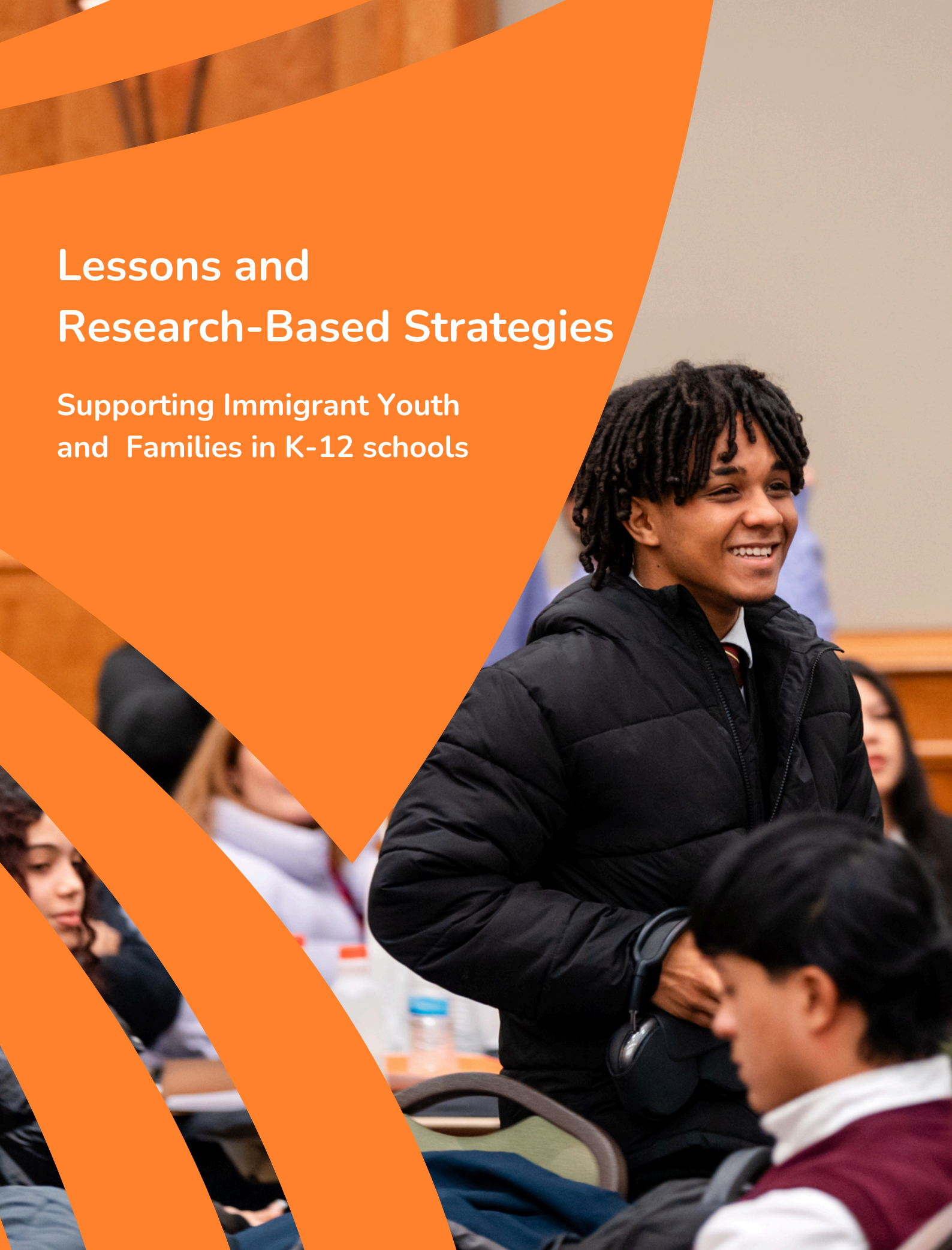


Lessons and Research-Based Strategies

Supporting Immigrant Youth
and Families in K-12 schools



ImmSchools

RUTGERS
Center for Youth Social
Emotional Wellness

ImmSchools Research Report 2024:

Lessons and Research-Based Strategies

Supporting Immigrant Youth and Families in K-12 Schools

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Executive Summary

ImmSchools is an immigrant-led organization that offers educational interventions to create more welcoming and safe schools to meet the needs of K-12 undocumented students, their families and educators. ImmSchools specifically serves schools in Texas, New York, New Jersey, and Pennsylvania which are among the states and urban regions with the largest populations of immigrants.

This report presents results from a participatory action research (PAR) project conducted by ImmSchools and the Rutgers Center for Youth Social Emotional Wellness. The goal of the project was to gather preliminary data regarding ImmSchools programs. The project blended quantitative and qualitative data, as well as guidance and testimony from a community advisory board to document outcome trends from program participants.

ImmSchools gathered data from youth, families, and educators who participated in their programs during the 2022-2023 academic year. Two independent samples were collected, the first sample completed assessments before the programs and the second sample completed assessments after the program. Results from quantitative analyses revealed the following preliminary trends:

- 1.** Educators who completed assessments after ImmSchools' programs felt more informed about immigrant rights and resources compared to educators prior to the programs.
- 2.** Educators also felt more competent to serve immigrant students after the programs, compared to educators before the programs.
- 3.** Educator's sense of being informed after the programs was linked to greater competence for serving immigrant students.
- 4.** Students felt a greater sense of agency to gain support from parents and others in the community after the programs, compared to students who completed assessment prior to the programs.
- 5.** Students also reported greater psychological well-being after ImmSchools' programs compared to students who completed assessments prior to the programs.
- 6.** Students' psychological well-being after ImmSchools' programs was associated with feeling that school staff behaved in welcoming ways toward immigrants, inclusive school culture, feeling of high agency to gain support from parents and others, and positive academic engagement.
- 7.** Family members reported greater school participation after ImmSchools' programs, compared to family members who completed assessments prior to the programs.
- 8.** Family member's school participation after the programs was associated with feeling an inclusive school culture and greater psychological well-being.

This report also presents testimony from participants to accentuate each of these findings. Furthermore, reflections from our community advisory board offers the perspective of individuals who participated in the programs in previous years. In addition to presenting initial findings, this report offers practical recommendations for educators and education leaders to promote outcomes among undocumented immigrant youth.

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Introduction and Context

ImmSchools is an immigrant-led non-profit organization that works with school leaders, teachers, and community organizations to ensure that K-12 schools are safe and welcoming spaces for immigrant students and their families. Nearly 5 million U.S. citizen students under the age of 18 live with at least one undocumented parent¹. These students experience daily toxic stress due to fears of family separation, exclusion of their parents from educational resources, and uncertainty about post-secondary opportunities. Experiencing this daily toxic stress makes it difficult for this student population to learn and thrive in schools². ImmSchools' programs provide the entire school community – including students and families themselves along with their teachers and administrators – with programs and resources to build safe and welcoming environments for all students, parents, and caregivers, regardless of immigration status.

