

‘How can we help?’ Lincoln Square school rallies around family after ICE takes parent of special needs child



Ingrid Guanume's husband, Brayan Plata, was detained by federal immigration enforcement officers while working as a landscaper in Skokie, Nov. 6, 2025. (Chris Sweda/Chicago Tribune)



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This is how the staff at Chappell Elementary School in Lincoln Square found out one of their families had been torn apart.

A fourth-grade girl was in the lunchroom when she began to cry. School workers called for a counselor, and the student told them that her father had been arrested by immigration agents.

Teachers reached out to the child's mother, Ingrid Guanume, who told them federal immigration agents had taken her husband, Brayan Plata, Wednesday while working at his landscaping job in Skokie. Guanume and Plata live in the Albany Park neighborhood with a newborn, a 5-year-old autistic preschooler and their older daughter.

The loss has unsettled their family, Guanume said. She and her husband are Colombians seeking asylum. They arrived in Chicago in 2018. The U.S. Department of Homeland Security released a statement accusing him of overstaying a visa "by more than six years." Guanume said her husband has a license and work permit.

"He's the one who works, who takes care of his three children," Guanume told the Tribune.

What happened next is a familiar sequence of events since President Donald Trump launched Operation Midway Blitz, a wave of immigration raids the administration originally said was targeted at "the worst of the worst" but has expanded to pursue as many immigrants without permanent legal status as possible.



Ingrid Guanume shows a photo of her husband, Brayan Plata, on her phone on Nov. 6, 2025. Plata was detained by federal immigration enforcement officers while working as a landscaper in Skokie. (Chris Sweda/Chicago Tribune)

The community sprung into action. Two parents at the school, Audra Wunder and Erin Tobes, who have been leading safety efforts through the Parent-Teacher Organization began asking basic questions.

“Does she need food? Does she need clothing?” Tobes recalled. “People immediately (responded), How can we help? How can we help? [We set up a GoFundMe](#) knowing we will have legal fees ... We were able to collect groceries, diapers, wipes.”

When the women delivered the goods to the family Thursday night, Tobes thanked the little girl for alerting the school.

“You’re so brave to reach out and ask for help for your mom,” Tobes told her.

The girl teared up.

“I said, ‘We’re here to help no matter what,’” Wunder said. “If you need something, reach out.”

Wunder said she has been inspired by the “heartwarming response” from the community.

“But it’s devastating that this is something that even needs to be responded to,” Wunder said.



Parents Erin Tobes, left, and Audra Wunder pass out whistles and information packets as staff and parents form a protective perimeter around Chappell Elementary School in Chicago on Oct. 14, 2025, following a tip of possible ICE agents returning to the neighborhood. (Antonio Perez/Chicago Tribune)

According to its online locator system, which spells his first name as “Bryan,” Plata is being held in Michigan. Guanume said she has been able to talk with her husband, but the family is facing deep uncertainty and disruption.

Their autistic child is in the most intensive program and has made great strides, the family’s case manager Margot Taylor told the Tribune.

“He’s made such great gains that he has started spending, with mom’s consent, some of his time in one of our general education preschool classes to spend time with general education peers. That has been going very well,” Taylor said.

Chappell educators were looking forward to being able to recommend a less restrictive environment for him for the future. Now they’re not so sure what is going to happen next.

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“We know young children, especially with disabilities, benefit from consistency and support and the intensive support he’s received and exposure to general education and special education peers has resulted in tremendous gains,” Taylor said. “His whole team is hoping that the support will continue, that it’s not interrupted so he can continue these gains with his family intact given they are a very important part of his IEP team.”

Speaking of the way the government has handled immigration arrests, Tobes said, “It feels like a kidnapping. It doesn’t feel like a legal process.”

“I think that’s something a lot of people are struggling with in our communities. This isn’t being handled in a way that makes sense to everybody,” she said. “It feels inhumane.”

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