

**In the Event of Increased Immigration Enforcement in your Community:
What MN Adult Basic Education Providers Have Learned During “Operation Metro Surge”**

1. Do not wait to prepare.
2. Draft safety protocols for your organization and for your students before they are needed.
3. Expect fear to reshape programming overnight.
4. Identify and connect to local immigrant advocacy and legal aid groups early.
5. Build relationships now, before advocacy & legal aid groups are overwhelmed with requests.
6. Create visible safety and perimeter awareness.
7. Build trauma-informed capacity in advance.
8. Create a rapid basic-needs response infrastructure.
9. Protect trust more fiercely than data compliance optics.
10. Advocate upward early. *(more details at end of document)*

Lessons from Minnesota Adult Education Programs, February 2026

Issue	Assumptions	Specific Action Items
<p>1. Safety First: Shift Delivery of Instruction Immediately</p>	<p>Fear alters attendance patterns overnight.</p> <p>Safety is not optional.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Move to temporary 100% online or hybrid models immediately. ● Offer synchronous online classes to maintain community. ● Maintain in-person options if families feel safe. Some students want/need the in-person interaction and are willing to take on the risk in order to see their classmates and maintain some sense of normalcy.

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	<p>Students and staff of color, regardless of immigration status, can easily be the target of ICE harassment and detention. Some encounters are violent.</p> <p>Some people will not feel safe leaving their homes, and this instinct should be honored. Others will want to continue coming to school in-person and that decision should also be respected.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Respect their choices, while also making sure they have as much accurate and current information as possible, preferably in their home languages. ● Hire security support for evening/weekend programming if feasible. ● Establish clear staff safety protocols (visitor response, documentation handling). ● Communicate clearly and repeatedly regarding how to attend class: students may choose online without penalty. ● Create and post signage to indicate who is allowed in the building, and where visitors are allowed to wait.
<p>2. Trauma-Informed Response Is Not Optional</p>	<p>Education is happening inside survival mode for both staff and students.</p> <p>No one is at their best in this state. Expect emotional dysregulation and all that comes with it.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Train staff in acute stress responses and trauma-informed practice. ● Normalize fear in communications ("You are not alone; this is stressful"). ● Build in emotional check-ins in classes and meetings. ● Reduce academic demands temporarily. ● Expect hypervigilance and attendance fluctuations. ● Provide staff debrief spaces and supports to address emotional distress and overwhelm. ● When possible, refer students to support groups and services; create a resource binder and list free mental health support services, ideally with multilingual and culturally appropriate options.

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<p>3. Rapid Basic Needs Infrastructure</p>	<p>Food and rent will eclipse learning.</p> <p>Adult education programs can help either directly, or in partnership with local food shelves, churches, and other mutual aid efforts.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Establish emergency grocery delivery systems, and/or tap into the existing food support networks in your area (neighborhood, faith communities, and mutual aid networks). ● Create or activate a basic needs fund. ● Partner with trusted community organizations for rental support. ● Develop referral lists for legal aid and Know Your Rights workshops. ● Prepare for work authorization disruptions and employer confusion. ● Anticipate religious calendar impacts (e.g., Ramadan).
<p>3. Visible Community Presence & ICE Observance</p>	<p>Seeing staff and volunteers near the school entrance increases physical and psychological safety.</p> <p>Visibility reassures students and staff without creating legal exposure.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Increase staff presence during arrival, dismissal, and evening programming. ● Designate a staff member to coordinate patrol teams for peak arrival and dismissal times. ● Recruit trusted volunteers to greet students at the door, walk the perimeter of the school, and to be present in parking lots and nearby corners. (Consult legal counsel before organizing volunteer monitoring or patrol activity). ● Provide patrolling volunteers/staff with safety vests and whistles. ● Establish clear, written, protocols for responding to enforcement presence at your site or center. ● Partner with trusted community organizations to train students and staff on their rights (Know Your Rights) and what to do and not do if enforcement appears (such as Monarca or Immigrant Defense Network training, but for your specific context/location). ● Partner with trusted community organizations to assist with arranging for parental authority for children (DOPA) in the event of detention (seek out

