

Countering Bullying and Building Belonging

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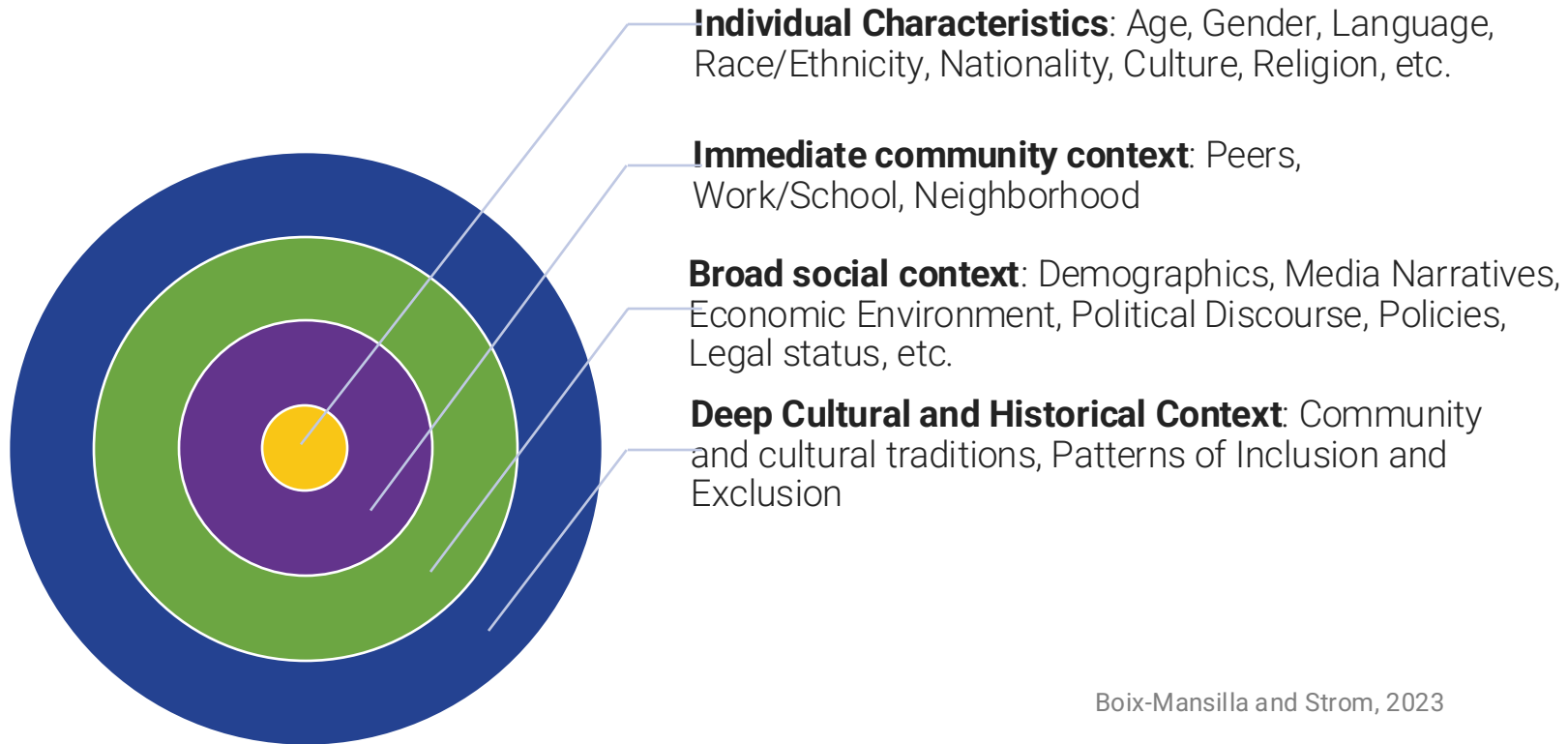
Imagine you are a fourth grader getting ready for your first day of school in a new community, maybe country.

