



A Generation at Risk: The Impact of Immigration Enforcement on UnidosUS-Affiliated Classrooms and Educators

Executive Summary

America's prosperity and vitality as a nation are increasingly tied to the well-being of Latino children. American children of Hispanic heritage will comprise one-third of all K-12 students within the next decade, making them important social, economic, and political drivers of America's future success.¹ Despite educational gains in recent decades for many Latino students, there are still significant barriers to universal quality education in the U.S.; featured among these are the stresses of current U.S. immigration policy and political discourse, which serve as negative multipliers to pre-existing social, economic, and health inequities.

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Research shows that parental immigration status can have a deep and lasting impact on children, especially undocumented status, even if the child is U.S.-born. In the case of Latino* children, who comprise 57% of American children in immigrant families, 95% are U.S. citizens.² Parental immigration status has been shown to affect child health, cognitive development, social-emotional well-being, and educational attainment.³ Since 2016, the stressors on children in immigrant homes have been exacerbated by indiscriminate immigration enforcement and anti-Latino political rhetoric. These stressors spill over into all aspects of impacted children's lives and as a result, American schools are suffering the side effects of our nation's immigration policies. Students who are fearful of being separated from a loved one are asked to learn in increasingly anti-immigrant climates, creating toxic, distracting environments that in turn harm all students, regardless of immigration status.

A nationwide 2017-2018 study by researchers from the Civil Rights Project at the University of California, Los Angeles concludes that "the current policy of immigration enforcement significantly dismantles an equitable education for all students and creates a critical threat to their future."⁴ Inspired by their research, UnidosUS conducted a similar survey of educators in UnidosUS-funded K-12 programs across the country. This report captures their experiences.

Methods

UnidosUS administered a questionnaire survey to 64 K-12 educators who attended programmatic workshops in July and

August of 2019. The survey, which was adapted with generous permission from the Civil Rights Project researchers, asked educators for their observations of the effects of immigration policy on their students' well-being and school climate.

Findings

- Ninety-two percent of respondents report observing students directly express fear and concern over immigration enforcement.
- Ninety-two percent of respondents also report that their overall classroom climate has been impacted by enforcement concerns, directly and indirectly affecting their students' ability to learn.
- Over half of the educators surveyed report observing increases in verbal and physical bullying at school based on the perceived immigration status of their students and/or parents.
- Eighty-one percent of respondents have noticed a decline in students' academic performance as a result of concerns over immigration enforcement.

The results of this study illustrate that the stress of an anti-immigrant climate and fear of immigration enforcement pose significant barriers to universal quality education in the U.S. The results also show resilient, culturally aware educators doing everything in their power to protect and reassure their students, but ultimately lacking the resources and institutional support to address the underlying causes of distress.

* The terms "Hispanic" and "Latino" are used interchangeably by the U.S. Census Bureau and throughout this document to refer to persons of Mexican, Puerto Rican, Cuban, Central and South American, Dominican, Spanish, and other Hispanic descent; they may be of any race. This document may also refer to this population as "Latinx" to represent the diversity of gender identities and expressions that are present in the community.

Recommendations

Placing the burden of this national issue on the shoulders of students and teachers is not a tenable solution. As a country, we will experience the consequences of undermining the education outcomes of an entire generation for decades if nothing is done to remedy the assault on American schools. Recommended actions include:

- Curb regulatory abuses that harm American children in mixed-status homes.
- Find legislative remedies for Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) and Temporary Protected Status (TPS) recipients.
- Pass an appropriations bill that holds immigration enforcement agencies to account.
- Invest in education spending rather than cutting it or consolidating programs, especially for English learners (EL) and Title I schools.
- Invest in teacher preparation and diversity to support Latino and English Learner students.
- Invest in culturally relevant social-emotional learning supports that address students' holistic needs.
- Reaffirm the role of the U.S. Department of Education in protecting students' civil rights.



Fatima and Yuleni Avelica shared their family's story at a March 2017 UnidosUS press conference in the U.S. Senate with Sen. Chuck Schumer (NY), Sen. Kamala Harris (CA), and Sen. Bob Menendez (NJ). They were joined by UnidosUS President and CEO Janet Murgía and Rose and Walter Escobar.

Change is possible, but the stakes are also high if the status quo prevails. Our future as a nation hangs in the balance if we do not remove the additional barriers to success that our immigration policies place on Latino children, 95% of whom are U.S. citizens and more than half of whom live in immigrant families.⁵

Study Catalyst

In 2017, 13-year old Fatima Avelica garnered national attention when her now famous viral video captured U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) agents aggressively arresting her father, Romulo Avelica, on the way to school.⁶ At the time of her father's arrest, Fatima was a student at Academia Avance in Los Angeles, an

UnidosUS Affiliate school.⁷ Academia Avance, the Avance community, and UnidosUS fought tirelessly to reunite the Avelica family.⁸ While Mr. Avelica was ultimately released from ICE detention after six months and allowed to continue his case in a non-custodial setting, many parents in similar situations are not.⁹ As UnidosUS reported in its 2019 report, *Beyond the Border: Family Separation in the Trump Era*, an estimated six million American children in mixed-status families live in fear of being separated from a parent or caretaker by immigration enforcement.¹⁰

Perhaps one of the places where this fear manifests itself most prominently is in our nation's K-12 schools. In February of 2018, the Civil Rights Project at UCLA (Civil Rights Project) published the working paper "U.S. Immigration Enforcement Policy and Its Impact on Teaching and Learning in the Nation's Schools."^{*} The paper describes findings from a survey which asked over 5,000 K-12 educators from more than 760 schools in 13 states their perceptions of the impact of U.S. immigration enforcement on "teaching and learning in their schools."¹¹ The study is groundbreaking for capturing nationwide data on educators' first-hand experiences of the effects of U.S. immigration policy on American schools—especially in documenting how negative spillover effects impact students from immigrant and non-immigrant families alike. By highlighting Fatima Avelica's experience as a case in point, the paper notes that Latinos, especially the American children of undocumented parents like Fatima, disproportionately experience the harms of immigration enforcement policies in the U.S.

UnidosUS has spent decades fighting for the fundamental right of all children in America to educational equality. Recently, this fight has come to include responding to indiscriminate immigration enforcement measures under the Trump

administration, such as immigration raids, and spiteful, inaccurate depictions of Latinos in political speech. As early in the Trump administration as July 2017, UnidosUS community members reported that the stress and anxiety of enforcement was impacting Latino students, citing "we have not seen this climate of fear [in schools] that we are seeing now."¹² As a community, we have been forced to triage the harm, equip educators and parents to respond, and share resources in the hope of preventing more trauma.

