TeachME PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT
CEUs for Teachers and Educators

Helping Newcomer Students Succeed



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Introduction

The importance of newcomers and newcomer students in modern American society cannot be overstated, yet the amount of support we tend to provide them for their success can often be startlingly minimal. The United States public school system can constitute an incredibly helpful asset in helping students assimilate into American society (without erasing their own cultural heritage). This means that it's key for United States schools and educators to have strategies in place to support newcomer students as they need it.

For example, schools must invest in linguistic support and education, cultural education, and methods of practical support for newcomer students and their families. Ultimately, schools need to find a way to ensure newcomer students have the ability to become as college- and career-ready as their peers. Doing so will involve investing in social-emotional instruction, upping the resources available, and more. We will delve into the current laws regulating the educational experiences of newcomers as well as practical ways that educators can support newcomers in this course.

Case Study 1: Addressing trauma for newcomers in elementary schools

One Californian school district launched a program in partnership with the city's government to help support students fleeing from gang violence in their home countries. Through the support systems in that school district, newcomer youth have slowly begun to feel comfortable sharing their own stories, including descriptions of the conditions that forced them to leave their homes, their journeys to the United States, and what reuniting with (or meeting) their family in the States for the first time has been like. These heavy life experiences are ones that, previously, many of these students have felt the need to shoulder alone. Now, as they are able to share more, schools (and trauma-trained school officials) are able to work to help them receive the mental health services they need to succeed.

Case Study 2: Creating a calm, warm community for newcomer students

An elementary school in Michigan is home to many newcomer students. The school has decided to invest in their well-being by creating a calming, restorative atmosphere in its halls. The school plays classical music over its loudspeaker system in the morning, and the school administrators cover the walls of the hallways with student art (which helps the place feel more community-centric). The principal notes that while not all of her newcomer students are refugees, many do have post-traumatic stress associated with

loud alarms, bells, and noises, so she has decided to opt for alternatives in most cases. The staff is also trained in trauma so they can recognize when a young student requires help.

Section 1: Who are Newcomer Students, and Why is it Important that They Succeed?

If it's a universal goal of educators to help newcomer students succeed, it's important to proceed with a few salient definitions. Who are newcomers, and why is it important that we take extra steps to ensure they have all of the resources and support they require in order to succeed? We'll start this course off by answering a few of these relevant questions.

Who are Newcomers?

'Newcomer' is a blanket term for students who were born outside of the United States. As part of their educational journey, they may have recently arrived stateside, and are now enrolling in a school as part of their new life experience. As 'newcomer' is a general term, it may be helpful to list terms that could fall under this umbrella. Newcomers may include refugees, asylees, unaccompanied and/or undocumented youth, and immigrant children. Aside from this general definition, it may be difficult to provide a more comprehensive sense of the demographics of newcomers. This is intentional: Newcomer students come from all over the world, hail from very different backgrounds, with varying levels of previous educational experience. They may or may not speak English. They are up against incredible challenges, social-emotional obstacles, language barriers, and an overall academically uphill climb (CDE, 2021).

As it is our job as educators to try our very best to meet every student where they are to help them get to where they want to be, we need to start by acknowledging the challenges that these students face. Our educators and educational systems need to figure out ways to support these students, as well as their families. We need to provide practical services and resources. We need to partner with parents and proactively help newcomer families integrate into our communities. It is not on newcomers to build a positive school climate; it's something we all need to work towards. It's also key to realize that this can require sweeping reform on the part of the administration, but it can also happen with small actions on the part of individuals. In this course, we will discuss both of these angles (CDE, 2021).

It may first be beneficial to elucidate a little more clearly who the newcomers to our country are. As mentioned previously, 'newcomer' is an umbrella term. Below, we'll provide more helpful definitions of terms that you may hear used to describe newcomer students and their families (CDE, 2021).

