

# Miami Herald

## **Miami-Dade schools brace for potential immigration stings. Here's what you need to know**

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MIAMI — South Florida's teachers, principals and parents are bracing for potential immigration stings in schools after the Trump administration rescinded a policy preventing enforcement efforts in places formerly considered "sensitive locations," like churches, hospitals and classrooms.

"Criminals will no longer be able to hide in America's schools and churches to avoid arrest," a spokesperson for the Department of Homeland Security said in a statement.

Miami-Dade County Public Schools officials say they are reviewing President Donald Trump's recent executive orders on immigration policy to assess their impact and ensure compliance with all local, state and federal regulations.

Principals in Miami-Dade were reminded that student information should not be released without authorization, and were told to notify their regional superintendent or the legal team for the district if any issues emerge. The district also released a list of resources for immigrant families, sharing information for over a dozen legal service providers and community organizations where they can seek service and support.

In Broward, the office of the superintendent released a memo to principals, similarly reminding them to seek proper authorization prior to releasing any student information and advising them to contact their legal team before taking any action.

So far in Florida, there have been no reported cases of federal immigration officials showing up to public schools. But teachers, activists, and community leaders are worried that tens of thousands of students and their family members could be at risk.

“The fear is real,” said Miami-Dade School Board Member Luisa Santos, who recalled attending school as an undocumented student and carrying around a “Know your rights” card.

An environment of fear

While it remains unclear whether the Trump administration will pursue immigrants onto school campuses, the potential for disruption in Florida schools is immense.

Legally, districts cannot collect information on students’ immigration status, so the true number of undocumented students in classrooms remains unknown. But data shows that in Miami-Dade, the changes in immigration policies have implications for a large portion of the student population.

In the 2023-2024 school year in Miami-Dade, one in every four students were considered English language learners, meaning they were likely recent immigrants, some of whom may be undocumented or have family members without proper documentation.

At least 25 schools in the district were identified as having more than 15 percent of students who were born outside of the United States and enrolled in Miami-Dade County Public Schools the same year they arrived in the country.

The stakes are high statewide. About 13,000 undocumented 12th graders graduate high school in the state annually, [according to the President’s Alliance on Higher Education and Immigration](#), a university leaders’ group that advocates for immigrant students and conducts research on the effect of immigration policies on universities. In 2019, there were about 68,000 undocumented students ages 3-17 in Florida, [according to the Migration Policy Institute](#).

Susana Baker, an art activist and chair of the arts with the Puerto Rican Chamber of Commerce, said she had received numerous calls from families in the community who have undocumented family members and are fearful of sending their children to public school. That includes a Colombian family that arrived in South Florida just months ago and is already contemplating returning to their home country.

Even parents of students who are not immigrants are worried.

Adriana Rivera, the communications director for the Florida Immigrant Coalition, sent her son, who is a U.S. citizen from Puerto Rico, with a note card to his middle school that says “I will not speak with you without a parent or lawyer present, it is my 5th amendment right.”

Rivera said she told her son he can either say that to an officer or hand him the card.

It's not just students who could be affected. There are also teachers who could become targets of Trump's immigration policies.

At least 15,000 educators in the United States are recipients of Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals, also known as DACA, according to a presentation on the impact of federal immigration policy on school districts put together by the **Council of the Great City Schools**. The program is currently being litigated in the courts. Trump attempted to end DACA during his first tenure in the White House.

Elsewhere in the country

Kara Gross, the legislative director for the ACLU of Florida, says that school districts should all have guidelines on how to best protect their students "with the goal of ensuring families are not unlawfully or unnecessarily detained or deported."

Across the country, some school districts are taking [strong actions](#) to work to ensure undocumented and immigrant students and their families are informed. In Los Angeles, the school district has distributed educational cards to remind immigrant community members of their legal rights.

"Students are much safer in California than they will be in Florida, no doubt," said Paola Usquelis, a Florida immigration attorney.

Under federal law, no student can be denied an education based upon their immigration status. School districts may not classify undocumented or immigrant students on the basis of their status or keep a list of students with and without alien registration numbers.

But the law that says all students regardless of immigration status can be educated in public schools contradicts some federal immigration laws, and experts say to some degree it will be up to school districts to respond, especially as it relates to educating parents on their rights.

While it's up to Congress to change legislation that regulates federal immigration law, Trump's executive orders have shuttered parole programs, attempted to limit birthright citizenship and declared a national emergency at the border. Advocates have already challenged the Trump administration in court over his orders. In one order from last week, the Department of Homeland Security declared a "mass influx of aliens" in all 50 states and called on their governments to help, a development

which could open the door for local law enforcement to carry out the functions of immigration officers.

#### Advice and resources

Usquelis said she is advising her clients to keep any paperwork or documentation of pending immigration status on their person at all times. This includes paperwork showing temporary protected status or showing that they have an upcoming court date.

While federal immigration officers need warrants to enter a school, Usquelis predicts that federal immigration officials will simply wait for people to exit school, their place of work or a church. Outside, no warrant is needed.

Florida Rapid Response Alliance for Immigrant Safety and Empowerment (RAISE) has a free hotline to assist community members with information requests, legal referrals, or reporting abusive enforcement actions. Individuals can call or text the RAISE hotline at 888-600-5762.

There needs to be a judicial warrant, and schools need to be sure it's a judicial warrant before they let anyone on to their private property.