



BACK TO SCHOOL AND BEYOND:

Creating Safe and
Welcoming Environments
Where Everyone Belongs



**Los Angeles County
Office of Education**

SUPERINTENDENT'S MESSAGE

This summer has been an especially difficult one for many families across Los Angeles County. Communities have been deeply impacted by heightened immigration enforcement actions and raids, leaving many of our students and their families living in fear and uncertainty. At the same time, recent changes in federal policy have rolled back critical education programs and services that our students rely on—resources that are essential for students to reach their full potential and build a meaningful future.

As educators, we recognize each student's right to a rigorous, high-quality public education and are called to respond with compassion and a renewed commitment to creating schools where every student feels safe, supported, and valued. We stand with ALL of our students and families. That's why we've put together this toolkit—to help you cultivate a culture of belonging, safety and care as we welcome students back to school.

Inside, you'll find practical resources to guide your work, as well as a list of professional development opportunities focused on building inclusive and affirming environments, amplifying student voices, and cultivating authentic connections with families. These tools are designed to support you in fostering classrooms and campuses where all students—regardless of their background, identity, or immigration status—can flourish.

Thank you for your steadfast dedication to our students and their families. In these challenging times, your leadership and care make all the difference.

Sincerely,

Debra Duardo, M.S.W. Ed.D.
Los Angeles County Superintendent of Schools



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Office of Education**

Back to School and Beyond:
Creating Safe and Welcoming Environments Where Everyone Belongs



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IMPORTANCE OF BELONGING, SAFETY AND CARE

Students and their families are more likely to show up consistently when they feel seen, valued, and connected. The first few weeks of school are a powerful opportunity to build that foundation.

Strategies to Create a Welcoming Environment:

- Greet students by name at the gate or classroom door.
- Use “Welcome Back” signage and banners in multiple languages.
- Host a “coffee and connection” or meet-and-greet event for families.

First-Day & First Week Belonging Activities:

- Create a classroom [“Where We’re From” map](#) or [“All About Me” wall display](#).
- Invite students to set personal goals or intentions.
- Use circle time or advisory to build community and establish norms.

Communicate Warmly and Clearly:

- Send welcome letters or postcards home before school starts.
- Create a short “Welcome Back” video featuring staff and student voices.
- Include clear information about opportunities to engage and how to stay connected with the school.

Resources:

- [The First Days of School: Building a Community of Learners](#)
- [Belonging and Community-Building at the Beginning of the Year](#)



BASIC NEEDS AND SCHOOL READINESS

Families need access to accurate food and health information to support a child's overall wellbeing and academic success. In times of need, these are proven reliable resources to meet the needs of children and families.

Resources:

- [What I Need \(WIN\)](#), [Shelter App](#) and [Findhelp](#) helps people search and connect to thousands of free and low-cost services across L.A. County, including food, legal, hotlines, health and more.
- [LACOE Padlet](#) has info on services across L.A. County specifically focused on supporting students experiencing homelessness and their families.

Health/Immunizations Clinics:

- [California Department of Public Health Parent/Guardian School](#)
- [Immunization Guide](#): List of required immunizations.
- [211LA Childhood Immunization Resources](#): Immunization resources in L.A. County.
- [Los Angeles Public Health Vaccine Clinics](#): Provides a nurse only clinic registration schedule.
- [211LA Resources](#): Find a variety of resources, including healthcare in L.A. County.





COLLECTIVE CARE AND COMMUNITY WELLBEING PRACTICES

Many students, families and educators are returning to school carrying anxiety, fear and trauma related to their safety and belonging. These tools center collective care and community wellbeing as essential practices for resilience.

Resources:

- [Preparing for Back-to-School Season: Tools for Success - Children and Youth Behavioral Health Initiative \(CYBHI\)](#): Includes tools and resources to support students, school staff and caregivers experiencing a range of emotions as they head back to school.
- [8 Tips to Protect ELLs from Bullying in Your Classroom and School | Colorín Colorado](#): Tips for addressing bullying problems that may affect English Language Learners.
- [Tools for Your Child's Success](#): Discussions to support children with a variety of topics.
- [How to implement a Calm Corner in the classroom](#): Guidance on creating a calm corner.
- [Self-Care Assessment](#): This assessment tool provides an overview of effective strategies to maintain self-care.
- [Self-Care and Mental Wellness Padlet](#): A variety of resources to use at home or in the classroom.