- **Asylees** are those who decide to travel to the United States on their own. Subsequently, these travelers may receive or apply for a grant which gives them asylum. Asylees are not refugees. They may first come to the United States as tourists, as students, or on business (or other similar designations) (CDE, 2021).
- **English learners** are—aside from simply those people who are learning English—more specifically those young people (aged 3 to 21) who are enrolled in school, from a country other than the United States or whose first language is not English, who seek to obtain proficiency in English in order to meet state standards and attend an English-speaking school. 'English learners' can sometimes be abbreviated as 'EL' (CDE, 2021).
- **Immigrant children and youth** are young people who were born outside of the United States who have not been attending schools in the United States for more than three years. (This perhaps arbitrary-seeming definition is for the specific purpose of legislation supporting newcomers in the United States.) (CDE, 2021)
- **Migratory children** are those whose parents are migratory workers (e.g., in the fishing, lumber, or agricultural industries) who have moved within the past three years. This move does not have to be the one into the United States; it can simply be a move from one residence to another, or into a different school district. This definition is also for the specific purpose of keeping legislation clear (CDE, 2021).
- **New American students** are those students who are foreign-born who seek to become integrated into their new communities in the States. (This is another all-encompassing term, much in the same vein as 'newcomer'.) (CDE, 2021)
- **Refugees** are those who have needed to flee their countries of origin due to persecution or fear of persecution based on their political opinion, nationality, religion, race, or membership in a social group (CDE, 2021).
- **Students with interrupted formal education** are those who are in grades 4-12 who have experienced a disrupted education, either in the United States or in their native country. As a result, these students may not be familiar with the

culture of schooling in the United States. This designation can be referred to as the acronym 'SIFE' (CDE, 2021).

- **Unaccompanied minors or youth** (or Unaccompanied children) are those who don't have immigration status in the United States, are not yet eighteen, and don't have a physical or legal guardian in the United States. This is a federal and state term (CDE, 2021).
- **Unaccompanied refugee minors** are those who are in a specific program to receive independent living services, foster care, and culturally-responsive child welfare. These programs may vary extensively from state to state (CDE, 2021).

The important thing to remember is simple: Regardless of their specific designation, these children require our support and attention, as well as organized resources. However, it can be very helpful to ground our ability to provide support in an informed knowledge of the terms used in the world of newcomer students (CDE, 2021).

Are there any laws protecting the rights and educational experiences of newcomers?

Yes. There are federal laws in place that protect the access of newcomer students to an appropriate public education. These laws may be in effect regardless of the language a newcomer speaks, or even their immigration status. In addition to federal programs, there also exist local programs that can ensure newcomer students receive access to high-quality education and provide them with the resources they require to thrive (The Best Schools, 2021).

First of all: There are no laws at the federal level that prohibit students with no documentation from applying to, attending, or graduating from an American school. Some states may have legislation that could interfere with this process, and the process of applying for and receiving aid to attend school if it is required could be substantially more difficult (or impossible) (The Best Schools, 2021).

Here are the laws that have been in effect:

- **The Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act** (or FERPA) is best known for giving families the right to access educational information that regards their children, as well as the right to public information and the right to privacy. The Office of Civil Rights made it clear that as part of FERPA, no public school should ask a student about their immigration status—and no student should feel any obligation to.

However, there are exceptions to FERPA's protections that can adversely impact some newcomer students. For example, sometimes federal immigration laws can take precedence and cause a school district to provide information about a student to another entity (e.g., a government entity). This may occur with some frequency for students seeking student visas. For the most part, FERPA does act by protecting a student's (and family's) right to their own information (The Best Schools, 2021).

- The precedent established in **Plyler vs. Doe** in 1975 concerned laws that required students to show documents proving their citizenship prior to attending public schools. The case concerned whether these laws were discriminatory. The Supreme Court eventually found that the laws were unconstitutional. The specific wording of the finding was important: The Court found that the laws were unduly "directed against children, and impose[d] its discriminatory burden on the basis of a legal characteristic over which children can have little control." This decision, occurring in 1982, served as a precedent disallowing public schools from denying children access to public education based on their immigration status (The Best Schools, 2021).

- **The Illegal Immigration Reform and Immigrant Responsibility** (IIRIRA) Act of 1996 created many new obstacles for newcomers seeking legal status or hoping to achieve residency in the United States. Among many other things, this act dictated that college students who are undocumented cannot use in-state tuition rates. (Some states have implemented workarounds.) While this may not immediately impact your K-12 students, it's definitely something for you to be aware of in your state (The Best Schools, 2021).