You are excited to meet new friends, learn, and belong.

Your parents constantly stress how important school, however, they also warn you that some people may not be welcoming. They also say you need to be on your best behavior and follow all of the rules.

What do you wish you would see, hear, and feel when you walk in the door?

The Ecology of Identity



37% of respondents to a Sept. 18-20 CBS News/YouGov poll believe the claim that Haitians in Springfield, Ohio are eating people's pets is either certainly true or likely true.

- **Bomb Threats:** Schools in Springfield were subjected to bomb threats following the dissemination of the false rumor. These threats led to heightened security measures and disruptions to the educational environment. There has been an increased police presence and emergency protocols being activated to ensure the safety of students and staff.
- **Community Tensions:** The rumor has fueled tensions not only within schools but also in the broader community, leading to threats against various public buildings. This has necessitated a coordinated response from law enforcement and school officials.
- **Impact on School Operations:** The threats have caused disruptions in school operations, with some schools having to close temporarily or implement lockdown procedures. These actions have strained the educational environment and impacted students' learning experiences.

You told us that since the beginning of the school year



You know that Immigrant-origin youth have reported that they have been bullied or teased at my school

I heard students make anti-immigrant comments this school year

I have heard staff at my school/institution make anti-immigrant comments this school year

I have heard/seen staff at my school make anti-immigrant comments directed at family/caregivers of students

I have not seen or heard any anti-immigrant language or bullying this school year

We believe that schools have the potential to help individuals and communities navigate demographic change. Schools can be greenhouses for inclusion and belonging that counteract harmful anti-immigrant sentiment.

Recognizing that communities have different needs, we have designed a research-based approach that offers educators practical tools and strategies they adopt to promote the dispositions that:

- **Allow newcomers to thrive**
- **Their peers to learn**
- **Communities to successfully navigate the predictable tension that surfaces with demographic change.**

The Broad Social Context



The Deep Historical Context

Migration is the throughline of the human story and it is central to the history of the United States.

Myths & misinformation get in the way of our responses to newcomers.



Scholar Beverl Daniel-Tatum likens stereotypes to smog that we all take in as we breathe. She explains,

"We're all breathing in misinformation. We're all being exposed to stereotypes, and we all have to think about how we have been impacted by that... if we have all been breathing in smog, we can't help but have our thinking shaped by it. "



**Xenophobia and polarization harms all kids,
particularly immigrant youth.**

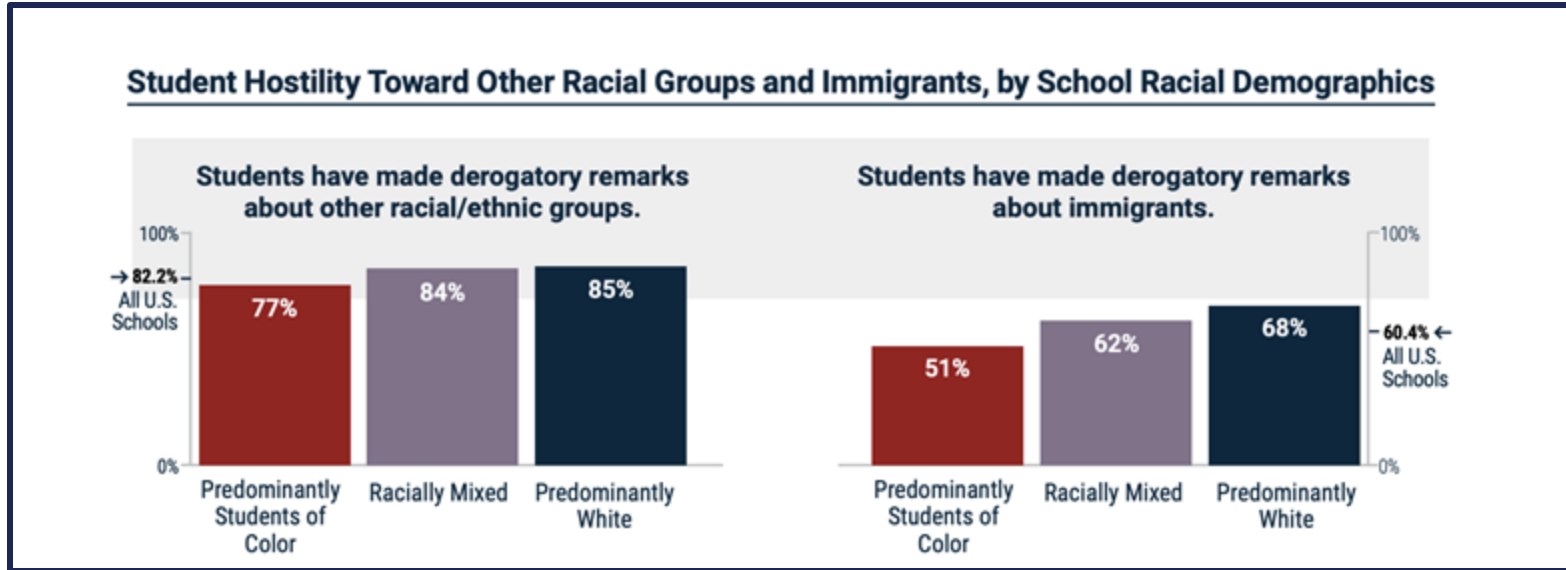
“More than two-thirds of the principals surveyed report that federal immigration enforcement policies and the **political rhetoric around the issue have harmed student well-being** and learning or undermined the ability of parents to support student learning.” ([Rogers et al., 2019](#))

How Xenophobia Impacts Immigrant-Origin Youth

In the run up and aftermath of the 2016 election, researches at UCLA found:

- 85% of educators observed **fear** among immigrant-origin students.
- 58% of teachers noted students expressed **concerns about their the well-being** due to political discussions surrounding immigration enforcement.
- 44.3% of teachers indicated that students' concerns regarding immigration and related issues **affected their learning**.

- **Bystanders to Bullying:** Non-immigrant students report they are less likely to intervene when immigrant students are being bullied.
- **Justifying Bigotry:** Some students feel emboldened to express xenophobia, using political rhetoric as a justification.
- **Setting Norms:** Non-immigrant students may adopt prejudiced attitudes and behavior (exclusion, bullying) due to the prevalent anti-immigrant sentiments in school environments. This is particularly true when popular students express anti-immigrant attitudes.
- **Empathy:** Some students are negatively impacted by seeing their friends and peers mistreated.
- **Academic Performance:** Toxic school climates can negatively impact the academic performance of all students.



Non-Immigrant students report being less likely to intervene when immigrant students are targets of bullying.

❖ Rogers, J., Ishimoto, M., Kwako, A., Berryman, A., Diera, C. (2019). *School and Society in the Age of Trump*. Los Angeles, CA: UCLA's Institute for Democracy, Education, and Access

❖ Gönültaş, S., & Mulvey, K. L. (2021). The Role of Immigration Background, Intergroup Processes, and Social-Cognitive Skills in Bystanders' Responses to Bias-Based Bullying Toward Immigrants During Adolescence. *Child development*, 92(3), e296–e316. <https://doi.org/10.1111/cdev.13476>.

Immigrant Students Sense of Belonging

Civics

Newcomer Immigrant and Refugee Students Are More Optimistic About the Future than Their U.S.-Born Peers

Familiarity may breed awareness of disadvantages and discrimination, finds a new study led by TC's S. Garnett Russell



Photo credit: S. Garnett Russell. Image illustrated by Kelly Baird.

What We Are Learning

A 2021 pilot survey by Youth Truth, in collaboration with the Immigration Initiative at Harvard and Re-Imagining Migration, focused on middle school students' sense of belonging. The survey identified six key patterns:

1 Lower sense of school belonging compared to nonimmigrant peers.

4 Difficulty discussing race and ethnicity with school staff.

2 Discouragement from using their family's home language.

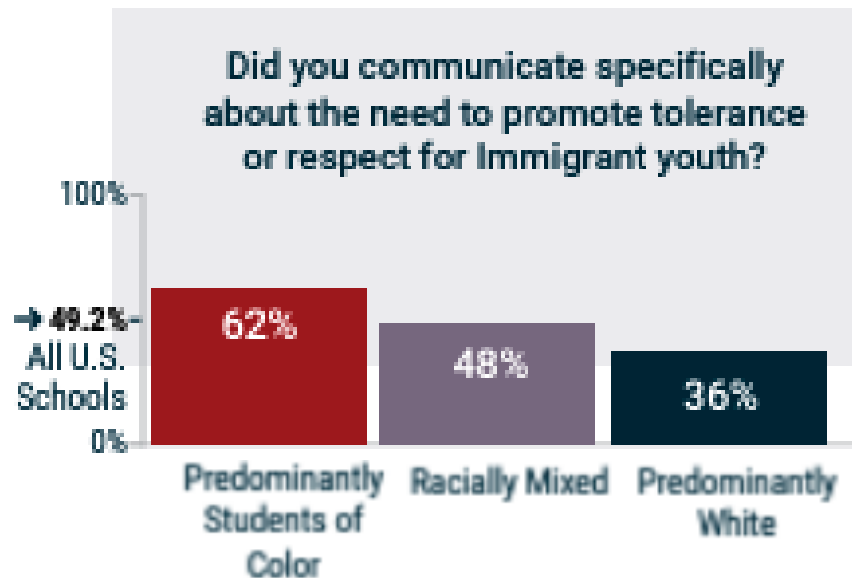
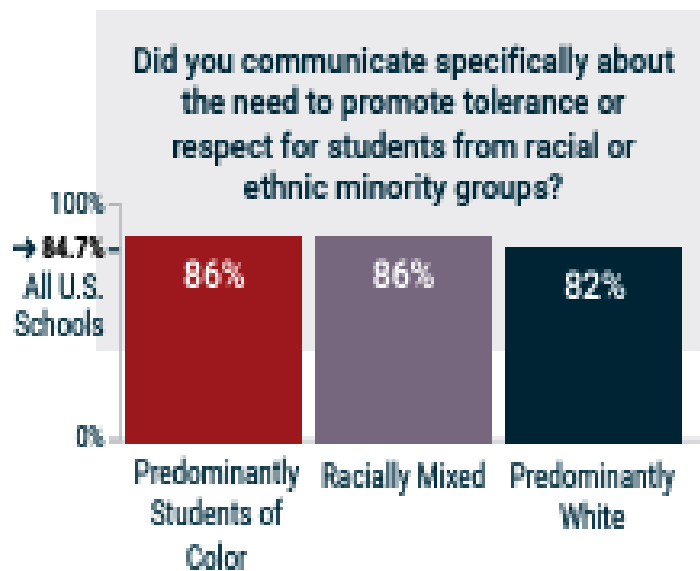
5 Lower sense of safety, both in and out of school.

3 Increased reports of bullying or harassment.

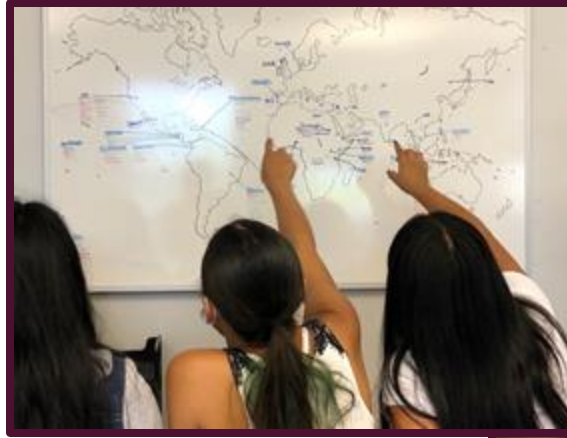
6 Lack of representation in the school curriculum.

