

National Education Convening: Summary and Lessons Learned



Purposes/Goals of Convening

Kids in Need of Defense (KIND) and the Oakland Unified School District (OUSD) co-hosted “Welcoming Unaccompanied Minors into our Schools and Communities,” a national virtual convening that brought together over 250 teachers, school board members, county officials, and other stakeholders from across the country. Throughout the two-day event hosted as part of our Opportunities for Youth project in California, attendees from across the country, such as Maryland, Washington DC, Ohio, Washington, Texas, New York, and California heard presentations from a number of KIND and OUSD staff, as well as insights from expert panelists. A highlight of the convening was the youth panel, where young immigrants shared their experiences with going to school and receiving legal services, and provided insight into how they would like to be served. A key takeaway is that immigrant children want to be heard, understood, respected, and kept informed of their cases. KIND and OUSD also created an infographic resource (linked under additional resources) titled, “*How to Support Unaccompanied Immigrant Children & Youth Students in U.S. Schools.*”

Who are Kids in Need of Defense (KIND) & Oakland Unified School District?

The two-day convening was hosted in partnership by OUSD and KIND. OUSD has become a model school district for their innovative ideas on how to welcome newcomers into the school system and ensure all children are set up to succeed educationally. Through becoming a Sanctuary School District, OUSD has created a learning environment where children of all backgrounds feel safe and supported in completing their education. OUSD has also launched programs specifically designed to meet the unique needs of newcomers within the school district.

KIND is recognized as one of the leading organizations advocating for the best interests of unaccompanied immigrant children (UIC) and providing legal representation for these children. In addition to providing legal services to these children, KIND works to support the overall well-being of children by advocating for and connecting them to social services like educational opportunities, medical care, mental health and counseling services, and employment placement. KIND staff work closely with school systems to assist UIC register and enroll in classes. In line with KIND’s mission to advocate for the best interests of UIC, the organization advocates for all children to receive fair and equitable education, regardless of immigration status.

Opportunities For Youth (OFY)

The California Department of Social Services, Immigrant Integration Branch launched the Opportunities for Youth (OFY) project in the Fall of 2020 across five California regions (Bay Area, Central Coast, Central Valley, Inland Empire, and Los Angeles). The goal of the OFY project is to offer culturally and linguistically responsive, and trauma-informed supportive services (i.e., case management, service navigation, mentorship, and family support workshops) to UIC and their families. These supportive services are intended: to 1) support healthy and responsive relationships for youth and adults; 2) strengthen youth’s core life skills and adult parenting skills; and 3) connect youth and families with community resources and supports to alleviate stressors. With support from an evaluation team, Harder+Co, the first phase of the project has been focused on developing the capacity of providers and creating assessment tools to measure progress and outcomes. OFY is being implemented using a collaborative and learning-focused approach. Supportive services are being provided in partnership with eight organizations with deep expertise working with and serving immigrant populations. KIND is the lead technical assistance provider for OFY, with the assistance of expert technical assistance from OUSD for OFY providers.



CONVENING BREAKDOWN

Demographics from the two-day event

HOW MANY PEOPLE ATTENDED?

465

REGISTERED ATTENDEES

The convening was attended by 465 participants over the two-day event.



50

SCHOOL DISTRICTS

from 7 different states were represented at the convening



WHO ELSE WAS REPRESENTED?

NGOS &
ADVOCACY
GROUPS

IMMIGRATION
PRACTITIONERS

LAW
ENFORCEMENT

ACADEMIA

PUBLIC HEALTH
PROFESSIONALS

STATE & LOCAL
POLICYMAKERS

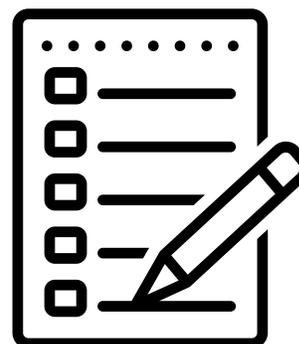
Convening Demographics

The convening effectively brought together an interdisciplinary group of over 450 participants and panelists. Participants represented school districts, immigration practitioners, health and social services practitioners, law enforcement, state and local policymakers, academia, and NGOs and advocacy groups. Interdisciplinary approaches to research, learning, and convenings are critical in providing a wide range of perspectives on a topic and creating comprehensive and holistic recommendations. Interdisciplinary collaboration allows for the analysis, synthesis, and linkages between a variety of disciplines to create a coherent approach.