- **The Development, Relief, and Education for Alien Minors** (DREAM) Act was first introduced to Congress in 2001. Its goal was to provide a pathway to legal status and even citizenship for newcomers to the United States who first arrived as minors. While this act was not made a law, it created a framework for providing protection and education to newcomer students (The Best Schools, 2021).

- **The Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals** (DACA) act, issued as an executive action while President Obama was in office, helped open some of these pathways for those arriving in the United States as minors. This act gave many young people the chance to access education without legal persecution. Under the Trump administration, many of the protections afforded under DACA were rolled back.

In addition to these federal laws, there are many state-specific laws that can directly impact the ability of a student to access education (The Best Schools, 2021).

It's clear that America's relationship with newcomers has been complicated. Now, as we begin to discuss the necessity and practicality of welcoming newcomers to our schools, it's important to spend some time discussing the contributions newcomers have brought to America.

What are the contributions of newcomers to our country?

Unfortunately, many of the harsher rules put together by our government rest on the assumption that newcomers don't do much for our country. These erroneous assumptions may include the idea that the work of immigrants devalues the work of people who were born here or makes it difficult to build our economy. In reality, the things that newcomers do for our country really can't be overstated. Some of the contributions that newcomers have brought to our country include:

- **Comprising a significant fraction of the workforce dedicated to extremely important economy- and community-building jobs:** Statistics from 2018 show that the percentage of foreign-born adults who participate in the United States labor force is higher than the percent of native-born adults. Moreover, immigrants and newcomers tend to hold jobs in agriculture, infrastructure, home health care, and other key industries without which our nation would not last a single day. The National Academy of Sciences determined in 2015 that it would be extremely difficult to replace the economic contributions of immigrants and newcomers, were legislation to pass that made it impossible for these people to live and work in the United States. In addition, one source reported that "immigrants…take low-skilled [but very necessary] jobs that native-born Americans are either not available or unwilling to take." Yet without the completion of these jobs, our civilization would collapse (CBPP, 2019).
- **Being mobile and flexible.** Research shows that the work performed by immigrants and newcomers requires moving around the country, perhaps very often, working more hours than may be considered healthy, and learning skills on the job or very quickly. Newcomers and immigrants are therefore often able to fill jobs that make our world and other jobs run smoothly because they're willing to be adaptable, often with huge sacrifices and effort on their part. One Harvard economist did the math and found that "efficiency gains [from newcomer labor]

for native-born workers was between $5 billion and $10 billion annually." (CBPP, 2019)

- **Fueling growth in other industries.** In addition to providing labor key to the success of many industries, newcomers to America are also driving growth by increasing the demand in others—e.g., the housing industry. The Census Bureau recently reported that newcomer households made up almost 40% of household growth (CBPP, 2019).

- **Supporting the United States population as it ages and helping bolster the birth rate.** The United States birth rate is historically low, and our population is getting older and older. This requires dedicated, experienced healthcare workers to help elderly adults age in peace. The newcomer population is also helping bolster our dwindling birth rates to ensure that we don't experience a reduced labor force and a slowing economy over the next several decades. About 78% of newcomers are of working age, compared with less than 60% of the native-born population. Without the contributions of newcomers, America would have a hard time supporting the country's needs (CBPP, 2019).

- **Showing upward mobility.** Statistically, the children of immigrants to the United States tend to go far in this country. They get more educated, enjoy higher earnings, and attain high-paying, successful jobs in prestigious careers. According to one economist, "even children of the least-educated immigrant-origin groups have closed most of the education gap with the children of natives." (CBPP, 2019)

Aside from basic economics, newcomers have contributed a lot to historical progress within a variety of industries. Many Americans are already aware of this, which reflects itself in the fact that most Americans (as reported through a 2020 Gallup poll) were largely pro-immigration, and in fact in support of increasing immigration. This, largely, did not change throughout the coronavirus pandemic. A poll administered by NPR in the summer of 2020 found that most of the respondents indicated that immigrants and newcomers are "an important part of the American identity." (CBPP, 2019)

We've already discussed the benefit newcomers bring to the American economy. Let's round this section out by discussing the impact newcomers to America have had across different fields.

