

Mental Health and Wellness Strategies to Support Students Impacted by Immigration Activity

The increase in immigration enforcement activity across Oregon has created an environment of profound uncertainty and fear for many students and families. Students, families and school staff may be experiencing social, emotional, and physical responses such as stress, anxiety, and hypervigilance in response to increased immigration enforcement in the last eighteen months. ODE would like to elevate a few strategies for district and schools' leadership, to ensure resources, services and supports are available and known to students and families, most impacted by immigration enforcement activity.



#1 Access to Care

District staff can help by making resources, support and services both visible and accessible. Ensure that contact information for counselors, social workers, and school psychologists is displayed at school in multiple languages, uses welcoming language and emphasizes confidentiality and safety. Information can be shared via flyer, email, or other mass communication efforts. Best practices include having culturally responsive school staff, specifically staff that have existing relationships with students/families to reach out and ask about what supports, services and resources could be helpful.

If a district does not have access to culturally responsive school counselors, school social workers or school psychologists, a community-based organization that provides culturally specific mental health care may be of great benefit. While it is challenging to list all community-based organizations that support children and families across Oregon, these resources may help.

- [Statewide Community Mental Health Programs](#), Programs that offer mental health services located in each of Oregon's 36 counties.

- [Familias en Accion](#), Focuses on health and well-being of Latino families in Oregon with a focus on community-based health education and food insecurity
- [Oregon Latino Health Coalition](#) to access free health coverage through the state of Oregon,
- [Raices de bienestar](#), Provides culturally specific mental health services and training in Hillsboro and Medford and offers training and educational programs focused on culturally responsive care, trauma and healing informed practices and support for BIPOC staff.
- [211 Info](#) A statewide information and referral services to help locate services such as mental health care, housing, food assistance and utility help.
- [988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline](#) are available and offer Spanish-language services and are available for anyone needing to talk. A note on 988: This helpline was designed for individuals facing mental health struggles, emotional distress, substance use concerns or just someone to talk to. You don't need to be experiencing a crisis to reach out for support.

#2 Improving Mental Health Literacy

Deepening staff mental health literacy and culturally responsive practices can be supportive of students' needs. It can be helpful to improve the mental health literacy of all staff so that signs and symptoms of stress, traumatic stress, and anxiety can be identified early on. By improving mental health literacy, staff identify students most in need of support and help them access the resources they need. Staff can also engage in thoughtful practices while recognizing community needs, such as students who are using survival strategies. Culturally responsive practices include understanding history and culture, values, and experiences.

All school staff, including classified, licensed, and administrative staff, can receive training to recognize the signs of common mental health issues like anxiety, depression, stress, and hypervigilance. Equip staff with the tools to hold supportive, non-judgmental conversations that bridge students to professional services early, preventing the escalation of social and emotional issues that can impact well-being. These are some easy to access resources focused on improving Mental Health Literacy: [Mental Health is Health](#) and [Mental Health Literacy](#) tools to build this foundational knowledge. [Trauma Informed Oregon](#) has many free and accessible resources. [Culturally Responsive Teaching](#) offers more information and strategies to support students and families.

#3 Implementing Transformative Social Emotional Learning (TSEL)

Whereas standard SEL focuses on individual regulation, Transformative SEL (TSEL) focuses on the collective well-being and the systemic conditions that allow a student to thrive. This framework is particularly helpful in improving self-awareness and social-awareness. If your team is newer to this approach, begin with the [Framework Overview](#) to understand how to align TSEL with unmet social emotional needs of students.

Use the [Conditions for Learning & Thriving guide](#) to support key practices associated with fostering positive learning environments. For the adults in the system, the [Social Awareness and Belonging resource](#) provides a pathway to better understand and foster genuine empathy and solidarity for the lived experiences of those impacted by recent immigration enforcement activity.

Please reach out to ODE.HealthySchools@ode.oregon.gov for more information or support.