ImmSchools harnesses the power of immigrant-origin families to design, develop, and deliver our programs. We defined immigrant-origin as those who are undocumented, mixed-status, DACA, TPS, refugees, and other protective immigration status. We believe that engaging the immigrant community creates systemic change that lasts. Therefore, every aspect of ImmSchools' work is informed by immigrant communities – not just by listening to them, but by working with them to unlock their school's ability to recognize their powerful leadership. For example, student participants become leaders of our school workshops, formerly undocumented teachers become teacher-trainers in professional development seminars, and parents who participate in community groups become expert facilitators of those groups. Since 2018, ImmSchools has trained more than 15,459 educators and reached more than 5,324 students and 9,251 parents through educational programming, such as workshops in regions on the top five states with the largest number of immigrants residing: Dallas and San Antonio, Texas; Camden, New Jersey; and New York City, New York³.

As a national organization operating in four regions and three states with very different immigration contexts, we have adopted a regional strategy approach to ensure that our programs are responsive to the needs and opportunities in each community. This report aims to share the preliminary findings of ImmSchools' first year of a multi-year school-based program launched in three states in the 2022-2023 school year. Our multi-year school-based programs, which offer more in-depth support to schools, were strategically launched in New York and New Jersey, two states that have favorable immigrant policies. The goal of this report is to provide evidence-based practices and interventions that teachers and school leaders can implement to create a learning environment that is safe, welcoming, and inclusive of all students regardless of their immigration status. While the findings of this report reflect a higher representation of our work in New York and New Jersey compared to our Texas regions, the preliminary findings from this study suggest that outcomes at the end of the programs are positive across regions. This early research is paving the way for these interventions and practices to be considered and adopted by schools across the country, with sensitivity and responsiveness to local immigration contexts. Additionally, this report serves as a call to action for advocates at the school, district, state, and federal levels championing policies that support every student, regardless of their immigration status.

¹ Suárez-Orozco, C. (2021). 6 Challenges to and Opportunities for Educational Access for Immigrant-origin Children in the US. *Bildung in früher Kindheit: Diversitäts- und migrationssensible Perspektiven auf Familie und Kita*, 115.

² Ee, J., & Gándara, P. (2020). The impact of immigration enforcement on the nation's schools. *American Educational Research Journal*, 57(2), 840-871.

³ Batalova, J. (2024, March 22). *Frequently requested statistics on immigrants and immigration in the United States*. migrationpolicy.org [https://www.migrationpolicy.org/article/frequently-requested-statistics-immigrants-and-immigration-united-states#:~:text=Which%20U.S.%20states%20and%20cities,New%20Jersey%20\(2.2%20million\)](https://www.migrationpolicy.org/article/frequently-requested-statistics-immigrants-and-immigration-united-states#:~:text=Which%20U.S.%20states%20and%20cities,New%20Jersey%20(2.2%20million))

2022-2023 Programs

ImmSchools core programs ensure safe and inclusive K-12 schools for all students regardless of their immigration status by providing schools the resources and skills they need to support immigrant students and their families. Through school partnerships, we provide the entire school community with programs and resources to create safe and inclusive environments for immigrant-origin students and families. Our program offerings include professional development for educators and school staff and workshops for students and families.

ImmSchools partners with schools that are both ready to serve the immigrant community and that commit to actively supporting these students and families by demonstrating responsive decision-making, district buy-in, and utilizing a budget as a reflection of values, a willingness to devote financial resources to strengthening schools for all. The schools with whom we partner must also be at least 10% multilingual learners, maintain at least 50% low-income students, and have at least a 50% BIPOC student body. School partnerships last, on average, 2-3 years.

Over the course of each school year, ImmSchools guides a “School Team”, or a selected group of 3 or more school leaders from each school partner, to assess the extent to which their school culture is safe and inclusive utilizing our Inclusive School Culture Rubric, a measurement tool defining a safe and inclusive school culture as one in which:



Administrators implement inclusive policies



Educators employ culturally-informed practices



Students & families leverage educational/legal resources

We then tailor a selection of coaching sessions and high-quality training workshops for the school year ahead in 1 or more of our 4 focus areas:

Administrative Action:

Supporting district leaders to enact inclusive policies: Safe Zone Resolutions, Open ID policies, and protocols for handling Immigration & Customs Enforcement inquiries about students

Student Engagement:

Empowering students with information on their legal rights, educational resources, and post-secondary pathways

Educator Preparedness:

Helping educators to support immigrant, and undocumented students, design and implement culturally responsive curricula

Family Engagement:

Empowering families with information on their legal rights, educational resources, and post-secondary pathways

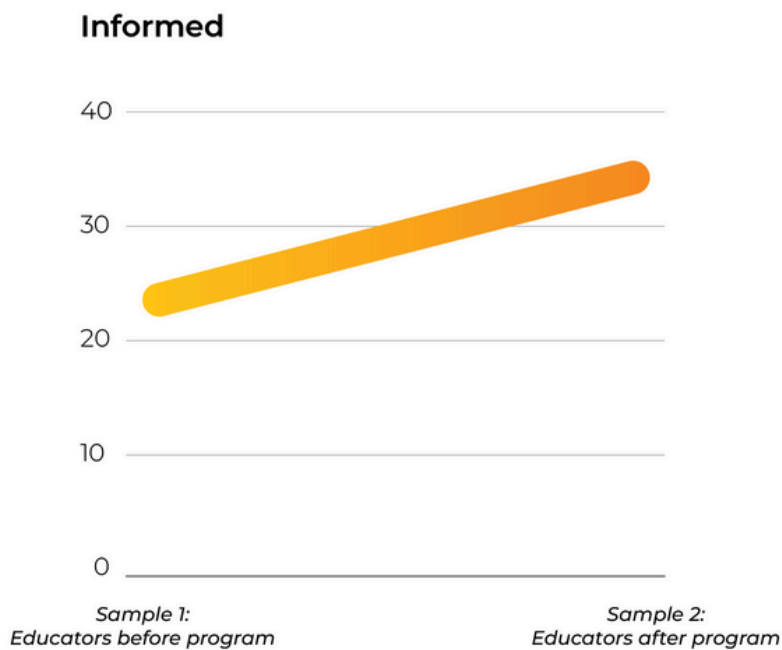
Also, ImmSchools offers quarterly community workshops that provide a safe space specifically for immigrants, undocumented parents, and mixed-status family members to engage in peer-led conversations. Topics include immigration and education advocacy, post-secondary education opportunities, family preparedness plans, mental health, and multilingual support, among other topics selected by families that significantly impact the social and academic development of their children in schools.

Results & Application

These results are based on analyses from a participatory action research (PAR) project conducted by ImmSchools with the Center for Youth Social Emotional Wellness (CYSEW) at Rutgers University. Please see more details about the research project on page 21 and about the methodology on page 22. Please note that these results are based on survey data from educators, youth, and families. For each group, two different samples were contrasted, those who completed surveys before ImmSchools programs and a different sample that completed surveys at the end. Thus, the results do not imply cause and effect. However, these trends are an indication of where participants of ImmSchool programs generally scored on several outcomes before and after the programs.