ACCESS TO EDUCATION AND ATTENDANCE

Education isn't a privilege; it's a fundamental right. Showing up to school each day builds the shared experiences, trust and connections that shape a vibrant, inclusive community. Consistent attendance allows students to feel seen, supported and safe—making it possible for culture, belonging and care to truly flourish.

Resources to support LEAs with practical strategies and resources to create a more inclusive and engaging educational environment to improve student attendance, academic outcomes and overall student wellbeing.

Child Welfare and Attendance (CWA) Professional Learning:

- [Attendance Driven - Racing Toward Better Attendance](#)
Aug. 12 and 19, 9:30-11 a.m.
Series designed to equip educators with effective strategies to improve student attendance and engagement.
- [LACOE Monthly CWA Cafe](#)
The 2nd Tuesday of every month, 11 a.m. - 12:30 p.m.
Join us to ask the questions that you need answers to and to share information that you have discovered.
- [Regional Learning Network \(RLN\) Meetings](#)
2025 Dates: Sept. 3, Oct. 1, Nov. 19
2026 Dates: Jan. 21, Feb. 4, March 4, April 1, May 6, June 3
9-11 a.m.
Engage, network and discuss best practices gain knowledge and support and strengthen staff capacity.

Resources:

- [Attendance Playbook](#)
A comprehensive tool for educators and administrators to implement evidence-based practices that can significantly improve student attendance, academic outcomes and overall student wellbeing. New version coming soon.





INDEPENDENT STUDY

Independent Study (IS) is an alternative to classroom instruction consistent with a local educational agency's (LEA's) course of study and aligned with State content standards. IS can serve as a voluntary alternative instructional strategy to meet the academic needs of students outside of the traditional classroom setting.

For more information, contact Child Welfare and Attendance at 562-922-6233 or cwa@lacoed.edu.

Resources:

- [Independent Study Toolkit](#)



IMMIGRATION AND STUDENT PRIVACY

Every child has the constitutional right to a quality education, regardless of immigration status. By equipping our schools and families with essential tools and knowledge, we aim to empower our families and educational communities with knowledge and support, help schools maintain welcoming, inclusive environments, ensure every student can focus on learning and growing and strengthen our school communities through mutual support.

Resources:

- [LACOE Immigration Enforcement Guide for Students and Families](#): This Immigration Toolkit is designed to provide students and families with practical guidance and resources to help them stay informed, organized and supported. It includes steps for creating a family preparedness plan, tips for safeguarding important documents and connections to trusted local organizations offering legal and community support.
 - [Spanish](#)
- [Migrant Education Program - Region 10 Los Angeles County Resources](#): Padlet providing community resources.
- Immigration Training Sessions (K-12): Equips our schools and families with the knowledge and resources needed to navigate complex situations and uphold students' rights within our schools.
 - Visit [LACOE's Immigrant Relations and Services](#) to learn about upcoming training sessions.
- [Student Enrollment and Record Protections](#): Schools are legally required to provide a safe, supportive and non-discriminatory learning environment for all students regardless of immigration status, nationality, ethnicity or religious beliefs. Learn more about the actions schools are taking to uphold these protections.

LACOE Contact:

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NAVIGATING DIFFICULT CONVERSATIONS AND ADVANCING BELONGING IN SCHOOLS

These professional learning experiences and resources equip educators with practical tools to navigate difficult conversations, address bias, and foster inclusive school environments. Participants build skills to combat hate, support marginalized communities and lead with empathy, courage and cultural proficiency—creating spaces where every student feels safe, valued and seen.

Professional Learning:

- [LGBTQ+ Awareness and Cultural Proficiency](#)
Sept. 8, 9 a.m. - Noon
- [Implicit Bias Mitigation \(Fall\)](#)
Sept. 10, 17 and 24; Oct. 1, 9-11 a.m.
- [Anti-Bullying and Harassment for LGBTQ+ Students](#)
Sept. 17, 9:30 a.m. - Noon
- [Cultural Proficiency Mini Certification \(Fall\)](#)
Oct. 20-22, 8:30 a.m. - 4 p.m.
- [Equity and Wellbeing Conference](#)
Oct. 29-30, 8 a.m. - 5 p.m.
- [Transformative Dialogue and Alliance Building Certification Program \(Fall\)](#)
Dec. 3, 4, 9 and 11, 8:30 a.m. - 4 p.m.
- [Leading with Heart: Transformative Leadership for LGBTQ+ Belonging in Schools](#)
Dec. 3, 2025; Jan. 27, 2026; March 2, 2026, 8:30 a.m. - 3 p.m.
- [Implicit Bias Mitigation \(Spring\)](#)
Jan. 22 and 29, 2026; Feb. 5 and 12, 2026, 9-11 a.m.
- [Transformative Dialogue and Alliance Building Certification Program \(Spring\)](#)
Feb. 18, 19, 24 and 26, 2026, 8:30 a.m. - 4 p.m.
- [Cultural Proficiency Mini Certification \(Spring\)](#)
March 24-26, 2026, 8:30 a.m. - 4 p.m.

