

How to Create an Immigrant Liaison Position at Your School



A Guide for School Educators



This guide was developed as part of the City University of New York-Initiative on Immigration and Education (CUNY-IIE), a project funded by the New York State Education Department. It was written by Jennifer (Jenna) Queenan from Teach Dream—the educator team at the New York State Youth Leadership Council (NYSYLC)—in collaboration with the Immigrant Liaison Team at the NYSYLC: Laura Pamplona, Juan Carlos Perez, Katharina Kempf, Kathy Garzon, Caroll Jimenez, Neidy Cortez, Howard Goldspiel, Tolleifa Bent, and Juky Chen Wei Ling.

This guide has not been reviewed by the New York State Education Department.

For more information about CUNY-IIE, visit www.cuny-iie.org.

For more information about NYSYLC, visit www.nysylc.org.



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About The New York State Youth Leadership Council and the Immigrant Liaison Pilot Program



The NYSYLC is the first organization in New York led by undocumented youth. Our goal is to give undocumented youth the tools and space to organize and create change in our communities. Teach Dream is the educator team at the NYSYLC. Our goal is to create safer schools for undocumented students. We advocate for equal rights and opportunities for all our students. We support student-led activism and leadership.

In the fall of 2020, the NYSYLC received financial support from the [CUNY–Initiative on Immigration and Education](#) to launch an immigrant liaison pilot program. Members of Teach Dream spent the fall preparing for the program, creating job applications, and interviewing prospective candidates for immigrant liaison positions. In the hiring process, the NYSYLC prioritized individuals who were directly impacted by the US immigration system in some way.

In the spring of 2021, the NYSYLC began to work with immigrant liaisons at three New York City public high schools. As part of their work for the NYSYLC, the immigrant liaisons filled out weekly google forms describing the work they were doing at their schools as well as the support needed (see below for examples of the work accomplished by the immigrant liaisons). In the spring of 2022, we expanded the program to two New York City public middle schools.

The immigrant liaisons were supported by two youth fellows—immigrant high school youth with

experiences navigating institutions as undocumented youth and/or in immigration advocacy work. The youth fellows read the responses on the weekly google forms and followed up with the immigrant liaisons with resources (such as a list of summer opportunities available to undocumented students), suggestions for how to approach various conversations at the intersections of immigration and education, and book/movie suggestions on the topic of immigration. The youth fellows were compensated for approximately five hours of work per week. In addition to giving feedback to the immigrant liaisons, the youth fellows also developed other resources (see below on needs assessment) and helped facilitate meetings. The immigrant liaisons were also supported by two immigrant liaison coordinators who worked together to manage logistics, compile resources on a website¹ so that they were easily accessible, and brought the group together for monthly meetings.



1 Go to <https://www.nysylc.org/teachdream> and check out the immigrant liaison page for more information and a link to this website.

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Purpose of This Guide

This guide is intended for school staff and community members who are interested in creating an immigrant liaison position at their school. We hope this guide will help you determine whether or not an immigrant liaison is needed at your school and, if so, how to get started in creating such a position. In this guide, you will find:

1. A short description of the immigrant liaison position
2. Typical duties and responsibilities of an immigrant liaison, including examples from the immigrant liaisons in the pilot program described above
3. Tips on creating an immigrant liaison position at your school, including what to consider in the selection process, how to fund the position, and where to look for support outside of your school
4. Suggestions from the immigrant liaisons in the pilot program on how to get started

We recommend working through this guide with a team at your school. If possible, include immigrant students and families, especially those who are undocumented, in the discussion about creating an immigrant liaison position at your school. In addition, we have found that it is helpful to have administrators who support the position involved in the initial planning stages, particularly because of the time and funding needed to make the position sustainable.

What Is an Immigrant Liaison?

An immigrant liaison is a part-time (or possibly full-time, if needed) position in a school created to offer support for immigrant, especially undocumented, students and their families and caregivers.² We argue that immigrant liaisons are needed in districts with immigrant populations like New York City because schools are still not sufficiently welcoming spaces for immigrant students, families, and caregivers. There are many reasons for this, including: teachers in the NYCDOE do not reflect the student body; many school environments and curricula are not culturally responsive; communication with immigrant families and caregivers is a persistent challenge for schools; schools are not transparent about their policies for engaging with law enforcement; and, high schools, in particular, are ill-prepared to support undocumented students in post-secondary planning. For more research on these reasons, see our full guide at <https://www.cuny-iiie.org/immliaison>.

