

# Supporting Immigration-Impacted Students: Guidance for Higher Education Institutions in Washington State



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## Background

On Jan. 27, 2025, Governor Bob Ferguson signed Executive Order 25-04 ([https://governor.wa.gov/sites/default/files/exe\\_order/EO%2025-04.pdf](https://governor.wa.gov/sites/default/files/exe_order/EO%2025-04.pdf)) which established the Family Separation Rapid Response Team led by the Washington State Department of Children, Youth, and Families (DCYF). The overarching purpose of the Rapid Response Team is to make policy improvement recommendations for how Washington state can be more responsive to the harm, trauma, and other lasting effects on children who experience family separation through the deportation or detention of their parents or primary caregivers.

A directive of the Executive Order was to “work with state universities, colleges, community colleges...to ensure and support robust pathways to higher education for children who experience the trauma of having their parents or primary caregivers deported or detained.” The Rapid Response Team partnered with higher education institutions to review existing policies that impact immigrant students and, together, put forward a list of policy revisions.

## Introduction

Working together with colleges, universities and immigration advocates across the state, the Rapid Response Team identified policy recommendations for higher education institutions to support the academic success and well-being of students with limited immigration status or mixed-status families. We understand that this is an ever-changing landscape and there are limits to what we can control in Washington state. Therefore, these policy recommendations are by no means comprehensive and are meant as suggestions. This document does not provide legal advice.

We hope that this guidance acts as a conversation starter and provides what is needed for institutions to take effective action to support students during these unprecedented times. We encourage colleges and universities to work creatively with their administration, faculty, and student advocacy groups when making decisions on campus policies and practices. After all, it is important that any changes be made collaboratively with those who have lived experience.



## Administrative Policy Recommendations

Below are administrative policy recommendations that higher education institutions may wish to consider. These are by no means comprehensive, and we support the local collaboration on implementation of these policies with your immigration student advocacy groups. In fact, individual institutions are encouraged to create guides to ensure all members of their campus are aware of their specific policies and resources.

### Identify a Single Point-of-Entry

For students, there can be a significant amount of fear around revealing one's immigration status to school administration, faculty, and staff. We recommend that schools identify a single office, staff person, and/or program to act as a point-of-entry to connect to all the resources students may need regarding immigration support. Staff and faculty should be trained on who this point of contact is, so that they can direct students to them. The appropriate staff person would be in an advocate role and able to join the student or coach them in discussions with professors on conversations surrounding immigration needs. Such accommodations would help students with flexible assignment deadlines, flexible attendance, alternative testing dates, and notetaking.

### Address Privacy Concerns

Recognizing that students experience fear about disclosures on “what their faculty member knows” and who to trust, school policy should clearly state what is being shared and with whom. Institutions should be explicit about what is and isn't shared, and with whom and why so that both students and faculty understand the boundaries.

Instituting clear rules to mitigate the sharing of any details regarding immigration status or family needs is key, if not already part of an institution's practice. For example, ideally, a Dean of Students' office doesn't share the “why” of an accommodation with faculty, just that a student meets the college or university accommodation policy.

## Absence Policies

### INCOMPLETES

We recommend students who experience an immigration-related emergency be encouraged to file an incomplete (I) or deferment for classes if they are unable to complete their work on time for immigration-specific reasons that are beyond their control. Each institution should specify the parameters on incomplete work and degree completion, per existing policy.

#### *Example:*

*Students who receive an incomplete grade have up to the end of the ensuing year to complete the course, unless a shorter interval is specified by the instructor. If the incomplete is not made up during the specified time or the student repeats the course, the I is changed to an F. For courses having the Satisfactory/Unsatisfactory grading basis, the I is changed to a U. Instructors are required to submit a grading report to their departmental office with every I given.*

Many students can use more guidance on resolving the incomplete well after the initial postponement of a grade. Institutional support in this realm could look like a reminder prompt to the student at specific intervals or coaching students about the responsibility of resolving an incomplete sometime after the accommodation is made (when they're out of direct crisis and can make plans).

### EMERGENCY ABSENCES

Emergency Absence Notifications are conducted when students are unable to communicate with faculty directly. Examples of this may include when a student experiences the death of an immediate family member or is hospitalized and does not have regular access to a cell phone or computer. To that end, an emergency absence notification should also be used in the case of unexpected leave necessitated by immigration proceedings. Clear guidance should be put forth for any student who is required to participate in legal proceedings related to their own immigration status or those of a child over whom they have guardianship. Special care should be given around student privacy and dignity when conveying the reason for emergency absences to faculty and staff.

## Guest Policy Exceptions in Housing and Basic Needs

Universities and colleges should develop a housing plan for when students unexpectedly find themselves as caregivers to younger siblings or kin whose parents have been detained or deported by immigration enforcement. In some instances, the family might have been unable to transfer guardianship prior to detention. Once detained, securing guardianship is a challenge given the complexities of Homeland Security's detention proceedings. We suggest that these students be offered basic needs support and housing accommodations during this difficult time.

### *Example:*

*An exception to the regular maximum guest time is made in advance for students who unexpectedly come into official or unofficial guardianship of a sibling or kin. Those students who have come into unexpected guardianship may be offered other housing options (like apartments) to accommodate for this change. This arrangement would be facilitated and overseen by the Dean of Students or any other appropriate department.*

When applicable, similar accommodations should be made for guests to access basic needs services on campus such as dining services, counseling and mental health services, legal services, and academic advising.

## In Closing

We want to thank our partners in higher education and immigration advocates who helped develop this guidance. Your expertise and insight has allowed the Rapid Response Team to create guidance that reflects current policy and practice needs, while ensuring that the safety, wellbeing, and rights of students remain at the core of this work.

Let's share this guidance widely amongst institutions of higher education across Washington, and with other states as desired or requested. A copy of this guidance is available online at [www.dcyf.wa.gov/FamilySeparationRapidResponseTeam](http://www.dcyf.wa.gov/FamilySeparationRapidResponseTeam).

For future correspondence,  
please direct questions to the  
Immigration Sub-Cabinet at:  
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