



Welcoming Schools Report Summary

In 2018, the Pennsylvania Immigration and Citizenship Coalition (PICC) conducted a questionnaire to further understand the experiences of immigrant parents and students in school districts across Pennsylvania. The questionnaire was distributed during workshops held at parent-teacher meetings, after school programs, out-of-school programs, and other community events, gathering responses from a total of 120 students, ages 12-18 years old, and 17 parents.

Providing Language Access is Critical for Student Growth

Language Access issues resonated deeply with respondents. Both parents and students reported problems receiving adequate interpretation, translation, and resources in their preferred language. This is affecting students in the classroom. When students identified some of the barriers to participating in classes at their academic level, “English” was listed as a major theme, with **14% of students reporting not receiving communications in their**

“I need help with my English and I don’t get support with that, I feel lost in class if more than one student talks.”

“If I was in charge of making immigrant students feel welcome I would have a bilingual professional present with me, translate materials in their language, and welcome them in their language.”

preferred language. Additionally, over 50% of students indicated that their school is not clearly presenting translated material on the school’s website. Students also shared that language access was important to their safety and to how welcome they feel in school, sharing multiple stories of times they were bullied while speaking other languages. Parents shared that they would volunteer at the school if interpretation was more readily available.

Teacher and School Staff Development is Essential

Students and parents both reported that teachers and other school staff have a major influence on student’s experiences in schools. The questionnaire elicited a lot of positive responses about teachers and school staff supporting students, especially when staff members were explicit in their support of all identities and immigration statuses. However, these stories were not universal. **Over 10% of students said that they did not feel that teachers or school staff supported them when they were bullied.**

“[...] I was always afraid they wouldn’t understand my situation since the majority of my teachers were middle class and predominantly white.”

Students and parents both indicated a strong desire for resources to support immigrant and refugee families. Needed resources include:

- Bilingual professionals present at all meetings.
- Information about their rights as immigrants.
- Legal clinics to apply for citizenship or to adjust their immigration status.
- Events, clubs, and cultural days that celebrate diverse student backgrounds.

Not ALL Students Feel Safe at School

While students and parents shared many positive aspects of their schools, 10 immigrant students definitively stated that they **do not feel safe** in school. For some students, this lack of safety was personal, with 14% indicating they were bullied *based on their identity as an immigrant or child of immigrants*. Concern about safety was also linked to immigration status and concern about Immigration and Custom Enforcement (ICE) access to schools, with 25% of students reporting

“When Trump became president, students told me to shut up or they will deport me and my family.”

“They respect who I am, they respect my sexual orientation, my culture, my background, and basically me.”

worrying about ICE entering their school. This concern was not limited to undocumented students: 60% of respondents who said they “prefer not to respond” to the question about their immigration status and 24.5% of U.S. citizen students also stated that they worry about ICE presence at schools. Even with such widespread concern, over 60% of students reported that teachers and school staff have never talked about what to do if ICE entered the school.

What did students and parents say made them feel safe and welcome?

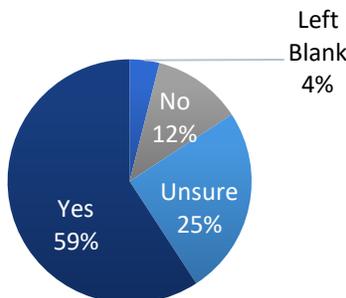
- Inclusivity – especially the explicit acceptance of race, social identity, and *all* immigration statuses.
- Language Access – including translated materials, accessible interpretation, language learning resources, and a school orientation in ones preferred language.
- Trusted teachers, school staff, and peers – specifically, the presence of staff who address racist bullying, make themselves available as a support system, and connect them to other students who can welcome them and speak their preferred language.

Students are Seeking More Academic Support

Overall, students and parents are looking for more support in schools. When asked if they feel they are being prepared for work or college after they graduate, 40.7% of students responded with “no” or “unsure”. This need for support was underscored when students were asked about resources they would like in their school, “access to information about how to attend college as an undocumented student” was one of the most frequent responses. Other responses included a strong desire to be placed in AP classes and more academic support for English language learners.

“When it comes to ESL students, many have told me that they are given much slower paced courses and are treated like little kids.”

If you are not in an AP class, do you want to be in one?



For more information about the Welcoming Schools Report or to schedule a Welcoming Schools Workshop, please contact education@paimmigrant.org.

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