This UnidosUS report was inspired by the Civil Rights Project's research, which led UnidosUS to study its own classrooms and school environments in a similar way. Our goals were to better understand and support our children and educators, as well as to record and preserve this moment in American history as it is lived. With generous permission from the Civil Rights Project to abridge and adapt its survey, UnidosUS surveyed 64 educators from four K-16 programs to capture the perceptions of educators in our communities. This paper presents and contextualizes their reported experiences.

Background: Latino Students Learning in a Climate of Fear

Latinos will comprise one-third of all students within the next decade and would benefit substantially from greater educational fairness in the U.S.¹³ UnidosUS's 2019 report, *The State of Public Education for Latino Students*, studies the barriers to equal education Latinos face, and the resilience and talents they exhibit despite unequal opportunities. Chief among the barriers to universal quality education for Latino students are school segregation, income inequality, inadequate support for bilingual

^{*} A final version of the study was published in the American Educational Research Journal in July of 2019. See Jongyeon Ee and Patricia Gándara, "The Impact of Immigration Enforcement on the Nation's Schools," American Educational Research Journal (July 2019), doi:10.3102/0002831219862998.

learners, discrimination, and underfunded, underperforming schools. Volumes have been written on how changing these systems of obstacles will require concerted effort by administrators and communities, from the school level to the federal. Importantly, the barriers do not need to be permanent, nor is the task of transforming them insurmountable in a country as rich in resources and ingenuity as the U.S.

Critically, how the nation decides to manage its immigration policies also plays a significant role in determining American children's outcomes. Today's policy trajectory suggests a deepening and calcifying of existing challenges. Immigrant parents may have language barriers which prevent full participation in their child's education, or they may lack the background knowledge of American schools to be able to advocate for their needs. Children from homes where the primary language is not English are often tasked with acting as both a linguistic and cultural interpreter between educators and their parents.¹⁴ They are also more likely to be tracked into segregated English learner (EL) programs which fall far below the academic standards in most states.¹⁵ These stressors are compounded for children with at least one undocumented parent, an estimated 3.9 million American K-12 students.¹⁶ While 95% of school-age Latino children are U.S. citizens, research shows that a parent's undocumented status can limit children's life opportunities and social rights, especially during periods of aggressive anti-immigrant sentiment and policy.¹⁷

Research is clear that parents' immigration status has a direct impact on their children's educational outcomes. A study of U.S.-born children with immigrant parents found that students with undocumented parents finished an average of 2 fewer years of schooling than their peers—which can mean the difference between graduating from high school or not.¹⁸ This is particularly concerning when we consider that roughly 8% of all U.S.-born children have at least one undocumented parent: the majority of such families are Hispanic.¹⁹ Indeed, by some

estimates, one in four Latino children in the U.S. may have an undocumented parent.²⁰ There are many possible contributing factors to these youth completing fewer years of school. U.S. citizen children in mixed-status homes disproportionately live in poverty,²¹ even though their parents are more likely to be employed than the average American.²² They are also more likely to live in crowded housing conditions and to experience food insecurity than their peers.²³

Even when controlling for such factors, having an undocumented parent can predict lower academic performance by American children.²⁴ This is because children in mixed-status families are often traumatized by the intense, constant fear of separation from an undocumented family member by immigration detention or deportation. Sustained toxic stress in children alters the brain's architecture²⁵ and can have long-term effects, the most extreme being a higher risk for premature death.²⁶ Relatedly, having undocumented parents is also linked to reduced cognitive development in children,²⁷ as well as higher levels of anxiety, depressive symptoms, sleep problems, and chronic diseases, often lasting into adulthood.^{28,29} Local law enforcement agreements with ICE have also been linked to drops in Hispanic student enrollment and/or school attendance; a 2019 Stanford study estimates that 320,000 Latino students, most of them elementary-aged, "disappeared" from public schools in counties with such agreements between 2000-2011.³⁰

Direct harms produced by anti-immigrant policies are only half the story; their indirect harms, or negative spillover effects, can be far-reaching. A growing body of research shows that the American children of Hispanic immigrants, including naturalized citizens, experience the aspects of the complex harms of punitive immigration enforcement policies, such as fearing family separation, fearing U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE), toxic stress, and discrimination based on falsely imputed immigration status.^{31,32}

The indirect attack on Hispanic children in the U.S. has only worsened under the Trump

administration. Even before taking office, then-candidate Trump exploited biased, anti-Latino rhetoric in his politics of division.* As a result of this environment, Latino youth have higher levels of depression and anxiety than their peers from being made to feel a perpetual outsider, including the children of American-born parents.³³ One study directly links negative political rhetoric about Latinos to higher stress and lower subjective well-being in Mexican-origin youth.³⁴ The prevalence of aggressive enforcement and inflammatory speech on the news has even been linked to high psychological distress in adult Latinos.³⁵ Emboldened by President Trump's example, hate crimes against Latinos have spiked since 2016. Distressingly, violent hate crimes are at a 16-year high,³⁶ the most visible, horrific example being the ethnically motivated mass murder of 22 people at a Walmart in El Paso, Texas, in August of 2019.

Schools are not immune to racial and ethnic animus; school bullying and relational aggression in children and adolescents has been studied for decades. The recent spike in hate speech and violence at the national level has only worsened the attacks on vulnerable students; some

researchers attribute the changes directly to President Trump's inflammatory rhetoric, due to children as young as kindergarten threatening classmates with language such as, "there's going to be a big wall to keep kids with brown skin out."³⁷ In a 2017 study, teachers from primarily White schools reported increasingly hostile school environments for ethnic minority students at levels unprecedented in their careers.³⁸ A 2019 study of middle school students found a significant increase in bullying and teasing based on race and ethnicity following the 2016 election in districts that supported the Republican candidate.³⁹ Students may also endure attacks by teachers or staff. Following national coverage of a student with DACA status, a UnidosUS-affiliated teacher at a minority Latino high school in the Midwest reported that a fellow teacher told a star scholar, "They're [ICE] coming for you next." Regardless of the instructor's intention, the student was distraught by the incident.