- **Newcomers have created jobs.** In one recent analysis, it was found that 45% of firms that made the Fortune 500 list were created by newcomers. (To put that percentage in perspective, only some 14% of the American population are

newcomers.) This ratio isn't only found in top companies: A large fraction of the small businesses and mom-and-pop shops that drive the American economy are founded by newcomers (CitizenPath, 2020).

- **Newcomers generate revenue.** The combined revenue of that newcomer-founded 45% of Fortune 500 companies alone was over $6 trillion. That's more than the whole economy of many industrialized countries. Simply put, according to one analysis, newcomers are more likely than native-born to start businesses, create jobs, and create revenue. This may be related to the fact that some people consider the act of immigration (in some cases) to be an entrepreneurial act in and of itself: The brave act of uprooting oneself and moving to a location where more opportunities are, largely speaking, on the table (CitizenPath, 2020).

- **Newcomers drive innovation in STEM fields.** Much of the recent progress that has been made in different STEM industries has been driven largely by newcomers to America. There are many reasons for this. Some argue that being an immigrant bolsters ingenuity in those who have to make their way through it. Regardless of the specific cause, newcomers are often exceptional creators, innovators, and inventors. The newcomer workforce has a disproportionately high number of individuals holding STEM degrees. Recently, the U.S. Census Bureau released figures indicating that newcomers hold just under a quarter of the number of patents currently registered in the United States. (As they make up less than 15% of the workforce, this is very impressive.) (CitizenPath, 2020)

- **Newcomers help shape American culture and identity.** America's unique culture is a blend of customs brought to our shores from the world over. Our traditions, while heavily influenced by the beliefs of the founding fathers, are evolving over time as newcomers influence the way we do things. Embracing these new traditions helps drive a rich new culture that's everyone's to share—but it's important to acknowledge and celebrate those who made these significant cultural contributions. American cuisine, art, sports, and more would be nonexistent (or, at the very least, extremely boring) without newcomer action (CitizenPath, 2020).

- **Newcomers protect our country.** Whether it's the real and imminent risk that many newcomers took on as essential workers, caretakers, and healthcare professionals during the COVID-19 epidemic or as literal protectors through the United States military, many newcomers have stepped up to risk their life,

health, and happiness for this country — in many cases, despite the lack of support we've been able to offer them. One United States Army Captain said of newcomer soldiers: "They were willing to fight for a country that they weren't even citizens of. I wish all Americans felt that way about their country." (CitizenPath, 2020)

- **Newcomers shape our country's politics.** In the past couple of decades, the number of immigrant politicians has skyrocketed. This is a distinct turn of events from America's history, in which there have been times where newcomers were prohibited or actively discouraged from pursuing a role in politics. Now, despite still-existent hurdles that exist for foreign-born individuals who wish to hold office, many first- and second-generation newcomers now hold high-ranking offices in our country's government (CitizenPath, 2020).

Section 1 Key Points

1. Newcomers may include refugees, asylees, unaccompanied and/or undocumented youth, and immigrant children. It's a blanket term that can refer to young students newly arrived in America as well as their parents.
2. There are federal laws in place that protect the access of newcomer students to an appropriate public education. These laws may be in effect regardless of the language a newcomer speaks, or even their immigration status.
3. Many of the harsher rules put together by our government rest on the assumption that newcomers don't do much for our country. These erroneous assumptions may include the idea that the work of immigrants devalues the work of people who were born here or makes it difficult to build our economy. In reality, the things that newcomers do for our country really can't be overstated.

Section 1 Summary

There are many types of newcomers to our country, and, in years to come, there will be many more. They provide much of what makes this country great (and, indeed, functional), yet many of our systems aren't set up to be as welcoming to them as may seem appropriate. One way that teachers can help ease the tricky transitions for newcomer families and young students is to simply be there for them—providing as much support as possible for people who are going through life-upending processes.

