

Education Review

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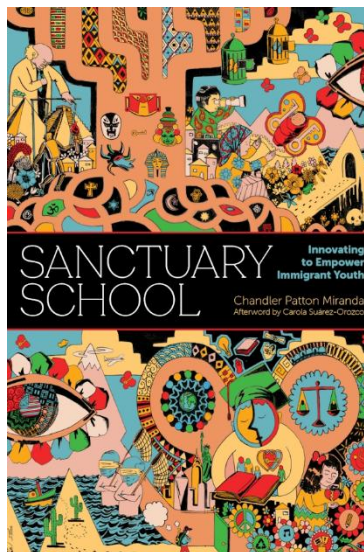
Miranda, C. P. (2025). *Sanctuary school: Innovating to empower immigrant youth.* Harvard Education Press.

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Sanctuary School begins with the retelling of the 2016 election, which resulted in the first Trump administration. Of particular concern was the fact that his entire campaign was marred by anti-immigrant rhetoric. Like many educators across the country, teachers in New York City were uncertain about the future that awaited the immigrant students and families they served. This moment in time serves as the backdrop of *Sanctuary School*, a book dedicated to examining how one high school in New York City provided sanctuary to its immigrant students.



To make sense of how International High School organized and enacted sanctuary policies, author Chandler Patton Miranda looks back in time to the Sanctuary Movement of the 1980s as well as the recent work of different cities and organizations across Europe. Informed by the understanding that sanctuary is both a place and a practice, she makes the case that International High School is unique in its ability to move beyond enacting sanctuary policies to safeguard their immigrant students. Unlike other schools serving immigrant students, International High School has enacted sanctuary through its innovative school-level practices that foster welcoming and belonging for its immigrant students.

In presenting her case, Miranda draws on an ethnographic study she conducted across two academic years (September 2016 – June 2018). Relying on more than 200 hours of participant observations, interviews with youth and educators, focus groups with students and teachers, and analysis of school documents, she tells the story of how International High School embodies what it means to be a “sanctuary school.” Readers might be more familiar with the idea of a “sanctuary school” as one that seeks to protect immigrant students through legally supported noncompliance and advocacy. However, Miranda argues that a “sanctuary school” is one that prioritizes a whole-school approach to disrupting

the status quo for immigrant students. The two tenets of sanctuary are explored in Part 1: Sanctuary as Protection and Part 2: Sanctuary as Innovation.

In Part 1, the author examines how schools navigated the aftermath of the 2016 election by engaging in sanctuary as protection. In Chapter 1, she describes how International High School adapted its practices upon realizing the danger their immigrant students could face. Miranda captures how changing immigration policies resulted in a growing fear amongst families and students about their own safety. In light of this reality, educators at International High School engaged in cultural shifts as they worked to ensure students and families understood their constitutional rights and began to provide opportunities for students to learn about migration throughout their coursework. As Miranda notes in Chapter 2, sanctuary as protection is more than just about providing legal protection; it ensures that immigrant students are safe. Through the story of Milagros, a student, and her teacher, Luz, readers learn about the importance of addressing immigrant students' physical safety, socio-emotional needs, and legal issues. The success of Milagros and Luz was only possible because International High School worked to eradicate structural barriers that harm immigrant students and instead adopted school-level practices that prioritize meeting the needs of their immigrant students. Learning cannot occur when the needs of newly arrived immigrants who require specialized attention are dismissed.

In Part 2, the author examines how International High School is structured to be a sanctuary school. Throughout Chapter 3, she details how different elements from the bulletin boards featuring student work, the placement of students in cohorts, and the classroom set-up prioritizing collaborative work fostered an environment of close-knit relationships. Peer and teacher support are crucial to the success of students. The work of International High School does not end there as it engaged in innovative practices like extending students' graduation timelines and providing internships to students in order to grant them opportunities to develop the skills necessary for their postsecondary success. Given the emphasis on accountability measures that prioritize fast results, Miranda argues that International High School has intentionally disrupted the status quo by granting immigrant students the time and space they need to be successful.