Building an Interdisciplinary Agenda

The success to this convening relied on building an agenda that covered wide range of topics and provided insights and perspectives from practitioners across disciplines. Rather than narrowly focus on one aspect of education for UIC, the agenda was divided to take a holistic look at how UIC encounter the education system and what ways school districts can support their unique needs.

Panels were led by practitioners and advocates with varying expertise in legal, social, and educational services, as well as in policy and philanthropy work. Panels offered cross-discipline collaboration where practitioners from different sectors provided insights into one topic. This allowed for a more comprehensive approach to the topics and for participants and panelists alike to gain new perspectives and insights from experts outside their own field.



8 STATES

Attendees came from California, Washington, Massachusetts, Maryland, Texas, Ohio, New York, and the District of Columbia



AGENDA

A step-by-step look at building the interdisciplinary agenda

Immigration 101: Overview of Unaccompanied Immigrant Children

The first panel provided the background and context on why children are coming to the United States, the immigration process, and laws that protect them and ensure access to education. This overview of how UIC flow through the immigration system provided participants with an understanding of when and how schools and districts may encounter these children.

Workshops

This convening utilized interdisciplinary workshops, which gave diverse perspectives on a wide range of topics regarding UIC and education. The topics in the workshops included:

Workshop Groups

Setting up District-Wide Systems in Service of Unaccompanied Minors

Socio-Emotional Programming for Unaccompanied Youth in Schools & Beyond

An Administrator's Perspective: Restructuring Schools to Meet the Needs of Unaccompanied Minors

Integrating Legal & Social Services in Support of Unaccompanied Children

Opportunities for Youth Project Journey: A State-Wide System in Supports of Unaccompanied Minors

Trauma-Informed Case Management Practices Serving Unaccompanied Minors

Finding and Leveraging Funding in Support of Unaccompanied Minor Programming

Breakout Rooms

The convening offered a space for participants to meet in small groups facilitated by subject-matter experts to ask questions and discuss certain issues in more detail. The breakout rooms provided technical assistance for:

Schools/Districts
Social Services
Policy & Legal Services

Resilience, Wellness, and Healthy Boundaries for Program Staff

This panel offered tips for practitioners on how to prevent burnout, integrate self-care and wellness into your work, and grounding ourselves in the work. This session included an interactive activity where participants could reflect on *what brings them to the work, what keeps them in the work, and what sustains their work*. The exercise allowed participants to be reflective and think deeply about what brings meaning to this line of work – which can be stressful and traumatic for practitioners as well as the children being served.

Immigrant Youth Panel

The three panelists were all children who came to the United States as UIC. They spoke about their experiences and challenges navigating both the legal and educational systems.

Considerations for Immigrant Youth Panel

Requests for UIC to share their experiences and provide feedback should always aim to empower them to share their stories, while also assessing and sharing potential risks and concerns in advance. It is especially important to have these considerations in mind when planning a speaking engagement with immigrant children and youth who may have endured traumatic experiences and are still undergoing stressful situations, and have had agency, dignity, and control in making decisions for themselves taken away from them.

Preparing the Panel

When preparing a panel comprised of immigrant youth, their well-being should always be at the forefront. Take the time to carefully identify potential panelists that may be appropriate for this panel, considering factors such as safety, mental health concerns, previous speaking engagements, who the audience is, language support needed, and any other stressors. Let the panelists know ahead of time what types of questions they might be asked and prepare them with an outline of what the panel will look like. With virtual panels, it is important to ensure that panelists feel comfortable with using the technology and have a safe setting to join the and speak freely.