Bullying: Policies and Norms

The number of schools that communicate specifically about the need to promote tolerance and respect for immigrant youth is **30%-40% lower than for other racial and ethnic groups.**



Jessica Lander



- EL History and Civics Teacher at Lowell High School in Lowell, MA
- Teach recent immigrant and refugee students from 30+ different countries
- 2023 Massachusetts History Teacher of the Year, Top Ten National History Teacher
- Author of *Making Americans: Stories of Historic Struggles, New Ideas, and Inspiration in Immigrant Education* (Beacon Press, Oct 2022) Winner of the 2024 George Orwell Award

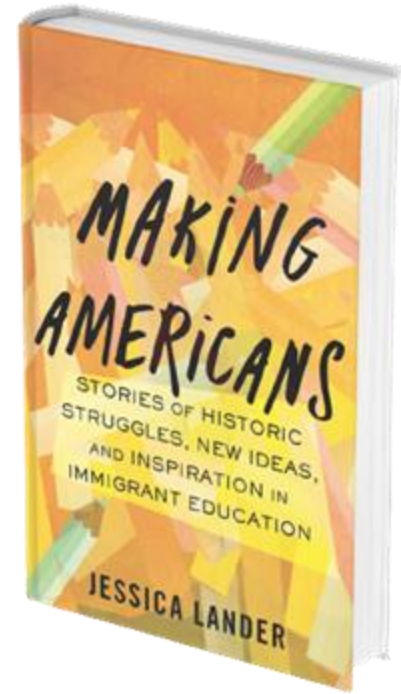


The Importance of Belonging

Belonging is fundamental. For young people, a sense of belonging provides a foundation for building a life and pursuing one's dreams. and, young people who feel that they belong are moved to invest their talents, their energy, and their heart in enriching their new home.

The 8 Pillars of Belonging

- opportunities for **new beginnings**
- supportive **communities**
- assurance of **security**
- **chances to dream**
- committed **advocates**
- recognition of students' **strengths** and assets
- **acceptance** for who students are and where they come from
- opportunities for students to develop their **voice**—and valuing those voices





The Past

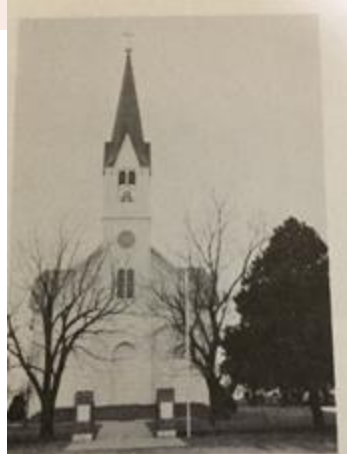
Uncovering the Past: *Meyer v. Nebraska*

1920
Rural Hampton, NE

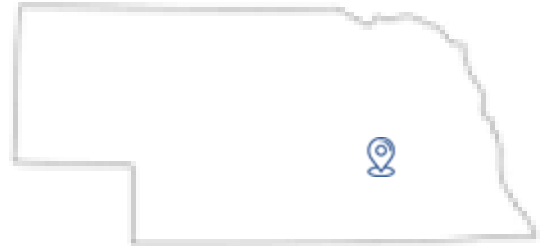
In a rural, one-room schoolhouse, a parochial teacher named **Robert Meyer** was arrested for teaching the Bible in German—not English—for his German-speaking students. He took his case to the Supreme Court and won, enshrining the rights of students to learn and teachers to teach non-English languages.