In the last two chapters, the author brings attention to how a sanctuary school is only due in part to its educators. In Chapter 4, Miranda showcases how school leadership has prioritized mentoring for new teachers and fostered leadership development among its veteran teachers. Whereas the majority of teachers of multilingual students are monolingual and white, school leadership has prioritized hiring educators like Carolina, Luz, Manchu, and Lupe who reflect the school's culturally and linguistically rich and diverse student population. Though there have been many efforts to diversify the teacher pipeline, what makes International High School unique is its success with collectively supporting, mentoring, and developing its teachers. Beyond the school space and its educators, the author sheds light on how advocacy efforts extending beyond the school and occurring at the district, state, and national level has resulted in innovative teaching practices. One example of such a change is the use of Performance-Based Assessment

Tasks in place of standardized assessments that have been found to inaccurately capture students' content knowledge. These advocacy efforts, which began decades ago with a small group of educators, now encompass the work of many other educators and advocates across the state and country. Indeed, a sanctuary school is one that undertakes the necessary political work to improve educational policies and practices for immigrant students.

The author concludes by describing four key mindsets shifts that are necessary if educators and schools want to take up the work of creating a sanctuary school. Recognizing the failure of the state to protect immigrant communities, Miranda reminds readers that schools like International High School have dedicated years to creating a sanctuary school, one that not only protects but empowers its students and teachers. One aspect of the first mindset shift entails educators' recognition that teaching is political. It is for this reason that a school like International High School is an exception given its ability to disrupt the status quo through innovative practices that seek to eliminate structural barriers that negatively impact immigrant students. The second mindset shift focuses on "holistic knowing of the whole child's past, present, family, and hopes for the future" (p. 167). Relatedly, the third mindset shift calls on educators to prioritize a stable educational environment. Both these mindset shifts take into consideration the unique needs of immigrant students and how schools can reshape their practices to best meet their needs whether that is through the provision of 5-year graduation plans or the hiring of teachers who are eager to collaborate with others and engage in reflective practices. The last mindset shift entails schools centering and leveraging immigrant students' unique set of skills and knowledges. A sanctuary school views immigrant students and families as key partners.

In conjunction with the discussion of the various mindset shifts, Miranda provides a detailed list of actions that educators can take to work towards the creation of a sanctuary school. Whatever the expertise of the reader, the author highlights the diverse ways educators can advocate for their immigrant students including championing for improved federal policies targeting immigrant communities, state policies that take into consideration the unique needs of students classified as English learners, whether that entail assessment policies or graduation policies, as well as local policies that ensure the lawful noncompliance of requests to assist federal immigration agents. Beyond these actions at the policy-level, she also discusses actions that educators can take at their own school-sites whether that be through the creation of safe spaces for undocumented students, the acquisition of professional development for teachers and school counselors alike, or adoption of practices that prioritize integrated content language instruction. Educators will find that the calls to action are bountiful. There is something for everyone to do.

At a time when the immigrant community is viciously under attack, *Sanctuary School* provides hope for the many educators who wish to provide sanctuary to the students and families they serve. Yet as Miranda beautifully explains through the stories of immigrant youth and the educators that serve them, sanctuary schools do more than just protect through minimal compliance with federal agencies like Immigration and Customs Enforcement. A sanctuary school is intentionally

designed, and its educators engage in innovative practices that aim to remove structural barriers that impede the success of its immigrant students and their teachers. Such a school both protects and empowers immigrant students.

As Miranda states,

Educators must acknowledge that there is no neutrality in public education, and silence is an endorsement of hateful, racist, and anti-immigrant rhetoric. From segregated schools serving large numbers of immigrant, undocumented, and other racialized and traditionally marginalized students, teachers must see their work as oriented toward justice for all children and acknowledge how the state and society have strategically disadvantaged immigrant communities in a multitude of ways (p. 158).

There is no better time than now for educators to acknowledge the powerful role they can play in providing sanctuary to the millions of immigrant students across the nation.

About the Reviewer



Sophia L. Ángeles is an assistant professor of multilingual education for the College of Education at Penn State University. She earned her Ph.D. from the School of Education and Information Studies at the University of California, Los Angeles. Stemming from her experiences as a former educator working in multilingual and immigrant communities, Dr. Ángeles' interrogates how and why language programs are designed in ways that translate into differential access to college and career readiness opportunities for high school newcomer youth.

She was the recipient of the 2021 Haynes Lindley Doctoral Dissertation Fellowship and the 2022 AERA Urban Learning, Teaching, and Research SIG Best Article Award.

About the Author



Chandler Patton Miranda is assistant professor of education at Molloy University, an anthropologist of education, and a former high school teacher. She studies how schools and educators navigate the pressures of exclusionary policies, accountability mandates, and a hostile political climate. Chandler's scholarship has appeared in *Harvard Educational Review*, *Anthropology & Education Quarterly*, *Leadership and Policy in Schools*, and *Equity & Excellence in Education*. Before becoming a professor, she spent seven years teaching high school science in Texas and

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