



THE STATE EDUCATION DEPARTMENT / THE UNIVERSITY OF THE STATE OF NEW YORK / ALBANY, NY  
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SENIOR DEPUTY COMMISSIONER FOR P-12 EDUCATION

August 30, 2010

To: District Superintendents  
Superintendents of Schools  
Administrators of Public, Charter, and Nonpublic Schools

From: John B. King Jr., Senior Deputy Commissioner for P-12 Education

Subject: Student Registration Guidance

### Introduction

The Department has recently received questions from school districts regarding their obligations in enrolling and making residency determinations, particularly with respect to students who are not citizens of the United States. As detailed below, school districts may not deny resident students a free public education on the basis of their immigration status. This guidance is intended to provide an overview and recommended strategies for addressing common issues that districts face in these areas. The Department encourages school districts to review their policies relating to student enrollment and residency to ensure that they are in full compliance with any applicable case law, statutory and regulatory provisions. School districts are advised to consult with their school attorneys in this review.

Pursuant to Education Law §3202(1), a person over five and under twenty-one years of age who has not received a high school diploma is entitled to attend the public schools maintained in the district in which such person resides without the payment of tuition. Moreover, pursuant to Education Law §3205, school districts must ensure that all students within the compulsory school age attend upon full-time instruction. As a result, during the enrollment/registration process, school districts commonly request certain information and/or records, such as those establishing a student's date of birth and address to determine a student's age and residency within the district. Districts may also request other information regarding the student's previous academic records, medical records, and proof of immunization (pursuant to Public Health Law and Department of Health regulations).

Undocumented children, like U.S. citizen children, have the right to attend school full time as long as they meet the age and residency requirements established by state law. In a 1982 decision, the U.S. Supreme Court recognized that children who are undocumented immigrants cannot be denied a free public education if they are a factual matter district residents. Plyler v. Doe, 457 U.S. 202 (see Appeal of Plata, 40 Ed Dept Rep 552, Decision No. 14,555). While Plyler did not expressly address the issue of whether a school district may inquire about a student's immigration status at the time of enrollment, this decision is generally viewed as prohibiting any district actions that might "chill" or discourage undocumented students from receiving a free public education. Accordingly, at the time of registration, schools should avoid

asking questions related to immigration status that may reveal a child's immigration status, such as asking for a Social Security number (Note- The Department does not require districts to collect students' social security numbers for any purpose). Moreover, as discussed below, while school districts may need to collect certain data pursuant to State and/or federal laws, they should do so after a student has enrolled in school so as not to inadvertently give the impression that information related to immigration status will be used in making enrollment determinations. Additional guidance related to particular situations is provided below.

## Age

In Appeal of R.L. (49 Ed Dept Rep 9, Decision N15,944), the Commissioner addressed the documentation a district may require as evidence to determine a student's age for admission to school. In that case, a parent of a child adopted from another country claimed that the child's birth certificate was inaccurate and instead attempted to provide medical information to demonstrate her child's age. The Commissioner, citing Education Law §3218, determined that if a parent has a birth certificate record of baptism (giving the date of birth), no other form of evidence may be used to determine a child's age.

However, in cases where a birth certificate or record of baptism is not available, a passport (including foreign passport) may be used to determine a child's age (Education Law §3218[1][b]). If a birth certificate, record of baptism and passport are unavailable, the school district may consider certain other documentary or recorded evidence to determine a child's age (Education Law §3218[1][d]). Below is a list of examples of documentation that may be used for this purpose. Please note that this list is intended only to provide examples of documentation that may be relevant to establishing a student's age; it is not intended to be exhaustive, nor is it a list of required documentation.

- f Official driver's license
- f State- or other government-issued ID
- f School photo ID with date of birth
- f Consulate identification card
- f Hospital or health records (in New York City, Hospital Birthing Records)
- f Military dependent ID card
- f Native American tribal document
- f Record(s) from non-profit international aid agencies and voluntary agencies (VOLAGs)

School districts should be aware that the government of Puerto Rico recently enacted a new law affecting all birth certificates issued by Puerto Rico before July 1, 2010. Pursuant to the new law, all such birth certificates will be invalidated as of September 30, 2010. On July 1, 2010, the Puerto Rico Department of Health began issuing new birth certificates to affected persons. School districts are encouraged to work with families affected by this new law to develop appropriate procedures and strategies to establish student age. For more information, please see:

