



Staff Communication for Immigrant & Refugee Student & Families Protocols

Dear Staff,

As many of you know, there have been recent changes at the federal level regarding Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE). The previous “sensitive locations” policy, which included public schools, is no longer in effect, meaning there is a possibility ICE officials could enter our schools when previously they would not.

Ottumwa Community Schools will comply with all federal and state laws, the intention of this letter is to explain the methods we will use to meet those expectations. We are confident that district staff take pride in a safe and welcoming teaching environment and we want all of our families to feel a sense of connection and belonging in our schools.

The Ottumwa Community School District is dedicated to creating a safe, inclusive, and supportive learning environment for all students. As part of that safe and supportive environment, we would like to update you on protocols and procedures in the event ICE would make a request of our buildings or district.

Our Policies and Practices:

First, it is important to note that the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act protects the privacy of student education records and restricts the sharing of personally identifiable information without parental consent. The federal law also supersedes any state-level policy that seeks to mandate the release of student data. Board Policy 506.02-R(1) addresses the information we must share regardless of parental consent.

The data we gather regarding students is for educational purposes only. The district cannot inquire about a student's citizenship or immigration status to establish residency within the district.

If ICE officials visit one of our schools, we ask that office staff take the following actions:

1. Welcome the agent(s).
2. Ask them to provide identification and run the ID through the Raptor Visitor Management System.
3. Inform the building principal. Also notify Mike McGrory, Superintendent, and Mike Stiemsma, Director of Special Programs.
4. Ask the agent(s) if they have any paperwork (i.e., subpoena, warrant, etc.). Ask to make copies of the paperwork and send them immediately to the Superintendent/Director of Special Programs for review.



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5. Ask the agent(s) to sit in the office while the principal or administrator arrives. Alternatively, you can ask them to sit in a more private area (such as the principal's office). Assure them we will work as quickly as possible.
6. Keep notes of the date/time, names and titles of the agents, who you contacted at the District Office, the name of the student or staff member they are inquiring about (if known), etc.
7. Requests from law enforcement to interview a student shall be made through the principal's office. The principal may attempt to contact the parent to inform them of the request and if they would like to be present *unless* the warrant indicates that contact should not be made. Board Policy 502.09

If ICE requests to speak with a teacher(s):

While we feel it is unlikely that ICE would want to speak to a teacher, in the event that a request is made, you have the right to remain silent and refuse to sign documents without legal counsel.

If someone identifies themselves as ICE outside of the school while on school grounds:

If anyone approaches you outside the school but still on school grounds (such as during dismissal), they should be directed to check in at the office. It is important to ensure that all interactions go through the proper channels. As a best practice, do not answer any questions or provide information until the individual has identified themselves and followed the appropriate school procedures.

If a parent or both parents are detained:

In situations where parents are unable to pick up their child due to being detained, please follow building protocols to contact the student's designated emergency contacts. If staff become aware that a student's parents have been detained, notify the Family Service Coordinators, Erin Hinebaugh or Megan Logan, immediately. Ottumwa Schools will collaborate with Iowa Health and Human Services (HHS) to ensure the child's safety. If emergency shelter is required, HHS will prioritize placing the student with relatives, following the same procedures used for any child experiencing homelessness.

If students express concern, fear, or anxiety regarding ICE:

Recent media coverage may cause students to feel apprehension or anxiety for themselves or their loved ones. School Counselors are available to work with students who are feeling strong emotions but we all can communicate when any student needs to be handled with care.

If parents have questions about ICE or Immigration



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If parents have questions regarding ICE or immigration, it's important to reassure them that all students are welcome and safe in Ottumwa schools. While our teachers and staff are unable to provide legal information, advice, or opinions due to the complexities of immigration laws, we are committed to fostering an inclusive and supportive environment for every student and family.

We understand that families may approach teachers with questions or ask them to share information with immigrant families in their classrooms. If parents request information, please refrain from offering any legal advice, as immigration-related resources frequently change. Instead, you can use the following template to respond professionally and empathetically to such inquiries:

Thank you for reaching out with your question. While I am unable to provide legal advice or specific guidance regarding immigration matters, I want to assure you that our school is committed to creating a safe and supportive environment for all students and families.

For accurate and up-to-date information, I encourage you to reach out to trusted organizations that specialize in immigration support. These organizations are best equipped to provide the guidance and resources you may need.

Thank you for your understanding, and please don't hesitate to reach out if there's anything else we can do to support your child's success at school.

In closing:

We know that there may be other questions that you have that are not addressed in this letter. We have a [Q&A form](#) that you can fill out if you have any questions. We will update the responses [here](#).

Sincerely,

Mike McGrory, Superintendent

Ottumwa Community School District
115 N Ferry St | Ottumwa, IA 52501



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FAQ: