



THE SCHOOL-TO-DEPORTATION PIPELINE: THE OTHER SCHOOL SAFETY CONCERN



In recent months, media accounts have been full—and rightfully so—of the fear, panic and concern caused by the tragic mass school shooting in Uvalde, Texas.

Yet well under the radar, many students spend much of their young lives facing a very different type of fear that plays out both inside and outside of school.

For Susana, it happens while driving. No matter how carefully she followed the rules of the road, she felt like her heart would stop each time she saw a police car pass. For Agosto, it starts at home: He worries immigration officers will burst through the door, removing him and his parents and thus leaving his behind his little sister and brother who are legal citizens born in the United States. As for Sylvia, her concerns crystallized in school, where her teachers started a college preparation program that excluded undocumented students like her. When Sylvia responded by creating her own college preparation group to help herself and her undocumented peers, teachers she had previously trusted responded not with support but with ridicule and avoidance.

“They made me feel like if I wasn’t a human,” she told [NEPC Fellow Jaime Del Razo](#) of Vas-sar College during an interview for a study on undocumented youth. “They made me feel like an animal that couldn’t be with humans.”

In the peer-reviewed *Journal for Leadership, Equity, and Research*, Del Razo details the lived experiences of Susana, Agosto, and Sylvia (all pseudonyms) and other undocumented students brought to the United States from Mexico as children.

When Del Razo reviewed his notes on interviews with the youths, he noticed that the set of questions that elicited the most detailed responses was: “*Is safety an issue for you and*

other [undocumented] students? How would you define a 'safe space'? Do you have a place like that at your school? Do you have a place like this outside of school?"

Repeatedly, the students responded that safety was indeed an issue and that they did not necessarily feel safe inside or outside of school. Other themes that emerged included a looming hopelessness combined with a sense of unfairness. After all, these young people had done all the right things. They had stayed out of trouble. They had gotten good grades. Yet they lived with the sense that their lives could be upended from one moment to the next by, for instance, a chance encounter during an automobile accident. Or by betrayal by a trusted mentor or friend. Or by a sudden raid.

"I chose what the country wanted me to do," a young woman Del Razo calls Carmen said. "I have never been arrested. I have never committed a crime. I have been respectful and loyal to this country. Yet this is what I get for it. I don't get the opportunities."

As of now, these students who were brought to the United States as children have little recourse other than the legal Band-Aids that now exist: California law AB 540 permits students who meet its requirements to pay in-state tuition (rather than the more expensive out-of-state/international fees they would otherwise be charged) at the state's public colleges and universities and to qualify for some financial aid. The Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) program, which former President Donald Trump attempted to end, provides still-enrolled participants with a work permit and de-prioritization for deportation—but not a path to citizenship or any longer-term assurances against deportation. Moreover, a lawsuit has **blocked** the enrollment of new applicants. The proposed federal DREAM Act would provide participants with a pathway to citizenship, but it has never passed through Congress.

While educators cannot directly change these laws, Del Razo wants them to be aware of the subset of their students who live in fear. They have become part of the fabric of our neighborhoods and schools. They study. They work, to the extent that they are able to do so. And yet they are often treated as if they are not part of our society.

Educators can help these students be hopeful "by ensuring that we have not lost hope in them," he writes.

NEPC Resources on Immigration

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