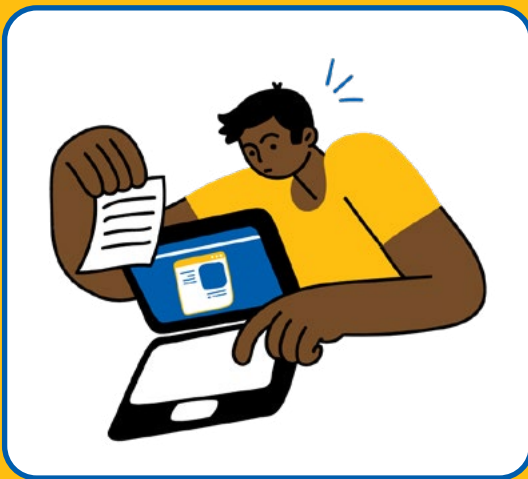
While services provided to immigrant students often come in the form of language support (i.e., instructional support for multilingual learners), the immigrant liaison position is unique because it is intended to specifically support students who are dealing with experiences of immigration. In particular, the position is designed to support undocumented students and mixed-status families, including undocumented students who may have lived in the United States since a young age and may no longer be classified as multilingual learners. This position is intended to be a part-time position filled by someone already working within the school community in some capacity who is able to support immigrant youth and families through various actions described below.



² We use family and caregiver interchangeably throughout this guide to acknowledge that many youth live with adults who may not be their direct blood family.

What Are the Duties and Responsibilities of an Immigrant Liaison?

An Immigrant Liaison's Overall Responsibilities Include:



Survey students, families, and staff periodically to gauge the needs of immigrants, particularly undocumented immigrants, in the school community.



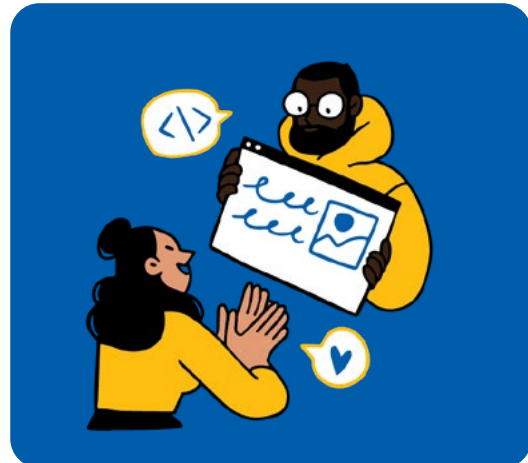
Provide resources and support that are identified as needed based on surveys and discussions with students, families, and staff.

Below are specific duties that we recommend the immigrant liaison take on, including the various audiences for each duty.



With Students

Student Leadership Opportunities



With Families

Trainings with Local Orgs



With School Staff

Trainings, Coordination



With Entire School Community

Share Information

Examples of Possible Duties from Our Immigrant Liaisons



Opportunities for Student Leadership

Facilitate opportunities for students to take leadership, give feedback, and inform school leaders on the climate and needs.

Questions to Ask

- What opportunities for student leadership, particularly undocumented student leadership, are there at your school?
- Does your school have a Dream Team?

For more on Dream Teams, see the CUNY-IIE Immigration in Secondary Schools Module Focus C here: <https://www.cuny-iie.org/comprehensive-educator-modules> and the NYSYLC Dream Team Network here: <https://www.nysylc.org/dtn>

Examples

"Students are presenting speeches to senior and junior classes about immigration and issues. Students are also making letters for the district representative to say their opinions and experiences as immigrants." —**Kathy Garzon**

"The past week I focused on speaking to my students regarding starting a Dream Team, to ramp up interest, develop a core group, and get feedback on what they would want the Dream Team to be. I also worked on the administrative steps necessary to begin a club in my school, since it is co-