It is under these conditions—beyond the normal anxieties of school and childhood, beyond the barriers of disparate opportunities, beyond the terror of school

"The stress is off the charts. Some students are documented, some aren't; some families are, some aren't. It doesn't matter, the stress is the same. I've noticed all sorts of physical manifestations of stress—skin conditions, peeling splotches, constant diarrhea. I truly believe [my students] are experiencing PTSD."

—Sandra, English Learner classroom teacher, grades 9-12, Ohio



* When Donald Trump launched his 2016 presidential campaign, the then-candidate famously called Mexican immigrants "rapists" who bring drugs and crime into the U.S. Three months before the August 2019 mass murder in El Paso, TX, Mr. Trump asked, "How do you stop these people?" (referring to asylum seekers from Central America). When an audience member shouted, "Shoot them!," Mr. Trump did not condemn the provocation of violence, opting instead to joke, "Only in the Panhandle can you get away with that statement." See "Transcript: Donald Trump announces his presidential candidacy," CBS News, June 16, 2015, <https://www.cbsnews.com/news/transcript-donald-trump-announces-his-presidential-candidacy/> (accessed February 26, 2020); see also Emily Mahoney, "Trump to Panhandle crowd: 'How do we stop these people?' Shocking reply: 'Shoot them.'" Miami Herald, May 9, 2019, <https://www.miamiherald.com/news/politics-government/national-politics/article230209564.html> (accessed February 26, 2020).

gun violence—that we ask our children to learn. Aggressive immigration enforcement adds more fear and anxiety still. We are raising the next generation of Americans under the burden of choices they did not make, but for which they must bear the consequences all the same. Viable options to lessen their load exist, but we must act as a nation to share the effort of change now, or choose to stand by, knowingly, as an entire generation of Americans is slowly crushed by trauma and alienation.

UnidosUS Education Programs

UnidosUS, formerly the National Council of La Raza, is the largest national Latino civil rights and advocacy organization in the United States. For more than 50 years, UnidosUS has worked to advance opportunities for Latino families to enhance their significant contributions to the social, economic, and political dynamism of the U.S. Through a unique combination of research, advocacy, and programs, UnidosUS and its Affiliate network of 272 community-based organizations in 36 states, the District of Columbia, and Puerto Rico work to provide education, health care, immigration, housing, workforce development, voter registration, and other services to millions of Latinos in the United States each year.

The UnidosUS K-16 programs, also known as Líderes, impact Latino students nationwide through evidence-based programs with a culturally competent curriculum and delivery model. The Líderes programs focus on four priority areas: Leadership Development; Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM); College & Career Readiness; and Post-Secondary Success. Together with 46 local partner organizations, Líderes programs serve roughly 2,300 students per year. Additional information on Líderes programs and UnidosUS's education equity work can be found on the UnidosUS website.*

The National Institute for Latino School Leaders (NILSL) supports cohorts of local leaders to influence education policy at local, state, and national levels. More than 50 NILSL alumni from Affiliates, community-based organizations, and public schools located across the country are continuing to advocate for their students. NILSL Cohort VII launched in September 2019, and a new initiative (NILSL-CA) will begin state-specific work in California in spring 2020.

This study drew from the 2019 cohort of Líderes program partners and NILSL fellows, which comprised 84 educators. The final sample yielded 64 participants. For more on the study's design and methodology, see Appendix I.

"We recently did a lesson on the Census where students thought of their own questions in addition to the original Census questions. They were supposed to gather responses from their families for homework, but only one student was able to finish the assignment out of a class of 25. Their families were too afraid to even answer made-up homework questions. They thought ICE was after them."

-Paola, CASA Code instructor, grades 5-8, Illinois



* <https://www.unidosus.org/issues/youth/>

Findings

Survey participants were asked to respond to nine questions about student behavior and school climate based on personal experience on a scale from 1-5, where 1 was “not at all” and 5 was “extensively.” Following the model of the Civil Rights Project study, responses were grouped by intensity: 0 is no impact, 2-3 are some impact, and 4-5 are a large impact.

Fear

It is clear from the responses that UnidosUS-affiliated educators and their students are deeply affected by immigration enforcement, most especially the fear and anxiety it cultivates. Almost all respondents—nearly 90%—reported their school or classroom was impacted by immigration enforcement. Likewise, 92% of respondents reported observing students directly express fear and concern over immigration enforcement (ICE); 48% reported their students expressed such fears ‘a lot’ or ‘extensively,’ which suggests this distress is both pervasive and intense in our schools. It follows that 84% of respondents reported observing their students’ parents also expressing concern over immigration: 41% observed a large impact.

Absences

Four-fifths of the educators surveyed reported noticing an increase in immigration enforcement-related student absences in

their schools. Nearly as many—76%—have noticed a decline in parent involvement in school that they believe to be out of fear of immigration enforcement.

Behavior

When students do attend school, 89% of respondents have noticed emotional and behavioral problems in their students stemming from immigration-related anxieties. One of the ways in which behavior change manifests is in bullying; 54% of educators surveyed observed increases in verbal and physical bullying based on the perceived immigration status of their students and/or parents.

Declining Performance and Indirect Harm

Unsurprisingly, the cumulative effects of intense fear, emotional distress, bullying, and increased absences impact student performance. Eighty-one percent of respondents have noticed a decline in students’ academic performance as a result of concerns about immigration enforcement. Even students who are not from immigrant homes are impacted; 92% of educators surveyed say their overall classroom climate has been impacted, directly and indirectly affecting other students’ ability to learn.

“We are currently serving youth and parents at three border school districts in Arizona. My colleagues and I have heard many families express concern in regards to immigration and the increase of border patrol presence in the streets. Families have seen ICE agents in apartment complexes and mobile home parks, and they are afraid.”

-Anahi, Entre Mujeres instructor, grades 9-12, Arizona



Discussion

UnidosUS's Findings in Context

Since 2017, the Trump administration has made a series of policy decisions that have shaken the lives of millions of American families. Eighty percent of Latinos in the U.S. are American citizens; of the remaining 20% who are not, half have legal permanent residency (green cards).⁴⁰ Despite these legal protections, the impact of punitive immigration policies is felt by millions of families and has an outsized impact on American children. A growing body of research finds that indiscriminate immigration enforcement reaches beyond immigrant families, and as a result, Latinos in the U.S. are bearing the brunt of the Trump administration's politics of hate.

