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## CORONAVIRUS IS HARD ON EVERYONE. BUT IMMIGRANT STUDENTS FACE AN ADDITIONAL SET OF CHALLENGES



School coronavirus closures have been hard on everyone, but immigrant students and families face an additional set of challenges. On top of stresses related to health concerns, widespread job losses, and difficulties associated with schooling children at home, immigrant families may face language and cultural barriers that interfere with the ability to understand what's going on, making the situation seem all the more scary. The problem can be especially acute for those who speak languages other than Spanish, given that 76% of the nation's emerging bilinguals speak that language. That means that when communications and instruction are available in languages other than English, they are often only available in Spanish.

Coronavirus-related stressors may also hit immigrant children especially hard as they navigate a climate where anti-immigrant sentiment is on the rise and in-your-face and enforcement efforts have been stepped up to the point that even [naturalized citizens fear deportation](#). A [2018 educator survey](#) by National Education Policy Center Fellow Patricia Gándara and her co-author Jongyeon Ee found that fears of deportation were impacting documented and undocumented students alike, leading to emotional and behavioral problems and to absences.

“We know that it's been very disruptive for these children with potentially very long-term consequences,” National Education Policy Center Fellow Patricia Gándara told the non-profit education news outlet [Chalkbeat](#) in March. “So this [pandemic] is just another layer on top of that.”

Undocumented immigrant students face an additional layer of challenges. For example, the Immigration and Customs Enforcement agency [tracks down undocumented immigrants](#) using electronic surveillance, including photos posted on social media and other websites. If children who are undocumented are asked, for instance, to post photos or videos of themselves online for class, they could inadvertently be putting themselves and their families at risk.

If their families are among the millions of workers laid off as a result of coronavirus-related business closures, they do not qualify for funds provided through the CARES Act to help offset the negative impacts of the pandemic. August updates to so-called “public charge” rules [have also had a chilling effect](#) on immigrant families seeking public benefits such as Medicaid or Section 8 housing assistance, because government officials now have more leeway to consider the use of such services when determining who receives green cards, visas, or citizenship. This means children whose parents have lost their jobs may be trying to learn on empty stomachs, or doubling up with family members or friends. Some immigrant families have [expressed concerns](#) about borrowing school-issued computers and other devices for fear they might have to pay for them if they get broken or lost. Others have [reported](#) that providers have required social security numbers to obtain free internet access for their children.

Undocumented parents who do remain employed often work in low-wage jobs that cannot be done from home, exposing themselves and their families to the risk of contracting the virus. If they do get sick, they may [avoid hospitals](#) because they fear being detained by Immigration and Customs Enforcement, worry about public charge rules, or simply cannot afford to miss even one day of work. With schools closed, sick children may no longer have access to school-based health clinics that some districts provide.

Children in immigration detention centers face yet another set of health risks because they live in group settings that are conducive to the spread of infectious diseases. Coronavirus has already impacted youth in detention centers in [Chicago](#) and [New York](#).

## NEPC Resources on Immigration

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