<http://www.pr.gov/gprportal/inicio> and  
<http://www2.pr.gov/prgovEN/Pages/BirthCertificateInfo.aspx>

## Residency

In Appeal of Plata, the petitioner appealed a school district's determination that her son was not entitled to attend the district's schools solely on the fact that petitioner and her son had entered the country on business/pleasure visas. The Commissioner noted that, for purposes of Education Law §3202, residence is established on two factors: physical presence as an inhabitant within the district and in



immediately enroll a homeless child, even if the child is unable to produce records normally required for enrollment, such as previous academic records, medical records, proof of immunization and proof of residency. If the child needs to obtain immunizations, or immunization or medical records, the enrolling school district must immediately refer the child's parent or guardian to the district's homeless liaison, who must assist the child's parent or guardian in obtaining the necessary immunizations or records.

### Data Collection

As noted above, schools should avoid asking questions related to immigration status at the time of registration. Similarly, the Department makes every attempt to avoid such questions in its own data collection policies and practices (e.g., the Department does not require that school districts report students' social security numbers or their status as "or "undocumented" immigrants). However, several state and federal laws require the Department (and/or school districts) collect certain student demographic data (Attachment A). For example, in order to receive funding under certain federal Title III programs, states and school districts must also collect and report data on "immigrant children and youth" served (20 USC §696 et seq).

In attempting to collect such information, school districts are reminded to use extreme sensitivity and to ensure that such attempts do not inadvertently discourage resident students from enrolling or attending school and that such information (or its unavailability) is not used to deny resident students free public education (see *Plyler v. Doe* 457 U.S. 202). For example, school boards are encouraged to adopt policies to ensure that such data is used only for its intended purpose pursuant to applicable State or federal requirements, and that district staff do not require such data or information as a condition of enrollment or continued attendance. To ensure that requests for such information do not inadvertently chill students' access to a free public education, the Department recommends that districts collect such data after students are enrolled in school. School districts should also consider seeking or providing training on the appropriate techniques and strategies to employ in the district's enrollment, registration, and data collection processes. Finally, the Department recommends that school districts review the data collection components of their student information management systems with their system provider to ensure that only those required elements are collected.

School districts are advised to visit our website regularly for any updates related to these issues ([www.emsc.nysed.gov/sss/](http://www.emsc.nysed.gov/sss/))

### Student Visas/Foreign Exchange Students

Inquiries on the federal student visa process should be directed to the appropriate federal agency (e.g., U.S. Department of Homeland Security, U.S. Department of Education, U.S. Student and Exchange Visitor Program [SEVIP]).

### For More Information

This guidance document will be updated or revised as appropriate. For more information, please see <http://www.emsc.nysed.gov/sss/lawsregs/>

Technical assistance is also available from the Department's Student Support Services Unit at (518) 486-6090.

Attachment A

Student Demographics

<p>FIELD NAME (DATA ELEMENT NAME)                      * = Required for all students                      + = Required only for specified students</p>	<p>Instructions or Rules</p>	<p>Requirement                      (State, Federal, or Policy)</p>	<p>Use(s) / Purpose(s) Include</p>
<p>HOME LANGUAGE CODE                      (HOME LANGUAGE DESCRIPTION)</p>	<p>Language routinely spoken in the student's home</p>	<p>Federal regulations 34 CFR Part 76                      EDFacts file 141 (LEP Enrolled)                      EDFacts file 045 (Immigrant)                      ESEA Title I, Title III</p>	<p>The home language description is the first step in the identification and screening process to determine whether a newly enrolled student may be eligible for federal and/or State Bilingual or ESL programs and services.</p>
<p>PLACE OF BIRTH                      (STUDENT'S PLACE OF BIRTH )</p>	<p>City State/Province/Region Country</p>	<p>Federal regulations 34 CFR Part 76                      EDFacts file 045 (Immigrant)                      ESEA Title I, Title III</p>	<p>This information is used in programmatic, instructional, and administrative planning and decision-making.</p>
<p>+INITIAL US ENTRY DATE                      (DATE OF ENTRY INTO UNITED STATES)</p>	<p>Required for immigrants only. Date when the student entered the United States for the first time. Cannot be a future date, must be after the student's date of birth, and cannot be less than the reported school year minus 25 years. If field 49 = Y, fields 38 through 40 are required.</p>	<p>Federal regulations 34 CFR Part 76                      EDFacts file 045 (Immigrant)                      ESEA Title I, Title III</p>	<p>For accountability purposes, LEP students who have attended schools in the US (not including</p>

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