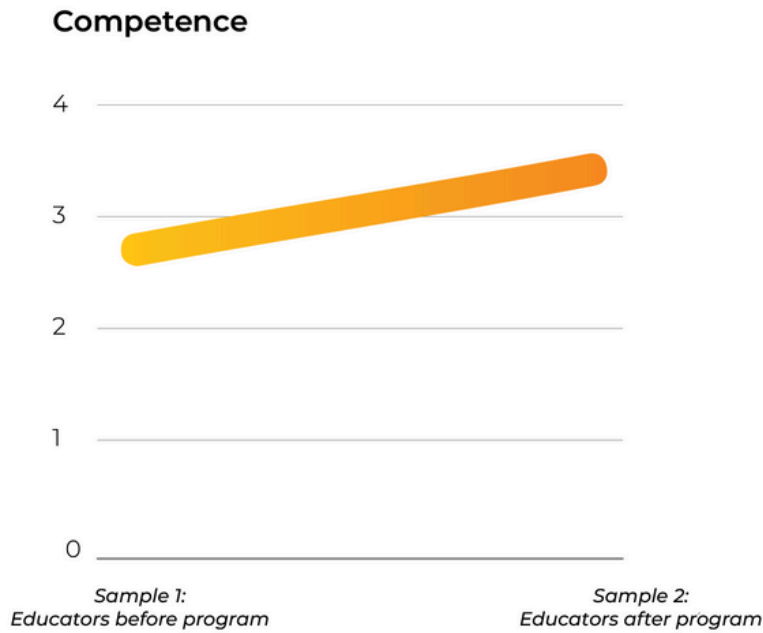
Educator Outcomes

After ImmSchools programs, Educators reported that they felt more informed about immigrant rights and resources compared to the group of educators who completed surveys before ImmSchools programming.



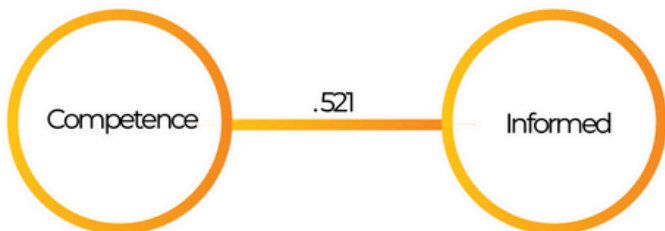
At the end of programming, educators described immigrant students as “resilient,” “resourceful,” “brilliant,” and “powerful.”

Educators perceived their competence for serving immigrant students to be higher after ImmSchools programming compared to educators who completed surveys before ImmSchools programming.



When we asked educators to list one tangible practice they would adopt as a result of ImmSchools programming, educators described their desire to create a more welcoming environment. For example, educators stated that “proactively sharing resources,” and teaching a “more inclusive curriculum” as examples of “being open to all families and their circumstances on an individual basis.”

For educators who participated in ImmSchools, greater competence in teaching immigrant students was associated with feeling more informed about resources and best practices to serve this community.

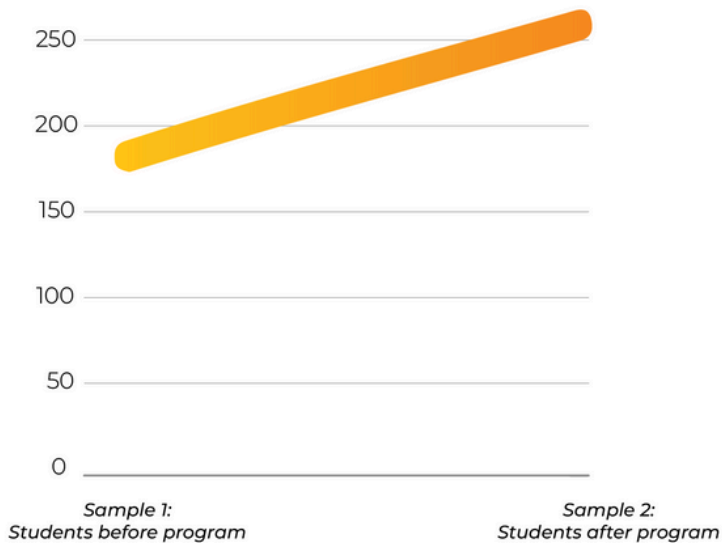


Educators expressed wanting to know more to be informed. For example, one educator reported that “the issue is always changing. I need to stay informed.”

Youth Outcomes

Students' agency (e.g., perceived ability to gain parental and community support) was higher for the group of students who completed the survey after ImmSchools programming compared to the group of students who completed surveys before ImmSchools programming.

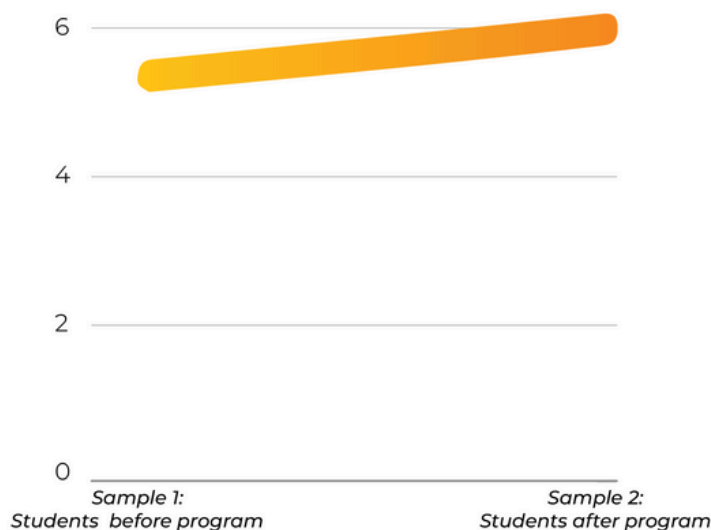
Enlisting Parental and Community Support



The following quotes from students speak to the sense of agency that they gained from participating in ImmSchools: When asked what the most helpful part of the ImmSchools programming was, students stated that learning about where or how to get support regarding the “college application process”, “scholarships”, and “immigrant rights” were the most helpful.

