicable to let them know what you're working on in case they can help and/or collaborate!

2. Educate Your School Community On Their Rights!

Take action to educate your community about their rights! Red Cards are a tool to assert your rights and protect yourself and your loved ones during ICE encounters. Print, download and learn more about #RedCards here: <https://www.ilrc.org/community-resources/using-your-red-cards> (note, these don't have to be red, you can print the PDF from the website and make your own with scissors and tape in whatever languages your community speaks!)

Organizing Ideas:

- ☐ Host a red card-making parent coffee at a local coffee shop (bring printed copies of red cards template pdf, lots of scissors & tape) - then schedule a time to distribute them together!

- ☐ Pass out red cards at school drop-off or pick-up. If your parent team feels motivated, ask local businesses around your school to keep them on their counters!
- ☐ Host a parent/caregiver info Zoom on knowing your rights with a local immigration attorney or immigrant rights organization.
- ☐ Ask for speaking time at your next parent association meeting to present on knowing your rights and pass out red cards.
- ☐ Ask your Principal to pass them out to all employees of the school.
- ☐ Table at your next school event to pass out know your rights information.

Learn from others! Here are some resources:

- [National Immigration Law Center's Education Providers and Immigration Enforcement: Know Your Rights, Know Your Students' Rights](#)
- [ACLU Guide for Schools and Teachers](#)
- [ACLU Maine - Know Your Rights Checklist for Schools](#)
- [ACLU DC - Know Your Rights Stop & Frisk](#) - *specific for DC.* [ACLU Southern California - If You Are Stopped, Questioned, or Searched By A Law Enforcement Officer](#) - *specific for CA.* Search your own state local organizations for state-specific differences!

3. Build a Kids Belong in Classrooms Morning & Afternoon Dismissal Support Team of Parent Volunteers a.k.a. “A Walking School Bus”

While ICE has had limited activity *on* campuses to-date there are numerous incidents where parents and children have been separated and/or taken on their way to school, and in some reports, even detained directly outside of school. One way we can ensure that our kids and their parents/caregivers are safe is by building a morning and afternoon school support team that helps with the safe arrival & dismissal for all students. If possible, work in partnership with your school staff, but if that is not possible, self organize! These teams are best built with relationships of trust, so take time getting to know one another on zoom calls, or coffee meetups! Extra bonus points if you also think about afterschool program support in this work!

Organizing Steps:

- ☐ Host a planning meeting to discuss: (1) high foot traffic routes to school that could use parents stationed to support safe passage (think: “Crossing guard-like” or a “walking bus”).
- ☐ Build a volunteer shift sign up form for morning, afternoon, and key locations.

- ☐ Assign a volunteer captain who sends reminder texts the night before to volunteers (this is a great job for someone who can't volunteer on the route but wants to support!) & communicates out who will be at which station on Signal.
- ☐ Figure out how to make yourselves identifiable to school community members walking to school (vests, arm bands, signs, silly hats) - make it fun & hopeful!
- ☐ If there are some families who affirmatively express needed escort support from their house, consider community carpools to engage in prolonged pick up and drop off for vulnerable families (this is a delicate balance to not assume anyone needs this support, but creating bilingual parent fliers to offer it & word of mouth may help you learn who needs this help.)
 - ☐ *Please note* - if a family with multiple children has been subjected to the detention of one parent or student, it is likely that family will need door-to-door escorting to school moving forward for many months to ameliorate fears. If the district will not provide this support, this is a great job for parent volunteers!
- ☐ After the first week of your team working together, hold a follow up call to share best practices and what you learned. Perhaps adapt any of your systems to make your efforts stronger.

Learn from others! Here are some resources:

- [Free DC Back to School Community Safety Toolkit](#)
- [How to Start a Walking Bus](#) from the National Center for Safe Routes to Schools
- [Safe Routes to Schools overview](#) from the Safe Routes Partnership
- [Washington Post: They Watched ICE Detain Their Dad. Now DC Neighbors Escort Them To School](#)
- [Immigrant Defense Project: Know Your Rights In Your Car](#)

4. Ask Your School To Make An Emergency Preparedness Plan

Schools prepare for all kinds of emergencies to make sure everyone stays safe. ICE arriving on or near campus requires the same type of preparation. In some cities this conversation will be easier to have because your school districts are already encouraging their schools to do this work, in other school districts you may be the first person to ask for such support from your school. Trust your instincts on what feels best for you and your school community. Remember, we're in this for the long-haul and baby-steps in the right direction make a huge difference!