Many of the Trump administration's most visible and hostile intimidation tactics jeopardize our nation's future. At worst, the administration's combination of rhetoric and policies deliberately target Latinos, including lawful residents and citizens, for discrimination. At best, the administration's policies cause predictable and disproportionate harm to Hispanic immigrants and citizens alike—in effect, collateral damage from its political agenda. Whether due to negligence or premeditation, both have the same effect of dehumanizing and terrorizing Latinos. It is not without reason then that many Latinos have become distrustful, even fearful, of government. The following is a non-exhaustive list of ways in which the Trump administration has sought to intimidate Latino and immigrant communities:

- **The 2020 Census:** In August 2019, personal files from a top Republican consultant revealed proposals to gerrymander political districts along racial and ethnic lines,⁴¹ including adding a citizenship question to the Census that would suppress Latino participation and be “advantageous to Republicans and Non-Hispanic Whites.”⁴² Despite losing its Supreme Court case to include the citizenship question in the 2020 Census,

the Trump administration is succeeding in undermining a full and accurate count. Weeks into the 2020 Census, the Government Accountability Office has already deemed the project “high risk” for 128 reasons, among them, “maintaining public trust to ensure participation [...] combating disinformation, and protecting the privacy of respondent data.”⁴³ A February 2020 poll found that 75% of Latinos are concerned the “Trump Administration will use census information against immigrants or Latinos.”⁴⁴

- **Efforts to terminate Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) and Temporary Protected Status (TPS) for over one million individuals:** The Trump administration seeks to end legal protections for over one million long-time residents, many of whom are Latinos with U.S. citizen families. In September 2017, the administration announced it would repeal DACA protections for the then-750,000 young people who have grown, studied, and worked nearly their entire lives in the U.S.⁴⁵ The Supreme Court is set to rule on DACA as early as the spring of 2020. In anticipation of a court decision, Acting ICE Director Matthew Albence notes the agency already plans to deport DACA recipients if the Supreme Court rules to end the program.⁴⁶ Roughly 94% of DACA recipients are Latino; an estimated 26% have U.S.-born children.⁴⁷ Three-quarters of DACA recipients with children report thinking about being separated from their children at least once a day.⁴⁸ An additional 417,000 TPS holders are also at risk of losing their immigration protections.⁴⁹ The average TPS holders has lived in the U.S. for 20 years; collectively, TPS holders are believed to have nearly 273,000 U.S.-born children and own more than 60,000 homes.⁵⁰ Roughly 80% of TPS holders are Latino.⁵¹ By targeting these two

programs, the Trump administration risks separating an estimated 500,000 American children from a parent with DACA or TPS.

- **The Department of Homeland Security (DHS) public charge rule:** The 1996 Welfare Reform Act (PRWORA),* which restricted access to social safety nets for eligible immigrants, had negative spillover effects on Latinos, including high levels of eligible U.S. citizens disenrolling from public assistance programs.⁵² More than 20 years later, its modern equivalents include regulatory changes to the public charge grounds of inadmissibility under our immigration laws and a related basket of policies with similar objectives. In many cases, the policy underpinnings for these rules expressly incorporate assumptions about their chilling impacts on eligible Americans in mixed status families,⁵³ despite evidence that child poverty causes negative life outcomes that can be mitigated by government antipoverty programs.⁵⁴ More than 9.5 million U.S. citizen children live in an eligible immigrant family that participates in a public support program.⁵⁵ As with PRWORA 20 years ago, today they are among the most susceptible to the negative spillover effects of these policies.⁵⁶

The Civil Rights Project study establishes, “[I]mmigration enforcement is affecting all students—both those from immigrant homes and those that are not.”⁵⁷ This finding is borne out in the growing body of empirical evidence detailed in Section 3 of this report. The experiences of UnidosUS-affiliated educators further confirm that indiscriminate immigration enforcement

and hateful rhetoric places undue stress and anxiety on Latino youth. The effects of repeated and sustained stressors are cumulative, deepening with time and increased exposure. These stressors can have lasting effects on adolescent brains in the critical stages of cognitive development, as well as physical manifestations.⁵⁸ Students need to feel safe for learning and healthy development to occur; the school environments described by educators in both studies show U.S. immigration policy is turning places where students should feel safest into hostile territory where students are alert to potential threats rather than to their studies and extracurriculars.

Parallels Between the Civil Rights Project’s and UnidosUS’s Studies

As discussed in Section 5, differences in methodologies limit any direct comparison between the Civil Rights Project’s and UnidosUS’s studies. Nonetheless, the fundamental similarities in findings merit acknowledgment, as do some of their essential differences.

The impact of immigration policy on educators and their perceptions of their school environments seems more extreme in the UnidosUS study than in the Civil Rights Project study. There are multiple explanations for the higher degrees of perceived impact, beyond different methodologies and sample sizes. Two additional years under the Trump administration could have contributed to a seemingly deeper impact on educators consulted in the UnidosUS study. The Civil Rights Project began surveying educators in 2017, early into the administration, whereas UnidosUS captured educator responses in the summer and fall of 2019, at the height of enforcement-related media coverage.[†]

* Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act of 1996 (PRWORA), Pub. L. 104-193 (August 22, 1996).

† In the summer of 2019, the media focused heavily on several issues, including asylum seekers at the U.S. southern border, a proposed DHS ‘public charge’ rule, the Supreme Court’s decision to hear arguments on the termination of the DACA program, and multiple visible, largescale worksite raids. The climate of fear was heightened by tweets from President Trump threatening mass removal operations by U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement.

The UnidosUS sample included more non-teacher school personnel and more educators of older classes/grades, which may also account for higher degrees of perceived impact on the educators surveyed. Certified personnel, such as counselors and school social workers, may be more likely to interface with students who need additional support and thus are exposed to greater secondhand stressors. Similarly, the Civil Rights Project study found school principals more likely to report observing behavioral problems, perhaps due to their roles as disciplinarians and crisis managers.⁵⁹ Older students may also have more insight into family stressors and/or hold greater responsibilities than younger children; they may also be better equipped to verbally convey their concerns to classmates and teachers.

The bulk of educators who participated in the UnidosUS study serve schools in low-income, immigrant neighborhoods which already experience complex barriers to equal education. Seventy-five percent of respondents in the UnidosUS study estimated at least half of their students come from immigrant homes; 97% percent estimated at least half of their students qualify for free or reduced lunch.* In the Civil Rights Project study, educators from Title I schools with high proportions of English Learners were more likely than other respondents to report observing the impacts of immigration enforcement. It is credible that respondents in the UnidosUS study reported a deeper impact on their communities overall because their students are caught in a perfect storm of arbitrary immigration enforcement and ethnically-motivated bullying combined with the anxieties of adolescence and inequality-related stressors.