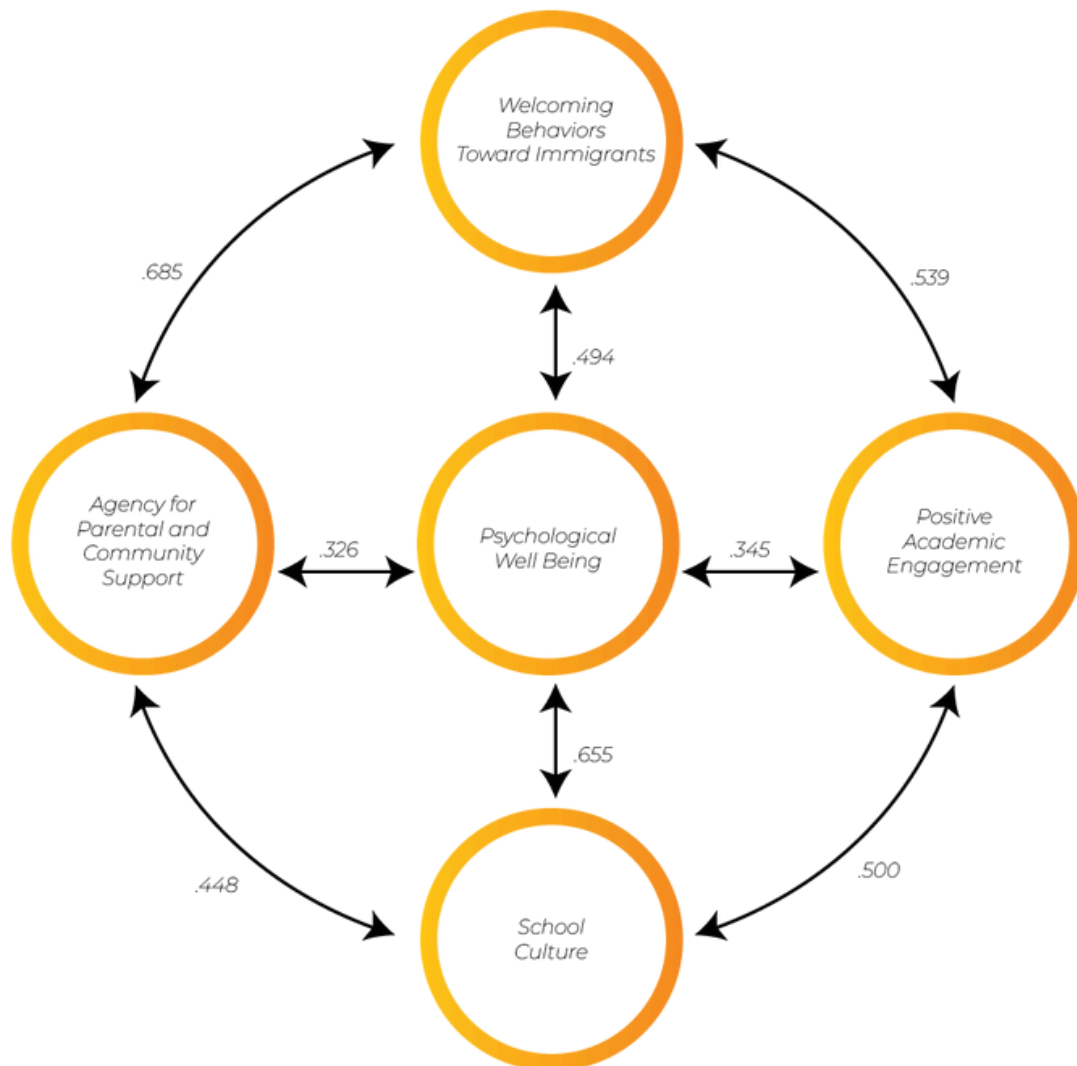
Students' psychological well-being was higher for students who completed surveys after ImmSchools programming compared to students who completed surveys before ImmSchools programming.

Psychological Well-Being



Regarding their psychological well-being, students reported feeling “more comfortable”, “supported and motivated”, and that they “learned a lot of information to help other people”, after the ImmSchools programming.

After participating in the programs, students' psychological well-being was high, and this was associated with perceiving their schools as welcoming, high sense of agency, positive academic engagement, and school culture.

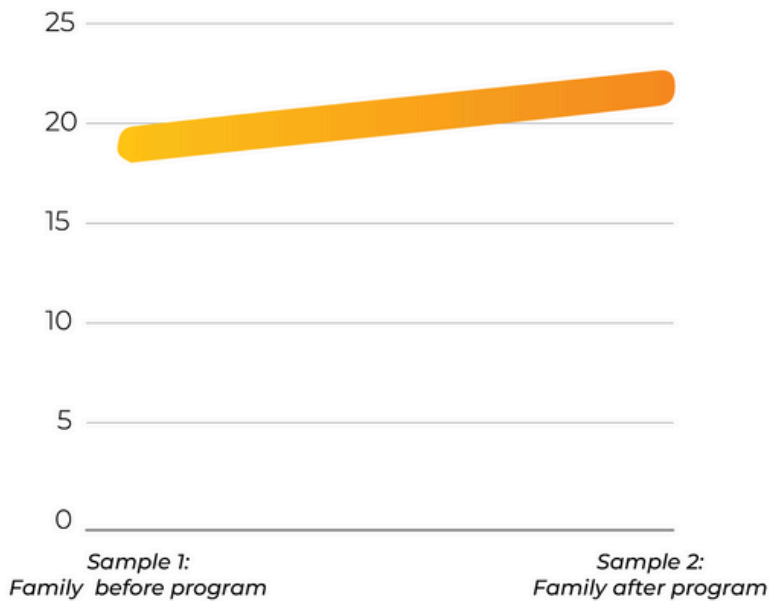


In their post-programming surveys, students reported that “immigrants do have opportunities to pursue a university without social security number” (translated) “los inmigrantes si tienen oportunidades de ir a la universidad sin numero seguro social”.

Family Outcomes

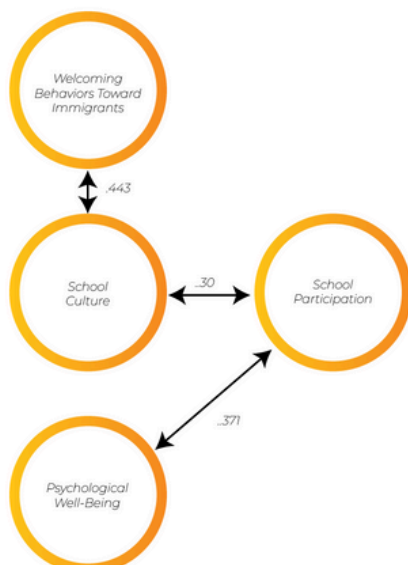
School participation was higher for family members who completed surveys after ImmSchools programming compared to the group of family members who completed surveys before ImmSchools programming.

School Participation



When asked what the most helpful part of the ImmSchools programming was, family members stated that learning about “immigrant rights,” and “immigrants’ access to college and financial assistance” was the most helpful.

Based on the results of surveys from those who participated in the programs, families reported that having positive experiences with school culture was associated with greater school participation and greater welcoming behaviors from their school. Additionally, school participation at the end of the programs was associated with greater psychological well-being for families.



One family member stated that “resources to connect my students to mental health programs” was a helpful aspect of ImmSchools programming. This illustrates the connection between mental health and other aspects of school participation.

Reflections from the Community

Advisory Board for Research

Community Advisory Board (CAB) for Research

A community advisory board (CAB) was established with 8 members, divided proportionally among immigrant youth, family members, and educators. The CAB participates in 4 meetings with the research team per year to provide feedback and community insights relevant to all aspects of the study. The CAB ensures that the project is conducted in a way that honors the experiences of immigrant youth and families. Furthermore, this CAB guides the development of an action plan to promote the translation of this research to inform educational practice and policy and to promote a public impact.

Community Advisory Board Members Biographies



Mari Ferrer
She/Her/Ella
Student,
Dallas Fort Worth, TX

Mari Ferrer is an immigrant student attending the University of North Texas. She is majoring in Sociology and is dedicated to using her education to create a more inclusive society. Mari is currently part of the graduate track program and is working her way into graduate school. When she's not studying, Mari enjoys crocheting & spending time with her loved ones, including her family, friends, and beloved dog.