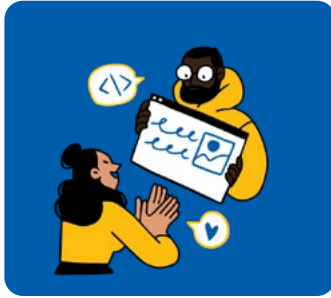
located and the clubs are scheduled through a community organization that serves both schools.”
—**Caroll Jimenez on starting a Dream Team at the middle school level**

“We first held an intimate two group English as a New Language session with students as we found students who aren’t as confident in their English or Spanish speaking don’t feel comfortable sharing in the group just yet. The goal of this activity was to get students to understand we are on this journey together and we both shared we aren’t experts either. Next, we used a word cloud centered around the word “immigration” last week but explained to students that this word is continuously living in our space as the more students learn and talk with another, we will add to the word cloud chart.” —**Howard Goldspiel and Neidy Cortez**

Note: In this specific context, many immigrant students are also multilingual learners. While immigration justice and language justice are not the same issues, we also recognize that for many immigrant students, it is important to also be attuned to their language needs, as exemplified above.

“The Dream Team is preparing for the Day of Action for Immigrants on March 6th. They have organized a guest speaker for Advisory and are finalizing the details of the presentation. They are preparing a fundraiser for the HOPE Scholarship. They are contacting faculty members and personally inviting them to incorporate immigration into their course curriculum that date. The Dream Team is also doing a book club.” —**Katharina Kempf**

Note: The HOPE Scholarship is a scholarship for undocumented students to help pay for college that is organized specifically by this school for their students. While undocumented students in New York can get state financial aid through the New York Dream Act, this often is not enough to cover the cost of private colleges.



Trainings with Local Organizations for Families

Partner with local community organizations to set up Know Your Rights (KYR) trainings, legal clinics, and other pertinent trainings in the school for students and families.

Questions to Ask

- What information do immigrant students and families need/want?
- What local organizations do I know of that I can bring in to respond to these needs?

Examples

“Our school hosted UnLocal for the Parent’s KYR Workshop. We had a few parents connect on Google-Meet and asked good questions. Some follow-up is needed with some parents as they seem to want legal advice.” —**Juan Carlos Perez**

Note: UnLocal is a community-centered non-profit organization that provides direct immigration legal representation, community education, outreach, and advocacy for New York’s undocumented immigrants. For more information, visit www.unlocal.org.

“I helped finalize the details for the Parent Taxes workshop which will focus on how to get an ITIN number and what parents should consider if they get paid in cash.” —**Juan Carlos Perez**

Note: An Individual Taxpayer Identification Number (ITIN) is a tax processing number issued by the Internal Revenue Service (IRS). The IRS issues ITINs to individuals who are required to have a U.S. taxpayer identification number but who do not have, and are not eligible to obtain, a Social Security number (SSN) from the Social Security Administration (SSA). (<https://www.irs.gov/individuals/individual-taxpayer-identification-number>)



Trainings for School Staff

Provide ongoing trainings for school staff on how to support immigrant students and families as needed.

Questions to ask

- How can our school staff better support immigrant students and families?
- What do they need to know in order to do so?
- Do I know this? If yes, you can facilitate the workshop/workshop series. If no, is there an outside organization you can bring in to do a workshop for staff?

Examples

"I am working with our PD committee to have ImmSchools come and do their workshop "Elevating Students' Stories: Culturally Responsive Practices & Curriculum with Insight on Supporting Immigrant Students and Families" (they've previously done their foundational training with us)."
—**Katharina Kempf**

"I registered for and invited my colleagues to attend the workshop by Immigrants Rising to learn how to better support Black undocumented students through higher education." —**Katharina Kempf**



Coordination with School Staff

Coordinate with other school staff to support immigrant students and families. This can include:

- Work with parent coordinators to ensure that resources, including digital communications, are disseminated to families during PTA meetings, open school and family night events, and by other means.
- For high school, work with college counselors to effectively advise students on applying to college without a social security number and applying for available financial aid through the New York Dream Act as well as scholarships, etc.
- Work with enrollment to ensure a process that protects students' right to school and privacy.
- Work with school counselors to address any immigration needs that arise (legal, social-emotional, health-care, etc).