Indeed, we cannot speculate on any possible counterfactuals to UnidosUS's

results, i.e. how immigration enforcement might have impacted students differently had they not been in classrooms with the educators surveyed. Decades of research show students benefit greatly from having teachers and role models from shared ethnic and cultural backgrounds. Ninety-two percent of students in UnidosUS's 2019 programs identify as Latino, as do 80% of their instructors. A Washington Post analysis from the same year found that 80% of students in the U.S. are in districts where less than 5% of teachers are Hispanic.⁶⁰ Spanish is one of the primary languages spoken in the homes of 78% of students in UnidosUS's 2019 programs, as well as in the homes of nearly 58% of instructors. No reliable national measure of educators' primary languages spoken at home could be found at the time of writing. The sensitivity UnidosUS's educators pour into their work undoubtedly soothes some of the angst their students experience, even if it cannot remedy the underlying causes.

It is possible that the training UnidosUS-affiliated instructors receive in cultural competence and whole-child learning heightens their awareness of stressors outside the classroom, thus inflating the survey results. That said, the severity of the issues educators report suggests that one would have to be either callous or clueless not to notice these student concerns. Perhaps it is more likely, too, that UnidosUS instructors are a mitigating force on would-be bullies; it is conceivable that aggressors might know better than to harass a fellow student in front of an authority figure and known ally.

Outside of school, UnidosUS Affiliates have a critical role in their communities as trusted brokers and allies, and UnidosUS programs depend on the support and services that these Affiliates provide to communities in crisis. Without the buffer

* Among other factors, a school is eligible for schoolwide Title I funding if 40% or more of its students qualify for free or reduced-price lunch. U.S. Department of Education, "Title I, Part A" (October 2018), <https://www2.ed.gov/programs/titleiparta/index.html> (accessed February 13, 2020).

of dedicated, caring community leaders, it is plausible that the perceived impacts of immigration enforcement on students could have been even more severe. Their expertise should be leveraged to support Latino students—and their educators—in this challenging environment.

Recommendations

Students in the U.S., especially Hispanic students, continue to face many barriers to equal education. The status of a parent should not—morally or legally speaking—be one of them. Abrahamic traditions which have influenced governance in America for the past 500 years explicitly forbid intergenerational punishment.* Similarly, the 1982 Supreme Court ruling *Plyler v. Doe* protects the equal rights of all children to free public education under the law regardless of their immigration status, let alone their parents' status.†

UnidosUS plans to continue studying this issue with its Affiliate Network and partners, including the effects of immigration enforcement on the well-being of educators and administrators who may experience secondary traumas in their lines of duty. Looking forward, there are steps policy makers, elected officials, and education leaders can take to mitigate and eventually repair the damage of indiscriminate enforcement on our schools and our children in the short, medium, and long term.

- **Curb regulatory abuses that harm American children in mixed-status homes.** In the past year, the Trump administration has promulgated a “basket of polices” designed to block low-income, predominantly Latino immigrants from the legal avenues of entry into our nation. In so doing, our own research confirms the deleterious spillover effect on

American children in several arenas. The administration’s agenda in this regard has been headlined by the DHS public charge rule—set to be implemented in February 2020—that has many insidious tentacles. These include, but are not limited to, a U.S. Department of State public charge companion rule, a U.S. Housing and Urban Development rule on mixed-status households, and proposed naturalization fee hikes by the U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services. In the immediate term, Congress should deny funding for these measures until such time that any legal proceedings associated with these policies have concluded in their entirety.

- **Find legislative remedies for DACA and TPS recipients.** It is imperative that we provide relief for the nearly one million integral community members who are under threat of losing the only homes they know and their estimated 500,000 U.S.-born children who are at risk of family separation and trauma. The U.S. Senate should immediately take up the American Dream and Promise Act, which passed the U.S. House of Representatives with bipartisan support in June 2019.
- **Hold Immigration Enforcement Agencies to account.** The Trump Administration has routinely exceeded appropriated funding levels for immigration detention since FY2017. With record high funding levels, no meaningful checks on its ability to transfer funds to exceed congressional established funding levels, and wide net cast on deportation targets, ICE is significantly harming Latino and immigrant communities, including as described in this report. UnidosUS urges Congress to pass an appropriations bill this year that (a) ensures DHS effectively prioritizes

* “The child will not share the guilt of the parent.” Yechezkel (Ezekiel) 18:19-20.

† “[L]egislation directing the onus of a parent’s misconduct against his children does not comport with fundamental conceptions of justice.” *Plyler v. Doe*, 457 U.S. 202 (1982). See also <https://www.oyez.org/cases/1981/80-1538>, accessed February 21, 2020.

its interior enforcement resources on serious public safety and national security threats; (b) requires timely public reporting of arrest, detention, and removal metrics; and (c) imposes limits on DHS' transfer and reprogramming authorities to curb the recent practice and pattern of irresponsible spending on immigration enforcement.

- **Fund additional research on the impacts of heightened immigration enforcement on children under age five.**

Decades of research show that early childhood education (ECE) and healthy development in children ages 0-5 are critical to long-term individual outcomes. However, research suggests that U.S. immigration policies are also endangering our children in utero. Following the 2016 election, preterm births among Latina women spiked, most likely due to stress.⁶¹ Similarly compromised pregnancies were observed following large worksite raids in Postville, IA.⁶² Signs of negative cognitive impacts can be observed in children with undocumented parents as young as 24 months, due to parental distress and insufficient resources.⁶³ Anecdotal reports from UnidosUS ECE teachers already suggest children as young as ages 3 and 4 are terrified of being separated from a parent due to immigration enforcement; further study and analysis are needed to protect our nation's youngest, most vulnerable children from potentially life-altering harm.

- **Enact sensible immigration reform legislation.** The American public agrees that we need a modern, workable, solutions-based immigration system that combines good governance, clear values, lawfulness, and fairness. Such a system would provide an earned path to citizenship for undocumented immigrants. In addition to being important economic, social, and political engines for the nation, immigrants are part of millions of American families—including many of

Latino heritage—who contribute to the fabric of our nation.

In addition to immigration policy steps that can be taken to improve conditions in our schools, the following education policy recommendations can also help to mitigate some of the harm to students.