When determining who might be a qualified panelist, consider what limitations they might have linguistically, technologically, or logistically with their schedule. Many immigrant youth have employment or household responsibilities outside of school and may need accommodations to fit their schedule. Prior to the panel, determine what benefits exist for panelists to participate. Consider if panelists need to take off from work to participate, travel by public transport, miss class, etc. If possible, consider providing the speakers with fair compensation for their time, as well as reimbursement for associated costs.

In addition to giving careful thought to who the panelists might be, it is important to select a facilitator who can manage the panel. Building rapport and trust with the panelists might help young panelists feel more comfortable and supported during the panel. Additionally, having a facilitator who is culturally sensitive and trauma-informed will help ensure the well-being of the youth during the panel.

THINGS TO CONSIDER FOR AN IMMIGRANT YOUTH PANEL

A trauma-informed approach

Identify Youth for the Panel

Consider what trauma the youth may have gone through and work with them to identify and assess triggering questions or topics. Determine what the youth want to share with the audience.



Allow Space to Opt-In or Out



Give space for youth to share their voices, but respect their boundaries and support them if they choose to skip a question or topic, or use their discretion in sharing their identity and other information.

Prep the Panel

Let the youth know what questions are to come and what to expect during the panel.

Benefits to the Panelists

Determine what the benefits to the youth be and how they might be compensated for their time.

Virtual Panel Considerations

Work out language interpretation needs in advance, video and recording issues for privacy, and how to facilitate comments coming from the audience through the chat function.



Consider Who is Facilitating the Panel

Rapport with panel should be built prior to the discussion.



Facilitator must be culturally sensitive and trauma-informed.

Protect Mental Health

Ensure topics are not invasive or triggering.

Accommodate Schedules

Consider if youth on the panel are in school or working.



Empower the Youth

Youth own their story and should determine how much or little they want to share.

Ending the panel

At the conclusion of the panel, acknowledge their resilience and the value of the information they've shared, and how the audience will work to be accountable to the information, experiences, and recommendations the youth have provided

During the Panel

During the panel, the facilitator should help guide the panelists through topics but provide them with the space to share their experiences and unique voices. Empower the youth to own their story and determine how much or how little they want to share with the audience. The facilitator should allow the youth to skip or pass answering any questions they don't want to. Facilitators may need to read nonverbal signals (change in tone, fidgety, looking away) to identify when the youth are feeling uncomfortable. Some panels may find it useful to provide the audience with trigger warnings prior to beginning the panel. Many immigrant youth have experienced traumatic experiences that can be upsetting for the audience and other panelists to hear. Consider sharing resources for mental health services at the convening.

Ending the Panel

At the end of the panel, acknowledge the acknowledge their resilience and the value of the information they've shared. Organizers of the panel should debrief and seek feedback and suggestions from the panelists and audience members for future sessions.

Resources for Engaging Youth in Storytelling

Storyteller's Bill of Rights

Immigrants Rising, "Storytellers Bill of Rights," <https://immigrantsrising.org/storytelling/bill-of-rights/>

Roadmap to Resilience for Undocumented Storytellers

Define American, "American Dreaming: The Roadmap to Resilience for Undocumented Storytellers,"

<https://download.defineamerican.com/2021/06/American-Dreaming-The-Roadmap-to-Resilience-2021.pdf>

Guidelines on Adolescent Participation and Civic Engagement

UNICEF, "Engaged and Heard! Guidelines on Adolescent Participation and Civic Engagement," <https://www.unicef.org/media/73296/file/ADAP-Guidelines-for-Participation.pdf>

