

Immigrant student enrollment is dwindling at schools across the US amid immigration crackdowns

BY KATE PAYNE, BIANCA VÁZQUEZ TONESS AND GISELA SALOMON

Updated 10:44 AM EDT, November 17, 2025

From Miami to San Diego, schools around the U.S. are seeing big drops in enrollment of students from immigrant families.

In some cases, parents have been deported or voluntarily [returned to their home countries](#), driven out by President Donald Trump's sweeping [immigration crackdown](#). Others have moved elsewhere inside the U.S.

In many school systems, the biggest factor is that far fewer families are coming from other countries. As fewer people cross the U.S. border, administrators in small towns and big cities alike are reporting fewer [newcomer students](#) than usual.

In Miami-Dade County Public Schools, about 2,550 students have entered the district from another country so far this school year — down from nearly 14,000 last year, and more than 20,000 the year before that. School board member Luisa Santos, who attended district schools herself as a young immigrant, said the trend is “a sad reality.”

“I was one of those arrivals when I was 8 years old,” Santos said. “And this country and our public schools — I’ll never get tired of saying it — gave me everything.”

Collectively, the enrollment declines in Miami-Dade erased about \$70 million from the district's annual budget, forcing administrators to scramble to cover the unexpected shortfall.

Is your child ready to register for kindergarten? Here's what experts look for

Kindergarten readiness varies widely by income, new data shows. Cities are stepping in to help

Migrants languish in US detention centers facing dire conditions and prolonged waits

The drops in immigrant students add to [strains on enrollment](#) at many traditional public schools, which have seen overall numbers dip due to demographic changes and students opting for alternatives like private schools and homeschooling. Despite needs for English instruction and social supports, the newcomers in some districts have helped to buoy enrollment and bring critical per-pupil funding in recent years.

In northern Alabama, Albertville City Schools Superintendent Bart Reeves has seen the local economy grow along with its Hispanic population, which for decades has been drawn by the area's poultry processing plants. Albertville soon will be getting its first Target store, a sign of the community's growing prosperity.

Reeves' district is home to one of Alabama's largest Hispanic student populations, with about 60% identifying as Hispanic. But Reeves said the district's newcomer academy at a local high school hasn't been enrolling any new students.

"That's just not happening this year with the closure of the border," said Reeves, who expects the hit to his budget from enrollment declines will cost him about 12 teacher positions.

Some students are self-deporting with their families

One Sunday morning in August, Edna, a 63-year-old immigrant from El Salvador, got the call she had been dreading. Her friend, a mother from Guatemala with seven young children, had been detained in Lake Worth, Florida, on immigration charges while she was out grabbing a treat for her kids' breakfast.

The family had prepared for this moment. There were legal documents in place granting temporary custody of the children to Edna, who asked to be identified only by her first name because she fears immigration enforcement.

"I'll be here, and we'll be OK," she recalled telling the oldest child, a 12-year-old boy.

In the weeks that followed, Edna stayed home with two younger kids and got their five older siblings on the bus each day to attend Palm Beach County public schools, where enrollment has fallen by more than 6,000 students this year. One day in September, all seven children boarded a plane to Guatemala to be reunited with their mom, leaving behind neighborhood friends, band practices, and the only life they had ever known.

“My house feels like a garden without flowers,” Edna said. “They’re all gone.”

The family is now living in a rural part of Guatemala, out of reach of phone service. School there had already started for the year and the mother, who did not attend school herself as a child, was keeping them home and weighing whether to enroll them next year, Edna said.

Schools accustomed to newcomers see far fewer this year

The declines in the numbers of [immigrants coming to the U.S.](#) were already becoming evident in school registration numbers this summer.

Denver Public Schools enrolled 400 new-to-country students this summer, compared to 1,500 during the previous summer. Outside Chicago, Waukegan Community Unified School District 60 signed up 100 fewer new immigrant students. And administrators in the Houston Independent School District shuttered the Las Americas Newcomer School, a program dedicated to children who are new to the U.S., after its enrollment fell to just 21 students from 111 last year.

The shift is visible in places like Chelsea, Massachusetts, a city outside Boston that has long been a destination for new immigrants. The 6,000-student Chelsea Public Schools system has attracted Central Americans looking for affordable housing, and more recently, the state housed newly-arrived Haitians in shelters there. This year, the usual influx of newcomers didn’t materialize.

“This year has been different. Much more quiet,” said Daniel Mojica, director of Chelsea’s parent information center.

Over the summer, 152 newcomers signed up for Chelsea Public Schools, compared to 592 new-to-country students the previous summer.

Some are also picking up and leaving. Since January, 844 students have withdrawn from the district, compared to 805 during the same period last year. Mojica said a greater share of students leaving – roughly a quarter – are returning to their native countries.

He attributes that partly to the presence of masked Immigration and Customs Enforcement officers walking the city's streets.

"You can feel the fear in the air," he said.

Educators worry students are missing out

In San Diego, Principal Fernando Hernandez has enrolled dozens of newcomer students from across Latin America over the past couple years. Many made the treacherous journey through the jungles of the [Darien Gap](#) before setting up camp in a park near Perkins K-8 school.

About a third of students at the school are homeless. Staff have become experts on supporting kids who are facing adversity. As more newcomers arrived, Hernandez watched as Mexican American students switched up their playground slang to be better understood by their new classmates from Venezuela, Colombia and Peru.

But so far this school year, he hasn't enrolled a single newcomer student. Other families did not return when the new school year began. Overall, the district's enrollment is on par with last year's, according to a spokesperson. But at Hernandez' school, the change is noticeable.

Hernandez fears the toll of the disruption will extend far beyond students' academic progress. He worries students are missing out on chances to learn how to show empathy, to share, to disagree, to understand each other.

"This is like a repeat of the pandemic where the kids are isolated, locked up, not socializing," he said.

"These kids, they have to be in school," he added.

Natacha, a parent who moved with her family to California after leaving Venezuela, said she tries to avoid going out in public, but continues sending her daughters to school. Natacha, who asked to only be identified by her first name because she fears immigration enforcement, said she braces herself as

she drives the girls home each afternoon, scanning the road behind her in case another car is following hers.

“I entrust myself to God,” she said.