- **Invest in education spending rather than cutting it, especially for English Learners (EL) and Title I schools.**

The President's proposed 2021 budget includes cutting Department of Education funding by \$5.6 billion dollars, or nearly 8%. The proposed budget would consolidate funding for 29 programs into one block grant, including programs with large Latino student participation, such as English Language Acquisition (ELA) and Elementary and Secondary Education for the Disadvantaged (ESED).⁶⁴ Education research is clear: "in direct tests of the relationship between financial resources and student outcomes, money matters."⁶⁵ School districts with the highest proportions of students of color already receive the least funding in the U.S.—\$1,800 less per student than their White peers, on average.⁶⁶ Reducing their resources further still, as the President's budget contemplates, practically ensures students in these schools will not have equal access to quality education.

- **Provide ongoing funding to train school personnel to identify and respond to students' immigration-related needs.** School personnel in all roles need to become trauma-skilled, with a culturally responsive lens, to better serve students when they exhibit behaviors caused by immigration policies. Administrators at the district level also need training on how immigration policies impact their schools in order to better develop policies and plans that safeguard students and teachers against harm. Training on Plyer v. Doe and the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act

(FERPA) should be mandatory for all school personnel. Students and parents must trust that their schools are safe environments. Ensuring the adults at school are prepared and equipped to protect students from additional harm is critical to building this trust, as is a firm grounding in students' legal rights and protections.

- **Fund the expansion of school-based, trauma-informed care.** UnidosUS is in the initial stages of developing a whole-child approach for UnidosUS educators that recognizes and supports all aspects of a child's life that can impact learning success and emotional well-being. The UnidosUS model incorporates culturally responsive approaches that address the importance of individual identity and home language. The project aims to equip educators with additional tools to support and cultivate optimal student outcomes for Latino learners from diverse contexts. UnidosUS cannot do it alone; additional community-centered efforts will be needed to meet the complex challenges facing students and their schools nationwide. Funding to support healthy social-emotional learning, as considered in the fiscal year 2020 Labor, Health and Human Services, Education (LHHS-Ed) spending bill, is critical to these ends and should be protected in future appropriations.*
- **Improve diverse teacher pipelines and retention rates, with an emphasis on Hispanic educators.** A diverse teacher workforce is critical to improving educational achievement for Latino students, who will soon make up one-in-three public school students.⁶⁷ Reauthorizing the Higher Education Act (HEA), increasing support for Teacher Preparation Programs (TPP) at Minority Serving Institutions (MSI), and maintaining and improving management of public service loan forgiveness programs are among the critical steps needed to build and preserve a strong, diverse teacher workforce. Further recommendations are explored in UnidosUS's Latino Policy Priorities for Reauthorization of the Higher Education Act.†
- **Reaffirm the role of the U.S. Department of Education in protecting students' civil rights.** The mission of the DOE Office for Civil Rights (OCR) is to ensure equal access to education and to promote educational excellence through vigorous enforcement of civil rights in our nation's schools. However, under the Trump administration, OCR has rolled back protections for vulnerable student populations and has failed to provide oversight to ensure students' civil rights are protected in a heightened environment of fear and trauma. It is imperative the U.S. Department of Education and the U.S. Department of Justice strongly affirm that they will continue to enforce the Supreme Court's landmark case Plyler v. Doe and subsequent caselaw, as well as Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964.
- **Protect Congressional funding for research on health disparities.** The president's 2021 proposed budget would cut the National Institute of Health (NIH) National Institute on Minority Health and Health Disparities by \$31 million dollars. This program is critical to understanding non-biological factors to health disparities, such as socioeconomic factors, discrimination, and physical environment. Continued research is needed to establish longitudinal trends and encouraging practices for treatment. At best, cutting funding for health disparity research shows indifference for

* Labor, Health and Human Services, Education, Defense, State, Foreign Operations, and Energy and Water Development Appropriations Act of 2020, H.R. 2740, 116th Cong. § 3 (2020).

† <http://publications.unidosus.org/handle/123456789/1954>

the well-being of vulnerable Americans; at worst, it seeks to erase some of the disparate harms on populations which are equal under the law.

Conclusion

America is on the eve of great change—demographic, cultural, technological, environmental—the rumblings of these shifts are undeniable, as are their traces in American politics. Some changes are clearer than others, including the ways in which current U.S. immigration policy hurts American children, as demonstrated in this report. Indeed, it is entirely probable that the harms we observe now are the early warning signs of eventual, cumulative intergenerational effects that will influence our country for decades to come. Overhauling our immigration system or undoing years of systemic harm to our schools may seem insurmountable tasks: obstacles of such size and intractability as to preordain us to a future where American values no longer matter. However, it is in such political twilights that we have historically been our best, our boldest, and our most inventive.

The growth of the school-aged Latino population is an invaluable resource in our rapidly aging society. In just fifteen years, the U.S. is projected to have more people over the age of 65 than under the age of 18 for the first time in our history;⁶⁸ at least one-third of those children will be Latino. Indeed, we must quickly recognize the rich potential of our nation's diversity before it is squandered away on anti-immigrant, anti-family policies. Restoring community trust in the nation's ability to fairly and humanely enforce our immigration laws, curbing regulatory abuses that harm American children, and gradually fixing what we all agree is a broken immigration system are net positives for the nation. These measures would reduce immigration enforcement costs and would also have the added benefit of freeing up funds to invest in a shared resource—our nation's children. We have everything to gain as a country in rejecting the current U.S. immigration policy status quo and working instead toward viable solutions for American children, American students, and a brighter American future.



Appendix 1

Methodology

UnidosUS abridged the original survey tool with permission from the authors of the Civil Rights Project study.* The survey was administered during workshops in July and August of 2019 for educators in UnidosUS Líderes programs. Workshop participation was mandatory for community-based organizations and schools that received UnidosUS support for education programs in 2019-20. The survey was administered anonymously using SurveyGizmo software on tablets, and it had an 87% response rate. The survey link was also shared with educators via a newsletter to NILSL fellows in the fall of 2019, but only elicited three additional responses. The 2019 cohort of Líderes program partners and NILSL fellows comprised 84 educators. A total of 73 educators opted to participate in the survey; 8 respondents were dropped from the sample for incomplete responses. One respondent was dropped for having previous contact with the Civil Rights Project researchers. Non-respondents primarily opted out for lack of in-classroom experience and/or lack of interest.