Resources:

- [Media Literacy Now K-12](#)
- [USC's Race and Equity Center K-12 PD & Resources](#)





CIVIC ENGAGEMENT

Civic engagement involves individual and group efforts to address public issues and improve community life through both political and non-political means. Engaging students in civic action allows them to explore topics they care about, fostering a sense of empowerment and deeper connection to their education.

Professional Learning:

- [Increasing Student Engagement and Achievement through Civic Action](#)

Sept. 12 and Oct. 1, 8:30 a.m. - 3:30 p.m.

Empower K-12 students as civic-minded leaders by linking engagement to academic growth and designing meaningful civic projects.

Resources:

- [California Preschool Curriculum Framework](#)
- [iCivics](#): Nationally Recognized Organization with nonpartisan resources offered at every grade level.
- [Close Up Foundation](#): A nonprofit, nonpartisan, civic education organization that believes a strong democracy requires active, informed participation by all citizens.

LACOE Contact:

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ETHNIC STUDIES

Ethnic Studies is an inter and multi-disciplinary field focused on critically examining the perspectives, cultures and histories of racial and ethnic groups, with an emphasis on historically marginalized groups within the United States.

Professional Learning:

- [Ethnic Studies Three Day Summit](#)

Sept. 8, 2025, Oct. 19, 2025, Feb. 15, 2026, 8:30 a.m. - 3:30 p.m.

This three-day professional learning opportunity is designed for educators seeking practical, research-based strategies to create more inclusive and responsive classrooms.

Resources:

- [Identity Mapping Activity](#) from Facing History and Ourselves.
- [Cesar Chavez Day Lessons](#) from the Cesar Chavez Foundation.
- [California Department of Education's Ethnic Studies Model Curriculum](#)
- [California Educators Together](#) holds hundreds of vetted ethnic studies lessons.
- [LACOE Ethnic Studies Video Series](#): A comprehensive ethnic studies video series with corresponding resource materials to assist teachers and administrators prepare to offer ethnic studies courses.

LACOE Contact:

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FAMILY AND COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

Families are essential to supporting student success and wellbeing. It is important to engage families through cultural humility and an assets-based approach in which they are viewed as experts of their own needs and solutions before implementing strategies. These approaches facilitate empowerment, respect for voice and choice, so families can be active participants in the areas that directly impact them while dismantling systemic inequities.

Professional Learning:

- [Foundations of Family and Community Engagement \(FACE\)](#)

Sept. 10 and 12, 1-2:30 p.m., via Zoom

This two-day interactive training provides foundational support for districts, LEAs, and school sites to deepen their understanding and implementation of Family and Community Engagement within the California Multi-Tiered System of Support (MTSS) framework.

- [FACE 2.0: Deepening Impact Through CA MTSS](#)

Nov. 5 and 12, 1-2:30 p.m., via Zoom

The training emphasizes capacity building, continuous improvement and aligning engagement efforts with district goals and priorities.

Resources:

[Spectrum of Family and Community Engagement for Educational Equity](#)



VIDEO STORYTELLING FOR STUDENTS

Join Tyler Cook, LACOE's Multimedia Production Manager, for a webinar to learn about how you can inspire your students to share their unique stories in dynamic and engaging ways.

The webinar will focus on introductory strategies for shaping personal voice into engaging video content. Learn how to guide your students in creating compelling video narratives using readily available tools, empower students to become confident digital storytellers and give their voices a platform.

Professional Learning:

- [Video Storytelling for Students](#)
Aug. 19, 3 p.m.
- [Video Storytelling for Students](#)
Aug. 26, 3 p.m.





CONTACT US

We extend our sincere gratitude for your continued commitment to fostering inclusive and understanding environments within our classrooms and schools. Over the coming months, we'll be sharing even more resources designed to support inter-group dialogue, encourage courageous conversations and provide strategies that celebrate our rich human diversity and combat exclusion. We look forward to continuing this vital work alongside you.

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