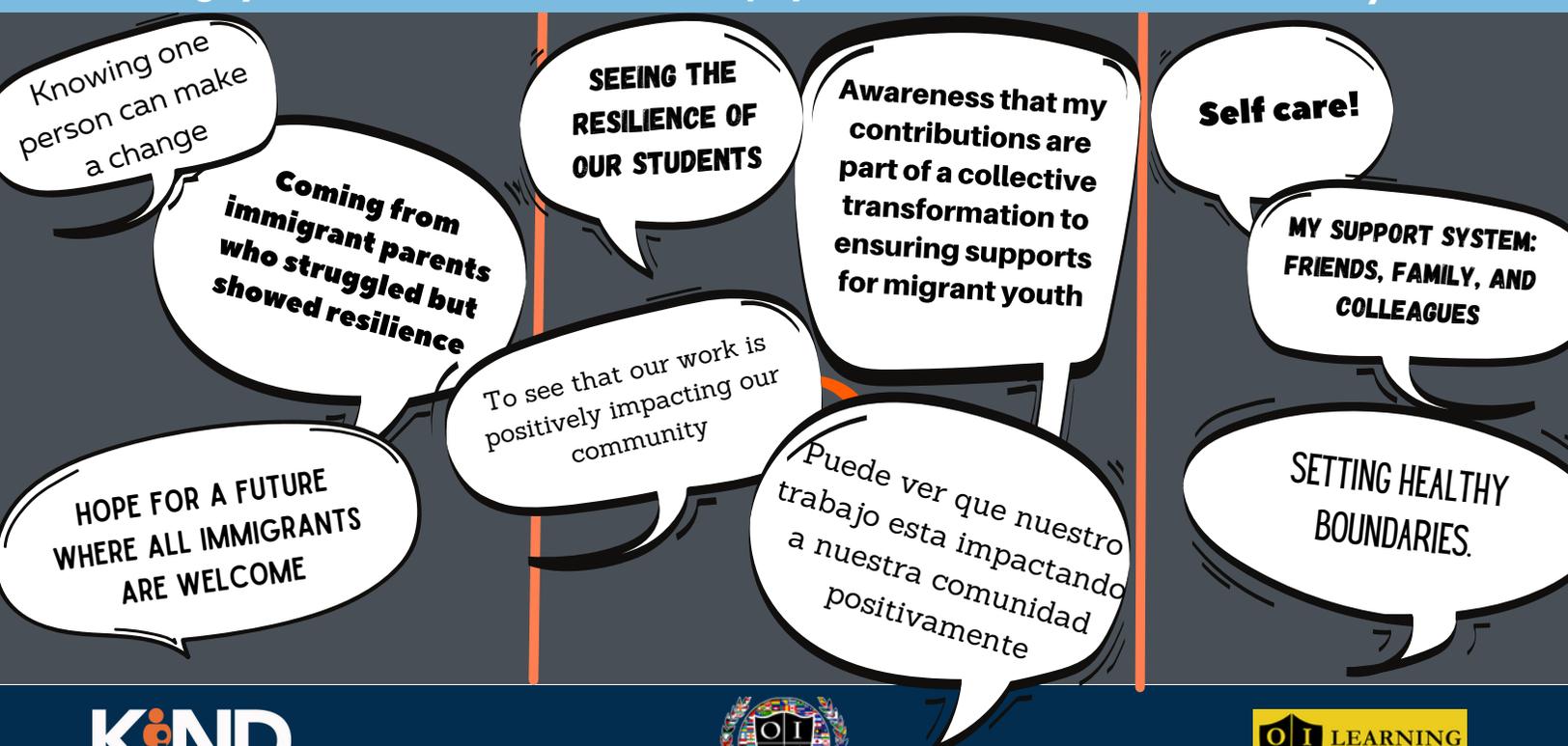
Grounding Exercises for Panelists

During the two-day convening, social workers led the group through interactive wellness exercises. The audience was asked to anonymously submit responses to the following prompts: 1) **what brings you to the work**, 2) **what keeps you in the work**, 3) **what sustains you in the work**. The exercise provided the audience with a space to be reflective about our work and help to ground us. This line of work can be challenging for many practitioners and mentally and emotionally taxing, so having the opportunity to think through and express why this work is important was a meaningful reminder for the audience. Below are some of the responses that were received during this exercise at the convening:

What brings you to the work?