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		<p>organizations for your specific context/location, but similar to Monarca or Immigrant Defense Network).</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Assist students in memorizing key phone numbers in the event of detention, including an immigration lawyer or organization. • Communicate calmly with students and staff about safety plans at your program to reduce rumor-based panic.
<p>4. Data Privacy & Trust Protection</p>	<p>Enrollment requirements, (such as asking for social security numbers, addresses, etc.) can conflict with safety.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Review intake forms: minimize non-essential data collection (i.e., home addresses, other identification). • Train staff on digital security and email/text protocols. (Immigration enforcement uses sweeping surveillance technology to track cell phone activity of entire neighborhoods and monitors people via social media and internet data. Be aware of potential risks based on activities in your programs and community.) • Reassure students about how data is stored and protected. • Avoid public sharing of student identities or locations.
<p>5. Attendance & Enrollment Strategy</p>	<p>Drops in attendance reflect fear, not lack of need.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reframe attendance declines internally as safety-driven. • Adjust funding conversations proactively (fear-driven drops are not program failure). • Track online engagement carefully to see patterns and predict what's needed. Consider having a code word for when students are logging into class remotely out of fear, for example. This can be helpful in making decisions about programming. • Maintain flexible enrollment. • Prepare for sharp short-term drops and rapid rebounds.

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<p>6. Staff Sustainability & Emotional and Moral Distress</p>	<p>Staff are absorbing trauma alongside students.</p> <p>In addition to losing students, their family members, and other community members to ICE detention, expect symptoms of moral injury (a sense of betrayal by systems and authorities).</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Offer remote work flexibility. ● Create clear lines about what staff can and cannot do. ● Rotate high-stress responsibilities. ● Provide access to counseling or secondary trauma support. ● Encourage boundaries around after-hours crisis response. ● Name moral distress openly.
<p>7. Community Solidarity with Guardrails</p>	<p>Mutual aid will surge—but must be structured.</p> <p>Prepare for an influx of volunteerism, donations, etc. Be ready to manage this generous, but time consuming reality to benefit as many as possible.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Develop vetted volunteer systems. (Be aware that ICE tracks the names, addresses, and vehicles of people who engaged in legal observation. People providing mutual aid to vulnerable populations and people actively bearing witness to ICE activities should be two separate groups and vehicles.) ● Coordinate food delivery safely. ● Avoid informal networks that increase surveillance risk. ● Create centralized communication channels.
<p>8. Communications & Narrative Protection</p>	<p>Fear spreads faster than facts.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Share verified updates only. ● Combat misinformation quickly. ● Provide multilingual communications. ● Frame program shifts as protective, not reactive. ● Publicly state that enrollment drops are policy-driven consequences.

National & Policy-Level Recommendations

Minnesota's experience suggests: **Advocate upward early.** That is, do not wait for enrollment drops or crisis headlines before communicating impact to funders and policymakers.

Who is "upward"?

- State Department of Education
- Federal reporting contacts (OCTAE)
- Legislative liaisons
- School district leadership
- Board/Advisory Council members
- Major funders
- Professional organizations (COABE, NCL, state TESOL affiliate, etc.)

Why early?

- Attendance drops will look like performance failure.
- Data reports won't show fear.
- Policymakers may not connect enforcement activity to educational disruption.
- Funding formulas don't automatically account for climate-based absenteeism.

What does early advocacy include?

- Alerting state leaders that attendance declines are fear-driven.
- Documenting safety-related program shifts.
- Requesting flexibility in reporting, seat-time, or measurable skill gain requirements.
- Proactively reframing the narrative: "This is not disengagement. This is a survival response."
- Adult education programs must be recognized as frontline trauma sites.
- Federal reporting requirements should allow emergency flexibility.
- Data privacy guidance specific to adult ed is urgently needed.
- Advocacy must name enforcement impact on educational access.

To our Neighbors in other States:

Thank you for taking the time to read through this guidance compiled by a variety of Minnesota adult education providers. We hope you find it useful.

What took place here shouldn't take place anywhere.

Wishing safety and well-being to you and those you serve.

We are all neighbors.

--Colleagues from Minnesota