Ruth E. Pérez
She/Her/Ella
Parent,
Camden, NJ

Ruth Pérez is a mother, wife, community organizer, and founder of MTC (Tricolor Movement). She also owns a small local company called Great Gifts Flowers and works part-time for the Food Trust Healthy Food. Ruth is a member of the board of directors of the City Winery Association and the Camden Food Fund.

In 2003, Ruth emigrated from the Dominican Republic to the United States in search of social prosperity and economic stability for her family. However, they faced the challenge of being undocumented immigrants, which took them 12 years to overcome and become legal residents. Upon arriving in the US, Ruth managed a local corner store where she ensured that residents had access to fresh food. She always took the time to listen to their concerns and interact with them. Later on, she became a health assistant for various agencies, providing necessary supplies and care to seniors for their well-being. Ruth's experiences led her to develop a strong desire to help people from similar backgrounds, such as Latinos, immigrants, undocumented individuals, and small businesses. She works to connect them with the resources and support tailored to their specific needs.



Yennesys Rivas Pérez
She/Her/Ella
Students,
New York City, NY

Yennesys was born in Brooklyn NY, she was raised in the Dominican Republic. She is an 11th grader attending It Takes A Village Academy in Brooklyn. She is interested in cooking, reading, and listening to music. She considers herself as a person who is easy to talk to. In the future she wants to be a pediatrician or a dentist.



Susana Garcia
She/Her/Ella
Parent,
Dallas Fort Worth, TX

Susana García is originally from Mexico and she is a wife and mother of seven children. Four of her children have graduated from high school, two are currently in school – one in grade 11 and one in 4th grade. Her oldest child is in Mexico. She arrived in Dallas, TX, 25 years ago. She has been a volunteer at her children’s school and in several organizations that support education, self-esteem, and legal support, among others. She enjoys learning new things so that she can help her family and her community. She knows how important it is to support one another.

Five years ago, she tragically lost one of her children. Her son was assaulted and murdered at the door of her house at the age of 17. Her son, Oziel García, had many dreams and goals that were cut short. In his honor, she likes to involve herself in everything related to education because she knows that, like him, there are many young people who want a better future for themselves and their families. She hopes to learn and support them.



Lyonel Dugué
He/ His/ El
Educator,
Camden, NJ

Mr. Dugué was born in the Republic of Haiti, West Indies, which shares the Island of Hispaniola with the Dominican Republic. Though Haiti is often regarded as a poor place, it was there that he gained a “wealth” of knowledge, not only academically but also socially. In his family, education was always equated with worthiness, dignity and being honorable; therefore it was not a question for his uncle, who took him under his wing at an early age, of whether his children and him would go to University, but where we would attend.

He was then accepted at the University of Administration, Management, and Political Studies to continue his educational endeavors in management and political studies. He later migrated to the United States, arriving in 1990. Over the years, educational pursuits have allowed him not only to attend school in Haiti, but also to seek certifications and degrees in the United States of America

He felt that these experiences both in America and Haiti provided him with valuable lessons not just educationally but also harmonistically. His life experience has been such a rewarding one that it’s worth sharing with others. He sees his experience as a motivational factor for others wishing to achieve successes through educational pursuits. His uncle’s success in the educational field, his mother’s burning desire for success, his marriage, raising two exceptional children who followed his lead and are pursuing degrees in higher education, and becoming a citizen of the United States of America has been the determining factor in making his dreams come true.



Carlos Pérez M.Ed.,
He/ His/ El
Educator,
South Central, TX

Carlos Gilberto Perez is an experienced educator with a passion for bilingual education. He has taught for 22 years at the elementary level and two years in middle school as a 6th and 7th Dual Language Studies teacher. Currently, he is in his second year of a doctoral program at the University of Texas at San Antonio, where his research focuses on emergent bilingual students with learning disabilities. Mr. Perez is the recipient of the Project D.I.V.E.R.S.E. grant, which is funded by the U.S. Department of Education/Office of Special Education Programs. Mr. Perez’s educational background includes a BA in Interdisciplinary Studies with a concentration in Bilingual/ESL Education from UTSA in 1999, an MA in Bicultural/Bilingual Studies from UTSA in 2003, and a Masters of Educational Administration from Concordia University in San Antonio in 2012. His future plans involve providing professional development to Texas districts to help students succeed in mastering grade-level language content. He also aims to apply his research findings to improve educational outcomes for emergent bilingual students with learning disabilities.



**Dennis De Guzman
Caindec Ed.D.,
He/Him/ El
School Leader,
New York City, NY**

Dr. Dennis De Guzman Caindec currently serves as the Director of School Support, New York State Region for the national non-profit organization, Internationals Network. In this capacity, he oversees the provision of structural and instructional support to 17 secondary schools across the NY state. He collaboratively works with principals & district leaders to strategically plan, implement, and monitor services that support and promote success and belonging for multilingual, multicultural children. He has been a high school classroom teacher, instructional coach, site program administrator and school district system leader. He received his bachelors of science in aerospace engineering from UCLA, his masters in education from Pace University, and his doctorate in educational leadership from UC Berkeley.



**Christina Gómez
Hernández Ph.D.,
She/Her/Ella
School Leader,
South Central, TX**

Dr. Gómez Hernández is a first-generation college student of Mexican descent and an emergent bilingual. She identifies as a XicanA. In August 2023, she graduated from the School Improvement Program in the College of Education at Texas State University in San Marcos, Texas. Dr. Gómez Hernández was awarded the 2022-2023 Outstanding Graduate Student Doctoral Level Award in School Improvement from the College of Education at Texas State University. She is also an alumnus of the UCEA (University Council for Educational Administration) Jackson Scholar program.

Her areas of specialization include educational leadership, Mexican American Studies (MAS), and working with emergent bilinguals. Her research interests encompass language policies, socio-cultural competence, MAS, and emergent bilinguals in Bilingual Education/ESL programs. Dr. Gómez Hernández has 24 years of teaching experience, working with emergent bilinguals in dual language programs spanning from kindergarten to 12th grade, as well as ESL programs. She spent 15 of those years in the classroom, while the remaining nine years were dedicated to campus and district leadership roles, serving the immigrant and emergent bilingual population.

Committee Reflections

The following reflections from the Community Advisory Board represent the voices of past and current participants of ImmSchools programs. Although not all advisory board members have the same programming experience, they shared their unique testimonies both before and after joining ImmSchools. The experiences represented in our board were those of students, parents, educators, and district school leaders who have directly or indirectly benefited from aspects of ImmSchools' programming in the last 5 years.