Photo: Nebraska NHD Org



Zion Lutheran Church - Rural



Uncovering the Past: *Mendez v. Westminster*

1943
Westminster, CA



Mexican-American and Puerto Rican children were denied access to the "white" school in their area. Their families organized to fight for their children's futures, suing 4 school districts. The case (*Mendez v. Westminster*) ultimately desegregated California schools—and laid the groundwork for *Brown v. Board of Education*.



Photo: Sylvia Mendez, c/o Zinn Education Project



Uncovering the Past: *Plyler v. Doe*

1982
Tyler, TX

In 1977, the Tyler Independent School District voted to charge a \$1,000 tuition for every student who could not provide legal residence in the US—roughly 1/4 of most undocumented Texans' annual income. Undocumented families resisted, risking deportation to advocate for their children's access to an education. Their fight culminated in a landmark Supreme Court decision that affirmed undocumented children's rights to public education in the US.



Photo: Tarlton Law Library, University of Texas





The Present

An Example at the District Level



Guilford County NC

- Who: EL Director Mayra Hayes + Her team
- 126 schools, 650 miles, 7,000 EL students, 50 countries, 100+ languages
- Rethinking instruction:
 - ◆ “On an autumn night in 1607, a furtive group of men, women and children set off in a relay of small boats from the English village of Scrooby, in pursuit of the immigrant’s oldest dream, a fresh start in another country.”
 - ◆ “Chimpanzees are eating bananas. Bananas are yellow.”

Strategies for creating change

- Regular group PD
- One-on-one coaching
- Meeting each skeptical teacher/leader where they are
- Co-teaching
- Model teaching
- Finding & Sharing resources
- Sharing best practice

An Example at the School Level



Global Village Project, Decatur GA



- The only school devoted to refugee girls who have spent a long time out of school
- 100 local older mentors who meet one-on-one with students each week
 - ◆ Provides opportunities for regular conversations with a native English speaker
 - ◆ Opportunities to practice and make mistakes without the embarrassment of messing up in front of peers.
 - ◆ Mentorship program after graduation to help navigate high school and beyond

Strategies at GVP:

- Mentorship
- Frequent opportunities to practice and learn from mistakes
- Shared mission
- Personalized approach for each student

An Example at the Classroom Level



“Partnership for New Americans” class - Taught by Leah Juelke, teacher of immigrant and refugee students in ND

In this class, students:

- Learn together
- Pair up and interview each other and write reflections on what they learned.
- Share their partner’s childhood memories as if they were their own
- Together craft lessons and activities that they teach at a nearby elementary school, teaching lessons on: on watercolors, Nepali dance, the Arabic alphabet, Bhutanese dragon masks, cooking Somali Mandazi

In another class, Leah’s recent immigrant students share “Journey to America” stories. They then print a book of their stories and share it in the community

Strategies for building bridges

- Co-creation with students
- Tapping into students’ strengths and assets
- Affirming students’ identities
- Building relationships
- Opportunities to share and tell stories
- Students as teachers

An Example at the Classroom Level



The Tasting History Project, Lander's Classroom



- *The Tasting History Project* is embedded in our study of U.S. History. It is the final project at the end of our study of early 1900s immigration to the United States
- Project Overview: Students: explore, reflect and share food cultures; choose and write about a family recipe, practice clear descriptive writing; reflect on and write about migration stories; share food and history; become published authors



Strategies for centering student knowledge:

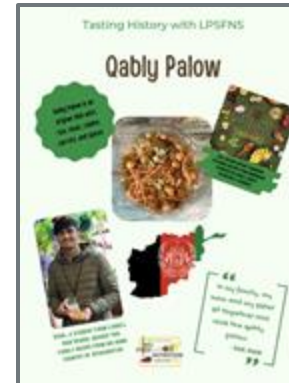
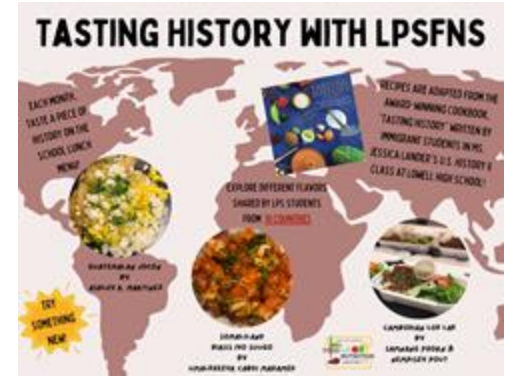
- Centering Student Voice
- Families as teachers
- Asset-based
- Community partnership
- Students as community teachers