Organizing Steps:

- ☐ Schedule a meeting with your school administrator. If you feel intimidated to have the conversation by yourself, then organize with other parents to ask for the meeting as a group! Consider starting with your child's teacher if that is a more comfortable first meeting to have.
- ☐ Ask your administration if they have a school preparedness plan for immigration enforcement, and if they do not, ask them to make one!
According to the Immigrant Legal Resource Center this plan should include:
 - ☐ A point person for monitoring school entrances during school hours.
 - ☐ A point person responsible for reviewing any warrants produced by ICE agents.
 - ☐ A point person designated to observe and document ICE's actions on school property.
 - ☐ A training module for school personnel on interacting with ICE agents and best practices to protect each other. (More below in the resources section)
 - ☐ Establishing a written policy and putting up signs clearly identifying which areas at the school are private and are not open to the public to preserve Fourth Amendment Rights.
- ☐ Additional steps recommended by the National Education Association and American Federation of Teachers:
 - ☐ Send Know Your Rights Information Home with Students. If your region has a local rapid response network, include that phone number in your materials.
 - ☐ Remind families to have their emergency contact info updated and at least two people per child.
 - ☐ Send [Family Preparedness Plan](#) toolkits home with parents.
 - ☐ The school can host a know your rights training for parents via zoom in partnership with a local immigrant legal services community organization.
 - ☐ Keep a roster of local pro bono and private immigration legal services in your community to refer to in case of emergency.
 - ☐ Provide school counseling or service referrals for students whose family members have been detained.
 - ☐ Identify someone at the school who can serve as an immigration resources coordinator who maintains a list of local services and organizations that may be helpful for immigrant students and families.

Learn from others! Here are some resources:

- [AFT Immigrant and Refugee Children: A Guide for Educators and School Support Staff](#)
- [ILRC Protecting Immigrant In Schools Against Immigration Enforcement](#)
- [NEA Guidance on Immigration Issues](#)
- [NEA Supporting Immigrant Families and Students](#)
- [NEA Supporting Immigrant Students and Families Training Template](#)
- [Sample Contract Language to Support Immigrant Students and Educators](#)
- [Lawyers Explain: Anti-Immigrant Policies and Education](#)

5. Foster joy, celebration, connection & cultural pride!

Creating a school community of belonging is not just about protecting each other from the hardest & scariest moments, but about keeping our spirits high and our minds well in the face of so much external turmoil. One way we can support this is by fostering joy, celebration, connection & cultural pride across our student, parent/caregiver, educator, school worker ecosystems! Community and connection is the path forward to our children thriving. Think of ways you can celebrate one another throughout the school year.

Organizing Ideas:

- ☐ Create a welcoming classroom for ALL students! Download our free banner to show that everyone is welcomed and respected in your classroom. Let's celebrate the diversity and strength of our immigrant communities!
+ [Banner/Poster options](#)
- ☐ Put up an immigrants & refugees are welcome here sign at your school.
 - ☐ You can find an example on [page 5 of this document](#) - or paint one together on canvas!
- ☐ Have a school arrival party with school supplies giveaways at drop-off where parents cheer on students and parents as they arrive.
- ☐ Support your school library with book donations that celebrate the brilliance of all communities.
- ☐ Hold Heritage Month celebrations to demonstrate the music, dance, food, and culture of different communities.
- ☐ Hold a community celebration fair where parents bring a food item or make a poster about the country, state, tribal lands, or continents their ancestors are from.
- ☐ Combat criminalization narratives by sharing stories of everyday heroes in targeted communities and their contributions to society.
- ☐ Participate in kid-friendly activism like the [Ruby Bridges Walk to School Day](#).

- ☐ Buy out a local immigrant-owned vendor business like a *Paletero* (ice cream man) or a fruit vendor to give your teachers or students treats during Teacher Appreciation week.
- ☐ Engage in service-learning projects for your school that support immigrant serving organizations, like grocery drives for families too scared to leave their homes.
- ☐ Share mental health and wellness resources with your community.
- ☐ Organize a kid-friendly protest with bubbles & sign-making at a local park on the weekend. Or hold a pro-immigrant story-time meet-up at the park to read stories that affirm immigrants in your community together.