Questions to ask

- Who should I be working with in my school building to support immigrant students and families?
- What do I know as an immigrant liaison that I can share with others to help them do their jobs?

Examples

"I met with our College Transfer Office director about supporting a student with undocumented parents who have questions about filling out the FAFSA form." —**Katharina Kempf**

"The college advisor and I met with our undocumented seniors one-on-one to help them fill out the Jose Peralta (New York Dream Act) form to received financial aid." —**Kathy Garzon**



Share Information with School Community

Disseminate information from local immigrant rights groups to staff, students, and families, including creating a central space such as an office area or bulletin board in the school for distribution of resource materials and forwarding digital resources. This can include:

- Gather and provide information regarding earning opportunities, internships, and trainings that do not require a social security number;
- Provide contacts for resources for legal, medical, housing, or other assistance that do not require a social security number;
- Make information available to all students regarding resources and supports for immigrants and opportunities for alliances with immigrant groups, including but not limited to posters, pamphlets, contact information for community resources, and a toolkit with resources, including medical, legal and housing.

Questions to ask

- What information/resources does our school community need/want regarding immigration?
- How can I best share that information (see above if a training is the best method to share)?

Examples

"I worked with my Juniors to get them resources for the summer month. We spoke about the importance of being active and looking for programs during the summer. Some students decided to apply for College Now programs. Others want to look for ESL programs in the summer."

—**Kathy Garzon**

"This week I began working with the student support team on how to refer families for legal screening. I also helped a family with getting a school letter for their immigration case and I'm helping another one that requested access to English programs." —**Juan Carlos Perez**

"I worked with a student that wants to sponsor his parents for their green cards. I referred him to two non-profit organizations that can give the family a free consultation."
—**Kathy Garzon**

"I connected an undocumented family that reached out to food pantries in the area and organizations that can connect them to the services to which they qualify." —**Caroll Jimenez**

"I shared info via e-mail with the school community about ImmSchools' Monthly Chats for families and students and about Immigrants Rising's Wellness Support Groups for UndocuAPI and UndocuBlack folks." —**Katharina Kempf**

"We are going to create a bulletin board that will be in place into next school year, showing that immigrants are welcome at our school. We are also planning on posters that we will post at the start of the school year." —**Caroll Jimenez**



Want to Create an Immigrant Liaison Position At Your School? Here is How to Get Started:

Selection Process

If you/your school is considering creating an immigrant liaison position, consider the following:

- ❑ See the description of the position as well as suggested eligibility considerations below. Whenever possible, prioritize selecting individuals who are immigrants themselves, particularly currently or formerly undocumented immigrants, so that the immigrant liaison at your school can directly relate to the experiences of immigrant students and families.
- ❑ When possible, involve students/families with direct experiences with immigration in the selection process. If your school already has students/families who are actively organizing around the needs of immigrant students, include these students and family members in the hiring process by having them review applications and participate in the interviews. Give students time during the school day to participate in the process. If possible, compensate family members for their time (see below for tips around compensating undocumented students and families).
- ❑ Make every effort to ensure that youth feedback is solicited at every step of the process. Once the immigrant liaison is selected, youth fellowships can be established so the youth fellows can work directly with immigrant liaisons to provide feedback and think about how the school can best meet the needs of immigrant students and families, especially those who are undocumented. Other options include using clubs like Dream Teams to provide support and feedback for the immigrant liaisons.

Eligibility Considerations

Consider prioritizing the following qualifications:

- School staff member OR someone who is in the school community/building often (this includes roles such as the parent coordinator and other community members) and has relationships with the community.
- Experience working with immigrant youth and communities through directly impacted experience and/or through community organizing.
- Experience advocating for and with marginalized populations and groups.
- Speak more than one language that is spoken by students/families, as needed based on the languages spoken by the school's immigrant communities.
- Knowledge of and commitment to learning about federal, state, and city immigration policies and legal resources for immigrants.
- Experience taking initiative, working independently, and collaborating with different institutions.
- Existing relationships with community organizations that provide resources to immigrant communities (preferred).
- Readiness to provide trainings on policy and law, mental health, and the complexities of diverse immigrant communities in New York (with support as needed).
- Demonstrated commitment to ensuring the well-being and full inclusion of immigrant students and families, including their empowerment.
- Demonstrated history of empathy in difficult situations.