The two students in the advisory board shared their experiences on their own education journey before and after engaging with ImmSchools programming. Mari Ferrer reflected on how she felt before she knew of ImmSchools existence. She reported **"Before I knew ImmSchools was a thing, at times I felt alone, and like no one else was experiencing the things I was experiencing."** When she was thinking about applying for college she felt that her school did not provide her with clear direction, **"regarding applications for college. When I was first applying I was not truly aware of how to navigate the process of going to college...In the past, in middle school, school officials would say 'if you would like to talk you can come' they would only speak very briefly. I felt alone. Sometimes I was hesitant to share."** She expanded how she felt after participating in ImmSchools **"having immschools where they are really vocal. It is life changing. Honestly this is truly great."**

Yennesys Rivas Pérez elaborated on Mari's reflection regarding the creation of inclusive learning spaces through the ImmSchools program and the emotions that these actions brought up for her. She shared **"hearing that they [other immigrant students] have made connections and [that school leaders] tried to incorporate more teachers from different backgrounds and different languages makes me proud" after learning the impact ImmSchools' program was for students.** She reflected on her own experience meeting and supporting Spanish speaking students at her school, **"and when they first met me they [other immigrant students] were like 'okay there is somebody who actually speaks Spanish' and they tell me how hard school has been because at my school there is a very small population of kids that actually speak Spanish."**



The members of the community advisory board who represented family voices, like Mrs. Ruth Pérez, reflected on their experience prior to engaging with ImmSchools. Ms. Pérez shared **“I waited 20 years to see something like this. When I came to Camden I asked why the teachers do not get training on how to support newly arriving students. Those teachers did not have the awareness of the experience of students. I am grateful to have been part of ImmSchools programming, I hope you all [ImmSchools] continue to provide professional development to educators and schools so they can best support immigrant students as they transition into schools.”** She elevated the importance of resources coming from community organizations such as ImmSchools because of the proximity to the immigrant community experience. She elaborated **“Sometimes they [newcomer immigrant students] are lost in class, they are not as focused. In their house they don’t have that peace, they might be wondering what is going to happen tomorrow? They don’t have that stability...I liked that about ImmSchools, there is someone who cares who has resources.”**

Mrs. Susana Garcia spoke about the challenges she experienced when supporting her children’s education and how she has leveraged ImmSchools to advocate for their education. **“When you go to school, language is the number one barrier to incorporate into the school and support my children...ImmSchools has been my biggest tool because while I have four of my children who are high school graduates. I have struggled with my younger son with completing the FAFSA...ImmSchools has been here to support me and the team has been a helping hand for my family and for other families to ensure we can empower ourselves with information.”** She elaborated on the impact that ImmSchools program has had on her family stating, **“I love that we have an organization like ImmSchools who supports us in this way. ImmSchools is not only changing the lives of our students but is changing all of our family’s lives as well.”** Her reflection provides testimonial evidence of how participants are spreading their knowledge to other people outside of the workshops. She further elaborates on the importance of families gaining awareness and information **“Sometimes we as parents dont have the tools to help ourselves. I was in despair because I was not sure how to help my son... I remember when I reached out to ImmSchools they helped me with all my questions. They did not only help me with my stuff but with others. Thank you for allowing me to have this voice.”**



The advisory board members who represented voices of educators were both actively participating in programming at the time of this report. Mr. Lyonel Dugué emphasized the shift in his experience supporting students before he started working with ImmSchools. He also highlighted the impact of resources acquired from ImmSchools on a student who was able to adjust his status after learning about trusted legal resources through ImmSchools programming. He states **“I am in a school and I do not have any bilingual school counselors. Sometimes as a teacher I am the teacher, counselor, father... I used to do everything for my students by myself. Now to have the support of ImmSchools, we have the resources so the kids have access to resources. When a kid tells you, ‘Mr. Dugué, did you know I went to the Camden Center for Law and Justice and now I have my papers.’ That makes you feel so great, so the resources work... I can’t describe the sentiment of the kids when they see there are people here to support them to reach their ultimate destination.”** He further explained that the language barrier is one of the challenges he faces at the school where he teaches, which hinders parental participation, sharing **“Immigrant parents do not want to come to the school because they don’t speak the language but when they see they have people who speak their languages and are here to help them.”** When reflecting on how other educators who received ImmSchools programming described immigrant students, he stated, **“I love the word “powerful” because they feel powerful because help is on their way. This is the thing I’ve been waiting for 30 years.”** Mr. Dugué’s sentiment coincides with Mrs. Pérez sentiment of yearning for programming that supports immigrant students and parents at a school and having to wait decades to receive support for immigrant students.

Mr. Carlos Pérez, another educator teacher in San Antonio added **“I want to acknowledge ImmSchools staff for making every session for the parents very meaningful and impactful. Today, I found out that one of my students had her last name changed. She advocated for herself. a result of an ImmSchools session [where] The students spoke with an attorney. You should have seen her, hearing her name being called as Rodriguez [pseudonym] and being so grateful. All because ImmSchools brought in resources and knowledge to the school and the student.”** He further elaborated on the overall impact that ImmSchools programming is having at his school stating **“ImmSchools provided valuable resources and information to help immigrant families understand their rights in the United States.”**



On the other hand, District school leaders reflected on the impact of learning about resources that could benefit all students. Doctor Hernandez, reflected on educational resources ImmSchools provides. **“My cousin had reached out to me about her daughter having [a] FAFSA issue and whatnot she got in contact with ImmSchools staff to help my cousin's daughter. They had a ceremony, and she received 170,000 dollars in scholarship to go to college.”** This is an example of how District leaders also leverage the support provided by community based organizations such as ImmSchools.

Dr. Caindec, a school leader in New York, reflected on the need for schools to use the students' home language when teaching to make immigrant students feel more included in the school environment. He stated **“I do want to recognize that there should be a nod to the way in which you include translanguaging, because that's important in order for you to recognize. The students' home language matters. That is something [school leaders] should be mindful of this in levering this through instruction. It's not just about the curriculum but how you teach the curriculum and that includes translanguaging strategies.”** His sentiments elevated the importance of continuing to provide inclusive practices and holding districts to higher standards and increasement of services to support all students.

Dr. Gómez Hernández, a District leader, reflected on the shift in her district since their partnership with ImmSchools. She stated **“I've noticed a positive change in the mindset of teachers, school staff, and administrators towards immigrant and undocumented students. They have become more aware and informed about the policies affecting these students.”** Adding the changes she witnessed in parental engagement saying **“Parent platicas [ImmSchools workshop] provided a platform for parents to express their concerns and seek support. These sessions helped parents feel heard and understood.”** When discussing the multiple students events she attended hosted by ImmSchools she shared “High school students were empowered to create safe spaces for undocumented students and their families. They shared their knowledge through advocacy efforts, including presentations. This empowerment has given students a sense of having more options and hope for their future after high school.” Her reflections added to the narrative around the impact ImmSchools' programing is having across districts.

The rich contribution and participation of each member of the community advisory board transpired over the spam of four virtual meetings. The reflections from the community advisory board supports the findings of this report and informs the recommendations generated in the following section.



Recommendations

The preliminary study findings highlight the positive impact school-based interventions can have on immigrant students and families. The following recommendations support school leaders, teachers, and educational practitioners to better support immigrant students and families.

