

**"Stressed, Overworked, and Not Sure Whom to Trust:
The Impacts of Recent Immigration Enforcement on our Public School Educators"**
SUMMARY

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In the past year, stepped up immigration enforcement policy has negatively impacted our K-12 public school communities. Students from immigrant backgrounds as well as their non-immigrant peers have been affected by the increased threat and enforcement of detention and deportation. Missing from the discourse, however, are the educators—the teachers, administrators, and staff—who work closely with these students. In this study, we investigate the ways in which educators who work with immigrant students nationwide are affected by the recent intensification of immigration enforcement. We find that educators have been deeply affected by the trauma experienced by their students and school communities. To understand the depths and levels of these impacts, we ask the following questions:

- 1) How has increased immigration enforcement affected K-12 public educators across the country who work with immigrant students and their families?
- 2) How has increased immigration enforcement impacted school communities?

In January 2018, research associates with the Civil Rights Project at UCLA conducted extended questionnaires and interviews with 38 educators, who took part in a larger study on the impact of immigration enforcement. These participants indicated an interest in being interviewed and were given an option of taking an online questionnaire or a doing phone interview, both methods asking the same questions. A majority of the educators chose to do the online questionnaire while 10 elected to be interviewed by a research associate over the phone. Questions focused on how factors such as stress and anxiety levels, job satisfaction, and working conditions have changed due to increased immigration enforcement and policy changes. A preliminary analysis shows that educators are impacted by immigration enforcement in the following ways: (1) an increase in their levels of stress and anxiety; (2) a increase in their workload and use of time; (3) a deterioration in the sense of trust and community in schools.

Educators are Anxious and Stressed

- Changes in teacher wellbeing are consistent with symptoms of Secondary Traumatic Stress (STS), which is “the emotional duress that results when an individual hears about the firsthand trauma experiences of another.”¹
- Over 85% report to an increase in anxiety and stress due to their students’ experiences with increased immigration enforcement. “*When you want the best for them (students), and you want them to succeed, and then you see systemic barriers placed in their way that inhibits their success, and you see it on their faces and in their decisions on a daily basis, it's stressful and anxiety producing.*” (High School Teacher)
- Educators feel helpless with regard to what they can do to care for and support their students. “*This past year, my job has felt simultaneously more important and more pointless than it ever has before. Pointless because I feel helpless. I feel like math and science pale in comparison to safety, security, and family stability.*” (Elementary Administrator)

¹ <http://www.nctsn.org/resources/topics/secondary-traumatic-stress>

- Increased stress and anxiety affects educators’ emotional, mental, and physical wellbeing. *“I have found myself lying awake at night agonizing over whether I should offer to take temporary custody of a child or children in the event that their parents are deported unexpectedly, and that’s emotionally exhausting in an entirely new way.”* (Elementary Administrator)

Educators are Overworked

- Increased fear and anxiety has altered the school ecology, impacting working conditions and making it more challenging for educators to execute their duties. *“The increased policies around immigration enforcement have been an enormous barrier, which means that I have spent more weeks working 50-60 hours to assure that our community feels safe, to prevent increases in student absences, and to encourage student involvement in education opportunities than ever before...”* (Community School Coordinator)
- Educators report to having to take on more responsibilities in addition to their roles as teachers, administrators, and other certified personnel. *“I think that if the state were less oppressive or had more supports for students and their families, I could be more of a teacher, I guess more percentage of the time and less like a social worker or legal advocate and stuff like that.”* (Middle School Teacher)
- Educators are compelled to provide more resources to their students, contributing to an increase in their workload. *“And the other thing is trying to get information for myself as a teacher about how I can support students... so I’m just trying to be aware of what’s going on myself, so that I can share that information with my students and their families.”* (Middle School Teacher)

Deteriorating Sense of Trust in Schools

- Educators express a sense of deteriorating trust in their school communities. *“I am even more careful about what I say to students and what I say to other adults. I have lost trust in some of my colleagues and have a network of “trusted” colleagues that I go to with these issues.”* (High School Teacher)
- Many teachers worry that colleagues will not protect their students if immigration enforcement officers come to their school. *“Our district policy is protective; unfortunately, some staff disagree and I fear they may act to report students to ICE.”* (High School Teacher)

This study provides insight into the ways in which recent immigration enforcement has shaped the experiences of our public school educators—a population for which these policy and procedural changes are not necessarily intended. Equally important, it illuminates some of the ways that non-immigrant students are also being negatively affected by harsh policies meant exclusively for their immigrant peers. This study offers a deeper understanding of the educational and professional effects of immigration policies that are hostile towards youth from immigrant backgrounds and their families. Our findings underscore the fact that schools are communities, where all members—regardless of background—are closely tied to one another.