Learn from Others! Here are some resources:

- United We Dream’s UndocuHealth Initiative has developed a [Resilience and Community Care Toolkit](#) to support organizers and community leaders.
- Informed Immigrant has a toolkit [Mental Health for Immigrants: Taking Care of Yourselves and Loved Ones](#)
- Immigrants Rising has [Wellness Support Groups](#)
- [Color in Colorado How to Create a Welcoming Classroom Environment for English Language Learners](#)
- [Well Point Care’s Talking About Deportation and Immigration With Children](#)
- [The National Child Traumatic Stress Network’s Guiding Caregivers: How to Talk to a Child About Deportation or Separation](#)
- [Britt Hawthorne - 5 Lessons I Teach My Kids About ICE](#)

6. Advocate for Local Policy Change to Support School Communities

One way you can help your school community is by advocating for local governments to support your community with policy change & resources. This could be your school’s policy, district’s policy, or city/county/state policy, etc. There is always more that our leaders can be doing to support us in this work!

Policy Organizing Ideas:

- ☐ [Have your school become a “Safe Zone”](#)
- ☐ Start a safe passage task force to coordinate safe passage zones with local cities.
- ☐ Change bus routes to support safer passage in high-density Black and immigrant neighborhoods where law enforcement and ICE have a higher presence.

- ☐ Set up a compassion fund to help families with legal and other costs
- ☐ Create virtual learning programs and policies, especially for deported high school children to finish their studies and receive their diplomas (High School seniors who are 18-year-olds are particularly vulnerable, as well as US Citizen children who leave when their parents are deported).
- ☐ Develop state-wide or district-wide parent notification systems if ICE comes onto a campus.

Learn from others! Here are some resources:

- ☐ [LA Times: Los Angeles Schools Open With Unprecedented Protections for Immigrant Children](#)
- ☐ [NEA Communications Toolkit: Protect Undocumented Children's Right to Access Public Education](#)
- ☐ [CLASP Guide for Organizing Safe Space Policies for Early Childhood Programs](#)
- ☐ [The Century Foundation: How School Districts Can Take Action To Protect Their Immigrant Students](#)
- ☐ [California Attorney General: Promoting a Safe and Secure Learning Environment for All](#)
- ☐ Go deep as an advocate to support your teachers and administrators by learning about all funding cuts to public education with the [Stop the Ed Cuts Toolkit](#) from the Alliance to Reclaim Our Schools.

7. Deepen Connection with the Community Around Your School

Safe and welcoming school communities include safe and welcoming neighborhoods around a school. Oftentimes schools may be geographically positioned near enforcement “hot spots” (like a Home Depot, car wash, or other high-foot-traffic immigrant neighborhood). This is why it’s also important to build connections with the local neighborhood. While ICE on a school campus is a horror we are all trying to avoid, ICE near a school executing enforcement on the neighbors can be equally as fear-inducing to our students, parents, teachers, & school workers. There are many ways to engage with local small businesses, street vendors, child care/nanny groups, afterschool programs, and community organizations to help keep each other safe.

Organizing Ideas:

- ☐ Build a culture of supporting nannies in your neighborhood who may frequent local public parks near your school. Visit the National Domestic

Workers Alliance [“It Takes a Village” Toolkit](#) for more great nanny-supporting ideas!

- ☐ Introduce yourself to any local street vendors in your school neighborhood. This may look like an ice cream man or snack stand. Get to know them, and as you build a relationship of trust you can become one of their emergency partners to let them know when ICE is reported in the neighborhood. Or in the worst case scenario, if they are detained by ICE you can hopefully have learned their family’s contact information to reach out.
 - ☐ Consider hiring these vendors for school activities with “buy-outs” that take them off the street and into safer event spaces.
- ☐ Put up pro-immigrant signage in local small businesses near your school. Make your own signs or you can [print some from Immigrant Legal Resource Center here](#) or participate in Indivisible’s No Kings We Stand With Immigrant Families [Small Business Sign Program](#).
- ☐ Incorporate “[Adopt a Corner](#)” or “[Adopt a Car Wash](#)” organizing into your efforts if Home Depots or car washes are located near your school. You can learn about these efforts from the National Day Laborer’s Organizing Network and [CLEAN - a labor center for car wash workers](#).
- ☐ Paint a community mural that celebrates the beauty of the diversity of your community on a local business wall.