Funding

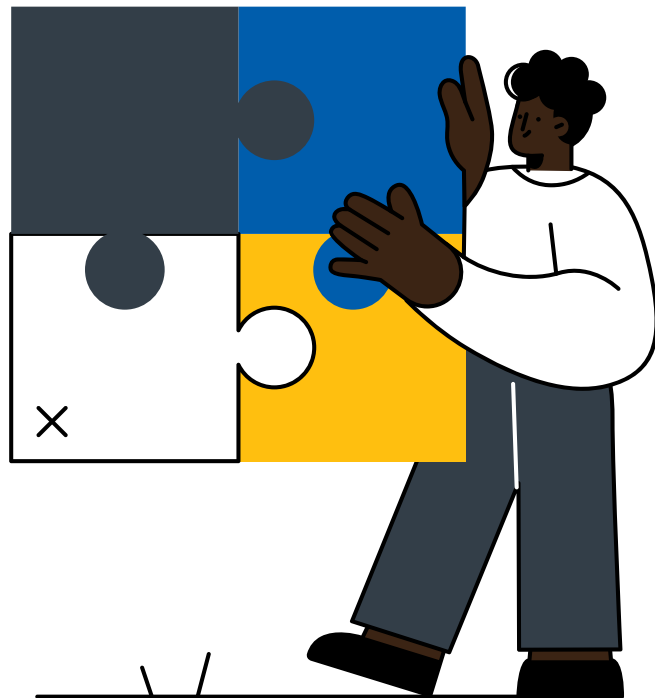
There are several different ways to compensate an immigrant liaison in New York City public schools, depending on who is selected and the school budget. In the pilot program, we found that immigrant liaisons typically spent 3-5 hours a week (at least) doing work specifically related to supporting immigrant and undocumented students and families at their school, outside of their typical contractual duties.

The compensation options include:

- **Comp time:** If the immigrant liaison is an employee who is eligible for comp time at the school, then they can get hours off from other contractual duties to complete work for this position. In this case, the union leader and principal agree to create a position (after reviewing with the Consultation Committee) and then the union votes through the School-Based Option vote. If approved, the position would essentially relieve the immigrant liaison from other contractual duties so that she/he/they get time during the day to do work related to the role of immigrant liaison. **In some schools, these hours were split between two people.**
- **Circular 6 (C6) option:** This depends on how a school uses the C6 options for faculty service. Presently, at a participating school with immigrant liaisons, staff have a menu of options that the principal provides, including immigrant liaison. Every year the staff state their preferences for how to use their C6 time (this is technically supposed to be a period a day).
- **Per session:** If the immigrant liaison is an employee who is eligible for the per session, their time can be compensated in this manner.
- **Stipend:** Provide a monthly, semester-long, or yearly stipend that is equivalent to compensating approximately 3-5 hours of work per week. Using a stipend is a way to open up the position to parents and staff at community-based organizations who might work directly with the school. If approved, the position would essentially relieve the immigrant liaison from other contractual duties so that she/he/they get time during the day to do work related to the role of immigrant liaison.

New York City Department of Education Support Needed for Sustainability

To ensure the sustainability of the immigration liaison program, the NYC Department of Education should establish and fund immigrant liaison roles in all New York City PreK-12 public schools. These positions should receive district-level support, with the NYSYLC as a consultant, and collaborate through district-level network meetings for professional development, knowledge sharing, and problem-solving, as this support is vital for their continuity.



Paying Non-Citizens

We recognize that hiring undocumented immigrant liaisons and youth fellows can be challenging, particularly given barriers to employment created by city and state governments.³ However, non-citizens are often best positioned to know what support immigrant and undocumented youth and their families need, given their relevant and necessary personal and professional experiences, and are therefore often the best candidates for immigrant liaison and youth fellow positions.