What keeps you in the work?

What sustains your work?



Looking Forward and Key Takeaways

The two-day convening reinforced the need for different stakeholders to come together to share ideas, resources, and information about UIC and their educational and other needs. Below are some of the key takeaways from convening hosts and participants.



WORK TOGETHER

Schools, school districts, services partners need to work together to holistically address the needs of UIC.



GET CREATIVE WITH FUNDING

Be creative in how to search for funding to support services for UIC. In addition to local, state, and federal funding, look to private philanthropy and other partners doing creative work.



BE PRESENT

UICs have better experience of working with services providers who are a consistent presence in their life and provide updates and are easy to communicate and get in touch with.



ENGAGE WITH COMMUNITY

Providers must work to provide outreach to caretakers and engage with the relatives or sponsors of newly arrived students.



BE TRAUMA-INFORMED

All staff should be trained in best practices for working with youth and families who have experienced trauma; staff should also know how to make referrals for more in-depth trauma support. Remember that these young people's first experiences in the U.S. were at the hands of immigration authorities and inside federal facilities.



CREATE A DEDICATED POINT PERSON

Designate a point person to support and serve UIC. This role would ensure the acclimation of newly arrived students and implement programs to address their unique needs.



BE A SANCTUARY AND WELCOMING SCHOOL FOR NEWCOMER IMMIGRANT STUDENTS

Implement, make visible, and educate students and families about school district Sanctuary School policies and policies that welcome newcomer immigrant students.



LIMIT BARRIERS TO ENROLLMENT

Districts must train staff to recognize common UIC identification and documentation and to utilize fair metrics to enroll students who may have experienced interrupted formal education.

Authored by Cristiana Little, Policy Associate, KIND

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Additional Resources

• How to Support Unaccompanied Immigrant Children in Schools

- Kids in Need of Defense, "How to Support Unaccompanied Immigrant Children & Youth Students in U.S. Schools," supportkind.org/resources/how-to-support-unaccompanied-immigrant-children-youth-students-in-u-s-schools

• Statistics of Unaccompanied Immigrant Children

- Migration Policy Institute, "Unaccompanied Children Released to Sponsors by State and County, FY 2014-Present," migrationpolicy.org/programs/data-hub/charts/unaccompanied-children-released-sponsors-state-and-county
- U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Office of Refugee Resettlement, "Unaccompanied Children Released to Sponsors by State," acf.hhs.gov/orr/grant-funding/unaccompanied-children-released-sponsors-state
- U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Office of Refugee Resettlement, "Unaccompanied Children Released to Sponsors by County," acf.hhs.gov/orr/grant-funding/unaccompanied-children-released-sponsors-county

• Federal Resources

- U.S. Department of Education and Justice, "Confronting Discrimination Based on National Origin and Immigration Status," ed.gov/about/offices/list/ocr/docs/confronting-discrimination-national-origin-immigration-status
- U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, "Unaccompanied Children Information," hhs.gov/programs/social-services/unaccompanied-children/index.html
- U.S. Department of Education, "Educational Services for Immigrant Children and Those Recently Arrived to the United States," ed.gov/policy/rights/guid/unaccompanied-children.html
- U.S. Department of Education, Justice & Health and Human Services, "Information on the Rights of Unaccompanied Children to Enroll in School and Participate Meaningfully and Equally in Educational Programs," ed.gov/about/overview/focus/rights-unaccompanied-children-enroll-school.pdf

• Resources for Engaging Youth in Storytelling

- Immigrants Rising, "Storytellers Bill of Rights," immigrantsrising.org/storytelling/bill-of-rights/
- Define American, "American Dreaming: The Roadmap to Resilience for Undocumented Storytellers," download.defineamerican.com/2021/06/American-Dreaming-The-Roadmap-to-Resilience-2021.pdf
- UNICEF, "Engaged and Heard! Guidelines on Adolescent Participation and Civic Engagement," unicef.org/media/73296/file/ADAP-Guidelines-for-Participation.pdf