The final sample size of 64 educators yields an approximately 90% confidence level with a 5% margin of error for extrapolation to educators in UnidosUS-affiliated education programs. Collectively, the 2019 cohort of UnidosUS-affiliated educators in the Líderes and NILSL programs serve more than 70 schools across the U.S., with over 3,500 fellow educators and 53,000 students. Given the constraints of this study, findings cannot be generalized or applied to this wider population. With additional funding and capacity, UnidosUS would expand an iteration of this study to include partners from its Affiliate Network in K-12 schools across the U.S.

The Sample

Most respondents self-identified as teachers. Together with paraprofessionals/teachers' aides, 68% of respondents were classroom instructors or support. The remaining 30% of respondents were principals/administrative staff or other certified personnel (counselor, social worker, school psychologist, speech therapist). Only one respondent self-identified as an afterschool youth development professional.

Nearly all respondents work at the middle school (51%) or high school (43%) levels. Sixty-seven percent of respondents were from the West Coast or Northeast. The remaining third of respondents were equally split between the Midwest and South. Over two-thirds of respondents' estimated that 80% or more of their student body qualifies for free and reduced-price lunch programs, which is more than double the 40% free and reduced-price lunch threshold commonly used as a proxy for low-income schools.

Seventy-three percent of respondents estimated at least half of their students came from immigrant homes. This finding is reflective of Latino populations in the U.S. As of 2019, 95% of Latino children (ages 0-17) are U.S.-born citizens and 50% have at least one parent who was born outside of the U.S.⁶⁹ Regardless of parents' current immigration status, the U.S. Census Bureau considers these immigrant homes.

* See Ee and Gándara, "The Impact of Immigration Enforcement on the Nation's Schools," for a discussion of the survey tool design and validity.

Limitations

UnidosUS relied on convenience sampling during pre-existing workshops to target UnidosUS-affiliated educators. As nearly all respondents were participants in mandatory workshops for UnidosUS education program grantees, some response bias may have been introduced. With a larger budget, UnidosUS would be able to administer a broader study across all UnidosUS-affiliated schools. Given the limitations, this study does not lend itself to comparative analysis with the Civil Rights Project findings. Likewise, the sample was too small to perform subset analyses by region or grade level.

Appendix 2

Sample Composition and School Demographics

Sample Description

Total Responses = 74 educators
Final sample size = 63 educators

Figure 1: Please select the answer that best describes your role at the school.

- 57% Teacher
- 13% Teach Aide/Paraprofessional
- 3% Principal/School Administrator
- 25% Other certificated (counselor, social worker, school psychologist, speech therapist)
- 2% Other

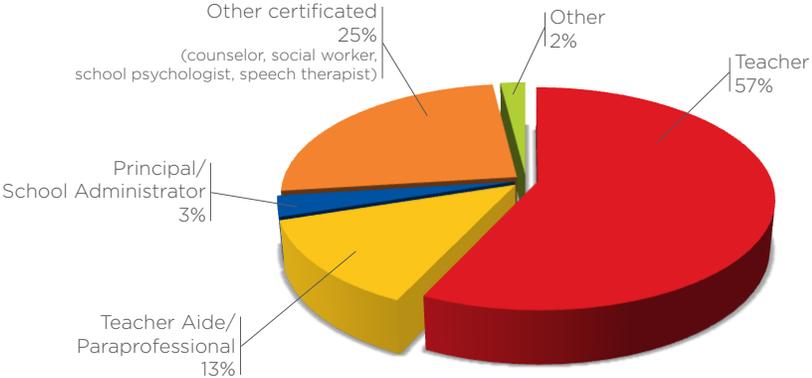


Figure 2: At what grade(s) or school level do you work?

- 43% High School
- 51% Middle or Junior High School
- 6% Elementary School

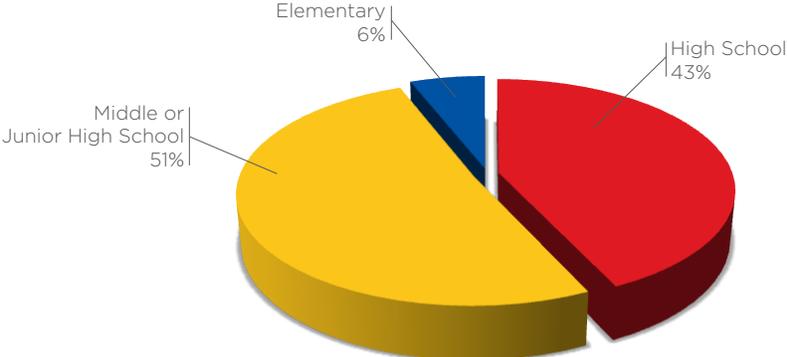


Figure 3: What percent of students in your school do you estimate come from immigrant homes?

62%	60 percent or more
11%	50-60 percent
11%	40-50 percent
8%	30-40 percent
5%	20-30 percent
2%	10-20 percent
2%	0-10 percent

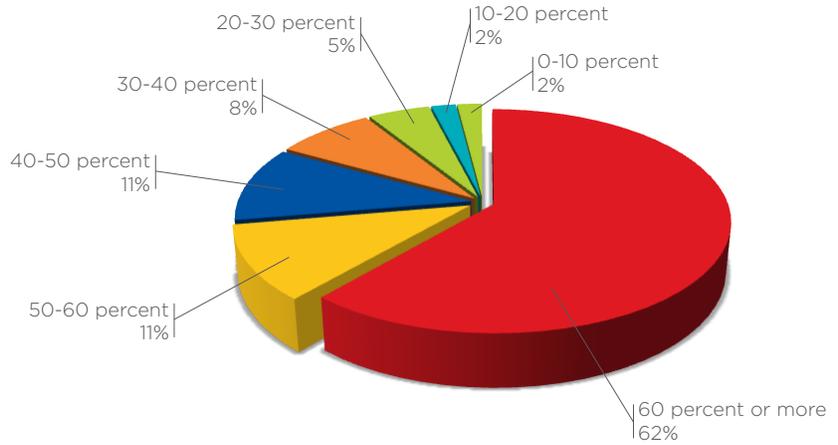


Figure 4: In which region of the U.S do you teach?