An Example at the Classroom Level



The Tasting History Project, Lander's Classroom

- Collaboration with the district food services which works with our class and our students to highlight and serve one dish a month from our cookbook in the district to 14,000 students.
- Through this partnership, for the first time our school district cafeteria has served food from: Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Brazil, Cambodia, Colombia, Guatemala, Somaliland
- The importance of students seeing their food is valued in our community



Who are the young people
we are educating?



Re-Imagining
MIGRATION



Re-Imagining Migration Framework

What are the most
important perspectives
for participating in a
world on the move?



How should we teach
about migration?



How can we create
powerful learning
environments for
all students?



How do we prepare
our educators for a
changing world?



What you can do...

- **Strengthen Relationships:** Reach out to students and their families. Learn their stories.
- **Messages Matter:** Communicate clearly that anti-immigrant bullying and harassment is unacceptable.
- **Don't Be a Bystander:** Ensure you intervene if you hear it and respond immediately when you hear about it.
- **Student Pulse Checks:** Regularly take pulse checks on student feelings belonging.
- **Safe Sharing Spaces and Systems:** Ensure students know how and where share their concerns and report bullying and discrimination.
- **Review Policies:** Review bullying/harassment policies to explicitly address anti-immigrant bullying
- **Reflect, Learn, and Grow:** Take a self-assessment to assess your own practice.

Building Belonging Across the Community

- **Bring People Together:** Create opportunities for the school community as a whole to get together and know each other.
- **Share Stories:** Encourage staff, students, and families to share their stories of migration through projects like Moving Stories or Our Threads.
- **Community Engagement:** Partner with community organizations and museums on cultural events for the students, the whole school community, and on staff professional learning.
- **Make Diversity Visible:** Ensure that your school hallways and communication reflect the diversity of your student body and their families.

Right Now: Address anti-immigrant prejudice in the classroom

- Teach students to recognize anti-immigrant stereotypes
- Adapt the Power of Words lesson for your students and Setting
- Introduce **Re-Imagining Migration's Rumor Review App**
- Ensure that your current teaching about migration builds understanding not bias.

Three Resources

- [Suggestions for Responding to Anti-Immigrant Taunts and Bullying in School](#)
- [Teaching About Anti-Immigrant Stereotypes: A Tip Sheet for Educators](#)
- [The Power of Words: Recognizing and Responding to Anti-Immigrant Stereotypes](#)

Our Threads



In December 2021, Luma Mufleh, founder and director of Fugees Family, approached iThrive Games and shared a desire to co-create with students a game that highlighted their expertise, built empathy, and supported schools across the nation in accepting incoming refugee students. The three-day iThrive Studio held with Fugees Family led to the creation of Our Threads, a question card game that supports students—refugees and non-refugees—in feeling understood, welcomed, and care for by others. Our Threads is available for purchase here, and all purchases help fund the creation and development of the Fugees students' next game



Takeaways

- Be proactive in creating a welcoming/safe environment.
- Evaluate your current bullying policies and response protocols
- Consider what you know, what you thinking you know, and what you need to know to ensure that all students can learn.
- Doing these is not partisan, it is our responsibility as educators

Closing



“...when young people grow up knowing they belong—in a classroom, in a school, in a community, and in a country—they will make a home here and they will go out into the world and do remarkable things.”

~ Jessica Lander, Making Americans: Stories of Historic Struggles, New Ideas, and Inspiration in Immigrant Education