In the next section of this course, we'll begin to provide specific methods for supporting newcomers and welcoming their families into our academic communities.

Section 2: How Schools Can Support Newcomers

Now that we've taken time to discuss who newcomers are and the contributions newcomers have made (and are making) to the United States, let's talk about ways that we can make their lives a little easier — starting by serving students and their families as they enroll in our schools.

What are some specific steps that schools can take to support newcomer students and their families?

As we discuss how to make sure that newcomers feel welcome in our schools, it's important to get clear on what the goal truly is. For example, there are many who believe that the goal of welcoming newcomers is the 'melting pot' analogy popularized throughout America's history. Today, we tend to emphasize that goal a little less, as it indicates that the goal is to make everyone the same. That can be a lot to take in for newcomers to the United States, as well as those who have been living here for some time. Assimilation can connote erasure of people's identity and culture, which can be traumatizing. Instead, the goal should be integration: Welcoming people and making them part of our country while celebrating their individuality (EduTopia, 2021).

As the aim is unity, not uniformity, integration is a dynamic process that is two-way in nature. Newcomers - or integrated individuals - should be able to recognize the positive attributes that they can bring to America's culture and experience the support they need to navigate life as a newcomer with ease. Science backs up this idea: Experts agree that having a strong sense of self-identity is central to our emotional and mental health. Erasing that sense of self for immigrants does them a disservice. As we continue to discuss our ability to welcome newcomers, we need to remember that some type of linguistically- and culturally-affirming integration needs to be the goal (EduTopia, 2021).

There are many ways that we can make that happen. For example, fostering a sense of belonging for our new students can be aided by literature. There is a wide array of books that speak to the experience of newcomers to America, which can help native students grow in empathy and give newcomer students the feeling of being heard. As a result, all students should be better equipped to build integrated communities (EduTopia, 2021).

A similar sense of highlighting the possibility for connections can occur in the cafeteria, where students can share meals together—meals that can include food from different types of cuisines. However, the power of a truly connecting meal can be at its highest if a native family invites a newcomer student or family into their home. This can be a learning opportunity and an incredibly welcoming one. If it's appropriate to do so in your school, you can consider pairing newcomer students with native students and encouraging them to share a few meals together in the evenings or on the weekends (EduTopia, 2021).

Your school can also start at a more administrative level by crafting statements of belonging or placing inclusivity statements around your school. There are also yearly initiatives (such as Welcoming America's Newcomers Week in September) that your school can take part in to emphasize the need for balance and educate all students about the practical aspects of integration (EduTopia, 2021).

How can I welcome newcomer parents so they can better support their children?

Supporting our newcomer children starts with a good amount of support for their parents. Research tells us that a student's nuclear family unit has an incredible amount of influence on how well they do in school. When that child is faced with integration into a new culture, this is at least equally true.

Your school can provide practical support to alleviate issues for your newcomer family in the following ways:

1. **Make sure that your newcomer family keeps their emergency contact number or contact information updated at all times.** Unfortunately, issues affecting the immediate availability of newcomer parents can happen more often, statistically speaking, than to native parents. As a result, your school may need to be able to contact a known caregiver for the student. Give your newcomer families an easy way to ensure that their contact information is updated at all times (Colorin Colorado, 2018).

2. **Educate your entire staff on the basic rights of immigrant and newcomer students.** Regardless of individual political or cultural beliefs, in most situations, all K-12 staff have a duty to protect newcomer students' civil rights and privacy (Colorin Colorado, 2018).

3. **Tell your newcomer families and students that they are welcome.** Create a welcoming environment, and tell your students that you are excited they are there. These are seemingly small gestures, but they can make a huge difference to the experience of a newcomer student. This also helps identify you as someone the newcomer student can turn to in times of difficulty (Colorin Colorado, 2018).

4. **Become an expert in local immigration laws and how immigration can affect students and families.** We can often incorrectly assume that our newcomer families are experts on immigration laws or the psychological ramifications of their experiences. Without invalidating their experiences, it's key that we become an available resource they can lean on for accurate information about their welfare and the governmental requirements affecting their lives. Especially if your school has a large population of newcomer students, you should ensure that at least one member of your staff (or a connected community partner) is highly educated on the local immigration requirements (Colorin Colorado, 2018).