District and School Leaders should:

- **Utilized Title III and other funding streams** such as philanthropic contributions that schools leverage to support multilingual learners and immigrant students
- **Hire and partner with professionals** (such as counselors, advisors, and external partners) that students can relate to or identify with and speak their language. This creates a “safe” line of communication, feelings, or experiences being validated and it creates a sense of hope (connection and proximity of the facilitators)
- **Strategically incorporate professional development** on foundational information on issues at the intersection of education and immigration (Plyler v Doe, Castaneda-k-12 v Pickard-language access, terminology, access to post-secondary education pathways available in-state) as part of District required school culture sessions that are provided to all educators throughout the year
- **Partner with Community-Based Organizations** to provide wraparound services: Connecting and researching with resources outside of the school (medical, mental health, social services, know your rights session such as those provided by UnitedWeDream)



Recommendations

Teachers and Practitioners should:

- **Be informed about general policies at the intersection of education and immigration**
 - Advocate to receive professional development on foundational information on issues at the intersection of education and immigration (Plyler v Doe, Castaneda-k-12 v Pickard-language access, terminology, access to post-secondary education pathways available in-state)
- **Build a safe and welcoming school culture**
 - Build relationships with immigrant-origin students to foster increased trust between educators, teachers, practitioners, students, and families
 - Show school-wide alliance and support for the immigrant community through visual posters that encourage a sense of welcome and belonging, using inclusive/ uplifting language when talking about immigrants
 - Create spaces where immigrant-origin students can feel like they belong. These spaces can be created through after-school programming such as students' Dream Clubs
 - Encourage your immigrant-origin students to seek opportunity, and center empathy, optimism, resilience, and agency when interacting with them. For example, leverage positive immigrant narratives and embed them into your interactions with students.
- **Employ a welcoming and inclusive curriculum**
 - Adopt Social Emotional Learning (SEL) frame when discussing immigrant issues through asset framing while humanizing this issue
 - Trauma-informed practices to better support mixed-status students & families
 - Use a Culturally Responsive curriculum that uplifts the immigrant experience and embeds the topic of immigration in cross-curriculum learning
 - Implement translanguaging strategies and use best practices that integrate language and content during classroom instruction
 - Assist students in gaining agency by using a curriculum that is accessible, rigorous and holds immigrant students to high academic expectations. Advocate for increased support for students (such as software, additional staff members, budget, etc.).
- **Stay up to date with evolving policies**
 - Sign up for the listservs / follow the social media pages of trusted CBOs to be informed about evolving federal & state policies impacting mixed-status families
 - Connect with local CBOs supporting immigrant community and advocate for CBO partnership and School partnership to school leaders
- **Share resources**
 - Share resources and information to help immigrant-origin students navigate education regardless of immigration status
 - Share resources and information to immigrant-origin students in a culturally and linguistically responsive way
 - Share information from local and national organizations like ImmSchools, The Presidents' Alliance on Higher Education and Immigration, Informed Immigrant and Immigrants Rising.

Conclusion

In 2018, as founders of ImmSchools, we were working in education, driven by our experiences as undocumented and mixed-status students. Our initial vision for ImmSchools was simple: to support more educators in creating safe and inclusive spaces in schools that we and our families wished we had when we were students. Today, our team has impacted over 30,000 students, family members, and educators across New York City, NY; Camden, NJ; San Antonio, TX; and Dallas/Fort Worth, TX.

ImmSchools's work is more important now than when we founded it five years ago, and it will only grow in importance over the next five years. ImmSchools will double its efforts to support our schools and system partners to create positive school cultures and climates for all of their students, parents, and caregivers, regardless of immigration status. As proximate leaders, we will continue to lead as experts at the intersections of immigration and education. We will do this by codifying a framework that captures the best practices for developing affirming, safe, and welcoming school cultures and climates and facilitating a professional development curriculum to support our school and system partners to ensure that all students regardless of immigration status can thrive and succeed.

Our team of majority immigrant women is committed to this work because we live the consequences of not doing this work every day. We are also committed to this work because we know the proven research connections between a school's culture and climate and student belonging and the improved academic outcomes students experience when they feel a sense of belonging in school. By doing this work and focusing on immigrant students and their families, we are designing for the most marginalized students. And we know if we can make school cultures and climates strong for them, they will be strong for all students.



The Research Project

Goals of the Research Partnership

The current multi-year research project (2021-2024) was developed to contribute to transforming educational practice and policy regarding educational interventions for immigrant students. The project was implemented as a community-academic partnership between ImmSchools and the Center for Youth Social Emotional Wellness (CYSEW) at Rutgers University. This project leveraged access to data from the program evaluation conducted by ImmSchools to assess the effectiveness of their educational programs on youth, families, and educators. The following research questions guided the current study:

Research Question 1:

What are the immediate effects of ImmSchools programs on un-documented youth, undocumented families, and educators?

Research Question 2:

What is the effect of ImmSchool's programs by region (New York, New Jersey, and Texas)?

Funding

This project was carried out with funding provided by ImmSchools and the university partners. Both entities contributed to supporting staff time and effort to implement the research project. This included providing funding support to 3 doctoral students to support the project across 3 years.

Our fundraising strategy consists of diverse streams of funding to ensure sustainability such as direct service revenue and philanthropic efforts. As our team prides itself in being a participatory-research based approach, we are intentionally compensating and supporting our immigrant community in ways that are not often supported by only traditional research grants. As such, we are also leveraging as many unrestricted funding sources to ensure our research goals.



Methodology

Who Participated

The table in Appendix 1 provides demographics of the student, family, and educator samples at pre and post-test. The majority of students were male, most identified as Latinx immigrants and most were from New York. The majority of family members were female, most identified as Latinx immigrants and most were from New Jersey, followed by New York. The majority of educators were female, identified as Latinx non-immigrants, and most were from New York, followed by Texas and New Jersey.

Participant Recruitment

The primary investigator and university researchers accessed data from the program evaluation provided by ImmSchools with permission from the organization. Only de-identified data was accessed for data analysis purposes. The current study was approved by the Institutional Review Board (IRB) at Rutgers University in 2023 and at Lehigh University in 2022.

The program evaluations were routinely provided by ImmSchools as part of their usual operations, before and after their programs. These evaluations were estimated to take less than 15 minutes to complete per administration. The program evaluation provided by ImmSchools included a brief consent letter for adults and an assent letter for children. Furthermore, parents of youth were aware of the programming provided by ImmSchools and that participation was voluntary. Additionally, participation in the study is confidential since individual responses from the program evaluation were not shared with participating schools, districts, or the public. Findings from the program evaluation were only reported in aggregate form, without disclosing identifying information. Declining to participate in the program evaluation provided by ImmSchools did not preclude participants from engaging in the programs and benefitting from their content. Only data from program evaluation in schools where ImmSchools has memorandums of understanding (MOUs) in place were accessed for research purposes.

Community Advisory Board (CAB) for Research

A community advisory board (CAB) was established with 8 members, divided proportionally among immigrant youth, family members, and educators. The CAB participates in 4 meetings with the research team per year to provide feedback and community insights relevant to all aspects of the study. The CAB ensures that the project is conducted in a way that honors the experiences of immigrant youth and families. Furthermore, this CAB guides the development of an action plan to promote the translation of this research to inform educational practice and policy and to promote a public impact.