17%	Midwest
24%	Northeast
16%	South
43%	West

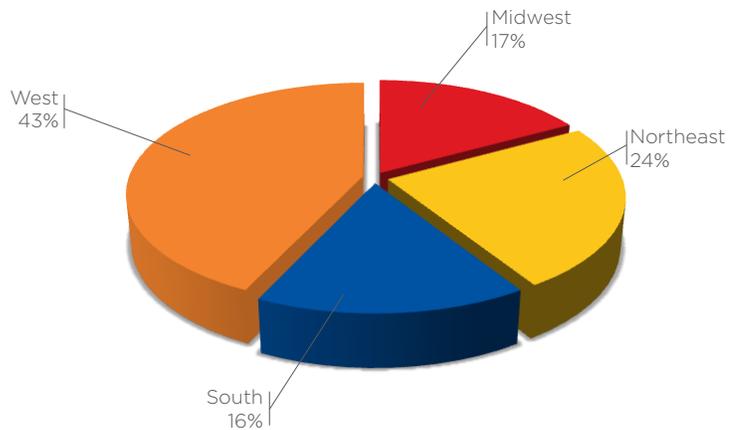


Figure 5: How would you describe where your school is located?

2%	Rural
6%	Suburban
92%	Urban

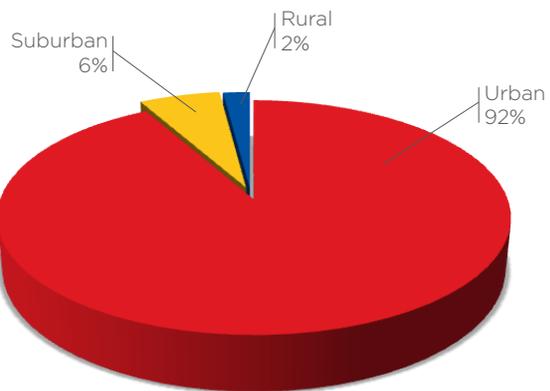
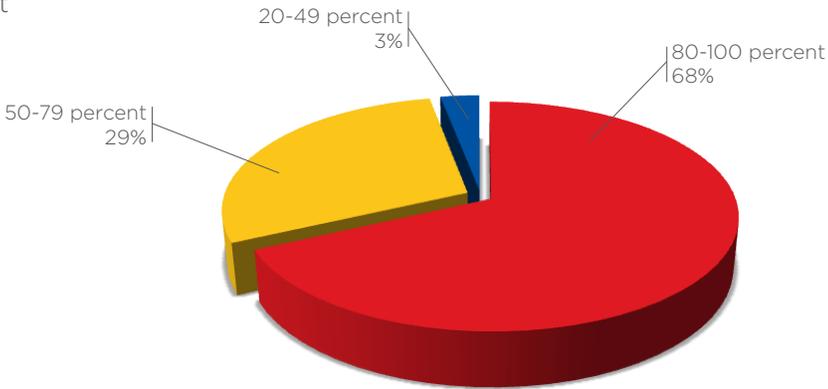


Figure 6: What percent of students in your school do you estimate qualify for free or reduced lunch?*

68% 80-100 percent
29% 50-79 percent
3% 20-49 percent



* Among other factors, a school is eligible for schoolwide Title I funding if 40% or more of its students qualify for free or reduced-price lunch. U.S. Department of Education, "Title I, Part A" (October 2018), <https://www2.ed.gov/programs/titleiparta/index.html> (accessed February 13, 2020).

Appendix 3

Survey Instrument and Responses

Perception of the Impact of Immigration Enforcement Activities on Schools

(Used with permission from the UCLA Civil Rights Project)*

Screening Questions

Did you previously participate in the UCLA or UnidosUS study?	Yes No	(A “yes” response would terminate the survey)
Would you like to participate in this brief survey?	Yes No	(A “no” response would terminate the survey)
1. Have you observed any students in your classroom or your school who are concerned about immigration issues that may be affecting them, their families, or people they know?	Not at all I don’t know Yes	6% 5% 89%

For the following questions, respondents were asked to rate their experience with the scale below. Responses are grouped by ‘not at all,’ ‘some impact,’ and ‘large impact.’

No	A little	Somewhat	A lot	Extensive
1	2	3	4	5
2. Have you noticed any increase in absences that may be related to concerns about immigration enforcement?	No	A little/somewhat	A lot/extensive	21% 70% 10%
3. Have you noticed any behavioral and/or emotional problems with any of your students that appear to be related to concerns about immigration enforcement?	No	A little/somewhat	A lot/extensive	11% 59% 30%
4. Have you noticed a decline in student academic performance that may be related to concerns about immigration issues?	No	A little/somewhat	A lot/extensive	19% 59% 22%

* *Ee and Gándara, “The Impact of Immigration Enforcement on the Nation’s Schools.”*

5. Have any of your students expressed any concerns or fears about immigration enforcement?	No	8%
	A little/somewhat	44%
	A lot/extensive	48%
6. Are concerns about immigration enforcement impacting any of your students indirectly by affecting classroom climate?	No	8%
	A little/somewhat	54%
	A lot/extensive	38%
7. Have any PARENTS of students expressed any concerns to you about immigration issues or enforcement?	No	16%
	A little/somewhat	43%
	A lot/extensive	41%
8. Have you noticed any decline in PARENT involvement in your school that appears to be related to concerns about immigration enforcement?	No	24%
	A little/somewhat	56%
	A lot/extensive	20%
9. Have you noticed any increase in bullying (verbal or physical) related to the perceived immigration status of students or their parents over the last year?	No	46%
	A little/somewhat	43%
	A lot/extensive	11%



UnidosUS, previously known as NCLR (National Council of La Raza), is the nation's largest Hispanic civil rights and advocacy organization. Through its unique combination of expert research, advocacy, programs, and an Affiliate Network of nearly 300 community-based organizations across the United States and Puerto Rico, UnidosUS simultaneously challenges the social, economic, and political barriers that affect Latinos at the national and local levels.

For more than 50 years, UnidosUS has united communities and different groups seeking common ground through collaboration and a shared desire to make our country stronger.

The UnidosUS Policy and Advocacy component is a leading think tank focusing on issues relevant to the Latino community. Through research, policy analysis, advocacy efforts, civic engagement, and campaigns, it defines a rigorous policy agenda that includes stances on immigration, education, health, employment and the economy, and housing. The component aligns federal work with state-level advocacy and provides support and expertise to state and local leaders in implementing Latino-focused policy.

For more information on UnidosUS, visit unidosus.org or follow us on [Facebook](#) and [Twitter](#).

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