Below are a few options to consider to provide monetary compensation for work done by non-citizens who do not have work authorization. Note that non-citizens with Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) and other legal immigrant categories will have work authorization.

- Hire non-citizens as independent contractors. We recommend consulting with a contract attorney to ensure that the work identified for the position is appropriate for an independent contractor. See the [NYSYLC's Non-Citizen Guide to Entrepreneurship](#) for more information on how to support a non-citizen hired as an independent contractor.
- Provide a stipend through gift cards.
- Fundraise private money to support the position.

³ For more information, check out Undocu-Edu, a team at CUNY-IIE whose work highlights the barriers non-citizens face in becoming teachers and works to shift policy and break down those barriers. See <https://www.cuny-iie.org/undocuedu> for more information.

Support for the Position

- For a comprehensive guide that lays out a description of the immigrant liaison program, examples of the work done, and recommendations for schools, please visit www.cuny-iae.org/immliaison/



What Do Immigrant Liaisons and Youth Fellows From the Pilot Program Suggest for Those Just Getting Started?

From our high school liaisons:

Katharina: Start by listening to un/documented immigrant students and families in your community—what needs have they expressed? What steps can you take in your school community to anticipate and address these needs? Much of this role is a willingness to do research, build a network of organizations that support immigrant students and families, and learn as you go. Three key organizations to get started in building your network are the [New York State Youth Leadership Council](#), [ImmSchools](#), and [United We Dream](#). Get to know their work, follow them on social media, and familiarize yourself with their resources. Use the [United We Dream #HereToStay Toolkit](#) for Educators for a step-by-step guide to making your school community undocufriendly. You do not need to be an expert on immigration law or immigration statuses to support students and families. It is expected that you will not have all the answers. Be honest with students and families about that and let them know that your role and commitment is to find and connect them to the resources that will answer their questions.

Juan Carlos: This position requires a lot of research, and staying up to date with policy changes and program datelines (student programs, scholarships). However, there is an extensive network of organizations that can provide support and information for undocu students and families. The NYSYLC published guides ([The Entrepreneurship Guide](#), [The Undocu Grad School Guide](#)) that are resources to refer students to. UnLocal’s monthly partner calls provide a quick overview of policy changes and how those can affect immigrant communities. Those calls also provide an opportunity for partners to ask questions and address concerns about the changes.

Kathy: This position is not only about learning about immigration policies but also about building trust with each student. Without trust, the work that we will be doing in the school to create clubs, presentations, give information, or speak to parents will not be as effective. Moreover, building

a network that will help you understand more about immigration, laws, opportunities, financial aid, scholarships, will be key. The network will help you give better guidance to the students and families. Each story is different, each background is different; so the help each student needs is different; getting them the best support is essential to our jobs as immigrant liaison.

From our middle school liaisons:

Neidy, Howard: Baby steps are okay. Bringing in a new program into a school for the first time will require time in terms of recruiting. In middle school- a lot of time will be spent on helping students process and understand their own identities. Students at this age are coming together to discuss popular social media trends and stereotypes they're overhearing. Middle school is a colony of students finding themselves or making discussions to just fit in. The bulk of our work has been helping students unlearn the shame and stigma that comes with being undocumented or coming from undocumented families- helping them understand that they and their stories are worthy. This involves countering internalized notions of inferiority in ways that aren't so positivist. Building a community of students that can hopefully be a lifelong friendship takes patience and constant nurturing.

Caroll: Students in the middle school level welcome the opportunity to discuss their immigration journey experience and compare it with other student's experiences. Therefore, a lot of time is spent on this process and other plans you come in with for the club (Dream Team) may be derailed. However, it is so essential that they are able to do this in a space with supportive peers and adults.

From our youth fellows:

Tolleifa: The most crucial component of being an immigrant liaison is listening to the kids' aspirations and needs. This job needs patience and an open mind to new possibilities. Introducing a new program into a school is difficult at first, but taking the time to make students feel welcome to come and discuss is key. Making the atmosphere more open and trustworthy will facilitate the flow of work and resources because you'll know how to gain experience in many scenarios.