Research Design

This project blended Participatory Action Research and quantitative methodologies to gather evidence regarding the effectiveness of educational intervention programs aspiring to promote educational and psychological outcomes by transforming the culture in schools to become safer and more welcoming to immigrant youth and families. ImmSchools educational intervention programs were delivered as usual by staff from the organization in partnership with 50 schools. The quasi-experimental design involved pre-program and post-program assessments using program evaluation surveys. These assessments will allow us to detect the immediate effects of the program, as well as regional differences (NJ, NY, and TX). The surveys include measures that were validated in past research with immigrants.

Measures

The variables that were measured across all surveys at post-test were psychological well-being and behaviors resulting from the educational interventions to help immigrants feel welcome and safe at school. Psychological well-being was measured by the Flourishing Scale⁴, a measure that is designed to assess major aspects of social-psychological functioning such as relationships, optimism, self-esteem, and purpose. The number of behaviors taken was measured by a set of items created by ImmSchools. The prompt asked participants “As a result of ImmSchools programs, what actions have you taken?” A sample item from the educator survey is “Employed curriculum that uplifts the experiences of undocumented community members.” Other variables were more specific to each population.

Self-efficacy was measured by the Self-efficacy for Enlisting Parental and Community Support⁵ scale which measures students’ self-efficacy levels across different contexts. Positive academic engagement was measured using a scale⁶ which measures how often a student engages in positive academic behaviors.

School participation was measured in the family survey using the school participation subtest in the Parental Engagement of Families from Latino backgrounds scale⁷ (PEFL). The PEFL measures parents’ active participation in school-based activities.

School culture and a welcoming school were two variables measured in both the student and family surveys. School culture was assessed using an existing measure that New York state includes in their Department of Education survey⁸. It measures school climate with components such as safety and respect, high expectations, and academic rigor. Welcoming school was measured by items created by ImmSchools which measures tangible and noticeable actions that the school is taking to make students and families feel more welcomed.

Competence and information on relevant topics were two variables specifically measured in the educator survey. Competence was measured by the Preparedness and Competence for Working with Immigrant Students scale⁹ which measures participants’ perceived self-efficacy to improve campus climate for immigrant students. Stay informed on relevant topics was measured by items created by ImmSchools which measured how informed participants are regarding relevant topics when working with immigrant students.

⁴ Diener, E., Wirtz, D., Biswas-Diener, R., Tov, W., Kim-Prieto, C., Choi, D., & Oishi, S. (2009). New measures of well-being. In E. Diener (Ed.), *Assessing well-being* (pp. 247–266). Social Indicators Research Series, 39. Springer https://doi.org/10.1007/978-90-481-2354-4_12

⁵ Bandura, A. (2006). Guide for constructing self-efficacy scales. In F. Pajares & T. Urdan (Eds.), *Self-efficacy beliefs of adolescents* (Vol. 5, pp. 307–337). Information Age Publishing

⁶ Valadez, M., Ayón, C., Enriquez, L. E., & Jefferies, J. (2021). Legal vulnerability and campus environment: Assessing factors that affect the academic engagement of undocumented college students. *Journal of Latinos and Education*, 20(3), 276–289. <https://doi.org/10.1080/15348431.2021.1949988>

⁷ McWayne, C. M., & Melzi, G. (2014). Validation of a culture-contextualized measure of family engagement in the early learning of low-income Latino children. *Journal of Family Psychology*, 28(2), 260–266. <https://doi.org/10.1037/a0036167>

⁸ NYC Public Schools (2022). NYC School survey frequently asked questions. <https://infohub.nyced.org/docs/default-source/default-document-library/2023-nyc-school-survey-faq.pdf>

⁹ Cisneros, J., & Cadenas, G. (2017). DREAMer-ally competency and self-efficacy: Developing higher education staff and measuring lasting outcomes. *Journal of Student Affairs Research and Practice*, 54(2), 189–203. <https://doi.org/10.1080/19496591.2017.1289098>

Analyses

To assess the effectiveness of the intervention, we used Independent Samples T-Tests¹⁰ to examine differences in key variables among the students, families, and educators who completed the surveys before the program in contrast to those who completed the survey after the program. Dependent variables included: self-efficacy for enlisting parental and community support, psychological well-being, school participation, competence, and the extent to which participants felt informed. Additionally, we conducted correlational analyses to test whether variables of interest (psychological well-being, school culture, welcoming school, self-efficacy for enlisting parental and community support, school participation, and positive academic engagement) were related to each other at the end of the program in the ways we expected.

A note about independent samples: Please note that the samples of program participants are different before and after the program. This is due to the surveys not being matched by individual participants to protect their confidentiality.

¹⁰ A statistical test which compares means of variables of interest on two different samples to determine if there is statistical evidence to suggest that means are statistically different.

APPENDIX 1: Demographics Table

Characteristic	Pre Students		Post Students		Pre Family		Post Family		Pre Educators		Post Educators	
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
Gender												
Female	5	31	22	38	14	70	38	88	28	80	28	74
Male	11	69	30	52	5	25	5	12	7	20	8	22
Non-Binary	0	0	4	7	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	2
Transgender	0	0	0	0	1	5	0	0	0	0	0	0
Other	0	0	2	3	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	2
Race/Ethnicity												
Black	1	6	8	16	2	12	5	13	6	19	8	20
Latinx	15	94	37	73	14	88	34	87	16	52	19	46
South Asian/Indian	0	0	6	11	0	0	0	0	0	0	7	17
White	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	9	29	7	17
Immigrant												
Yes	12	75	40	70	19	95	28	67	6	18	9	24
No	4	25	17	30	1	5	14	33	28	82	29	76
Region												
New York	10	62	42	69	1	12	18	39	17	50	14	39
New Jersey	6	38	14	24	4	50	20	44	11	32	8	22
Texas	0	0	1	2	3	38	7	15	6	18	14	39
Other	0	0	3	5	0	0	1	2	0	0	0	0

Characteristic	Pre Students		Post Students		Pre Family		Post Family		Pre Educators		Post Educators	
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
Country of Origin												
Dominican Republic	9	65	17	30	8	40	6	16	4	6	2	6
Mexico	0	0	3	6	3	15	9	25	1	1	0	0
United States	0	0	8	14	0	0	11	30	57	82	29	82
Central America	3	21	7	13	3	15	6	17	3	4	1	3
South America	2	14	3	6	2	10	2	6	0	0	0	0
South Asia	0	0	4	7	0	0	1	3	0	0	0	0
Caribbean	0	0	3	6	0	0	1	3	2	3	2	6
Middle East	0	0	3	6	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
West Africa	0	0	3	6	2	10	0	0	0	0	0	0
Asia	0	0	2	4	2	10	0	0	1	1	0	0
Europe	0	0	1	2	0	0	0	0	2	3	1	3
Grade												
Pre-K	0	0	0	0	0	0	5	14	0	0	0	0
K-3rd	0	0	0	0	0	0	3	9	1	3	1	3
4-5th	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	6	14	1	3
6-8th	6	39	1	2	5	28	15	43	6	14	5	14
9-10th	7	43	33	56	9	50	8	23	9	23	11	29
11-12th	3	18	25	42	4	22	4	11	5	13	9	24
Other	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	13	33	10	27