



## Immigration Enforcement Actions (ICE) Impact on IL Head Start Children, Families, Staff and Communities

**The Illinois Head Start Association has and continues to collect stories that describe the following:**

- Children's experiences (attendance disruptions, fear/anxiety, changes in behavior)
- Family impacts (detentions, missed work, transportation issues, housing instability)
- Staff experiences (emotional toll, workload, challenges supporting families)
- Program operations (drops in attendance, enrollment challenges, staffing issues)
- Community impacts (trust in institutions, participation in services, partnerships)

**Coming Soon! Watch for the IHSA Storybank – a collection of real-life stories that share lived experiences among our Head Start children, families, staff and communities.**

**Here's a summary of what we know so far -**

### **1) Classroom & School-Related Impacts**

Teachers & school communities coping with ICE fear

- Head Start/Early Head Start administrators/teachers report handling trauma and anxiety among children as families react to raids and enforcement presence at school edges; staff are improvising support systems to reassure families and help children and staff feel safe.

Emotional toll on educators

- Our Administrators have shared how the constant threat of enforcement wears on staff and children alike, describing parents and children on edge about school attendance and daily routines.

Medical/community response

- Clinicians and care workers describe scrambling to manage mental health effects of immigration enforcement actions on families within immigrant communities.

### **2) Community Trauma and Fear**

Trauma in families after raids

- Head Start/Early Head Start report families and community members struggling with fear and emotional harm following federal immigration sweeps. Mental Health professionals and advocates note long-term psychological effects.

#### Fear and behavior changes in neighborhoods

- Head Start/Early Head Start programs have shared that families have altered work, school, and travel behavior due to enforcement presence — staying home, skipping appointments, or arranging alternate school drop-offs to avoid perceived risk.

### Quotes About Children’s Fear and Emotional Impact

#### From teachers and parents describing children’s emotional responses:

- *“For children in immigrant or mixed-status families... exposure to distressing or violent social media content about immigration enforcement are reinforcing feelings of fear and instability.”* — Mental Health Professional describing children’s sense of safety at school.
- *“There are both visible and invisible effects to this, and it’s affecting every part of the community... we want it to be a joy-filled space where they feel safe in a space where they can forget about the weight of the world for a little bit.”* — A Head Start teacher about children coping with fear.
- *“Our children are totally frightened that they are going to come home and they’re not going to see their parents anymore or that their parent will not be here to pick them up.”* — A Family Services Staff Member

#### How enforcement presence affects learning and routines:

- *“Kids know. They feel it. They see it. They see the fear in their parents. They see the fear in their classmates”* — A Head Start Administrator describing how fear shows up in a child’s behavior.
- *“At our Head Start/Early Head Start... attendance has dropped because many families are scared of going to school as they curtail activities like grocery shopping or going to restaurants to avoid being detained.”* — A Head Start/Early Head Start administrator.
- *“We have to be good or ICE will get us.”* — A 4-year-old child overheard whispering to dolls after enforcement activity in their neighborhood.

### Patterns/Trends

- Increased absenteeism
- Children showing anxiety, regression, or behavioral changes
- Families avoiding public places or services
- Staff burnout or secondary trauma
- Enrollment or attendance instability