5. **Do some research, and help connect your newcomer families with community organizations that may be able to specifically help them meet their needs.** Relocating to a new community is always overwhelming; when that community speaks another language or is enmeshed in an entirely different culture, that level of overwhelm is magnified. Give your newcomer families access to resources they might need, connect them with other newcomer populations, or even (if your school district deems it appropriate) consider offering to go with them as they complete tasks in their new neighborhood (Colorin Colorado, 2018).

What are some specific teaching strategies that I can use to better support my newcomer English learners?

A key part of integration is learning how to communicate in the American culture. Unfortunately, English is not incredibly easy to learn, but it is the dominant language currently used across much of the United States. For the social and emotional health of the English language learners in our midst, it's key that we make education, friendships, and community as accessible as possible for even the English language learners who have just begun their journey. This can be difficult. In many school districts or schools, there is an ESL teacher who may be able to step in to help ideate structures to help these students. In order to best serve newcomers, it's key that all teachers feel equipped with a few strategies to help newcomer students feel comfortable.

Some of these practical strategies may include:

1. **Investing in closed captioning.** Your school may already have the ability to create and show closed captioning in order to help students who have reduced hearing. Using a similar strategy to help English learners as well will be effective. One study, completed in 2017, found that simply using closed captioning improves learning for many students, so this is a good strategy to use almost regardless of who's sitting in your classroom (EduTopia, 2021).

2. **Using voice-to-text tools** (e.g., voice typing within Google Docs). Many English learners will pick up the oral language first before they feel comfortably fluent in writing and spelling out English words. Equipping students with a voice-to-text option can reduce the number of skills they need to prioritize at the very beginning in order to communicate effectively or complete school assignments. Students can even use the same technology to dictate text in the language they're most comfortable with before using a translation service (such as Google Translate) to produce text in English. Of course, these services aren't always 100% reliable, but they can help reduce language barriers to provide a starting point for effective communication (EduTopia, 2021).

3. **Using instant translation tools.** We'd be remiss not to mention that the Google Translate tool (and similar ones) has added a lot of really functional utilities, such as the ability to hold your camera up to an example of text and instantly see that text translated into another language. This can be helpful for older students or for people who have instant translation needs (EduTopia, 2021).

4. **Actively give your students choices and examples of what to say when they get called on and don't know what to say.** For example, simply giving your students a handout of acceptable responses in that situation (and other common student communication situations), such as "I don't know," or "Could you say that again?" or "I think I need help" will empower your students to communicate their needs a little more effectively (EduTopia, 2021).

5. **Work on pairing evocative gestures with your words to help reinforce communication.** Much of communication is nonverbal. We can easily increase the comprehensible input of our words - or the amount of our communication that is understood by those around us - if we use simple gestures as we speak. It's easy to go overboard with this: For example, it's probably not necessary to mimic riding a bicycle if you're speaking about cycling. However, gesturing to relevant props, pointing in relevant directions, and moving around the room as you speak

will make it easier not only to pay attention to what you're saying, it'll make you easier to understand in general (EduTopia, 2021).

6. **Draw words as you use them in instruction.** As you're using your chalkboard (or whiteboard, or Smart board), draw the concepts in front of the student during presentations. Pepper your presentations with images from Google searches, alternatively. Your goal here is to help your students visualize what you're referring to as you speak (EduTopia, 2021).

7. **Use visual charts that can simplify common phrases.** For example, if you have a chart on the wall with emojis or pictures that represent common emotions (sad! confused! frustrated! happy! scared!), a student who is struggling with English can walk to the chart, point to the picture that represents their feelings, and work towards getting the support that they need. You could also have a chart with images that represent a bathroom, a cup of water, or other common needs (or give each student a laminated chart for use, for older students who may wish for more privacy). If you're looking for examples, a good place to start may be Googling "PECS charts for classrooms". (EduTopia, 2021)

8. **Pair English-learning students up with native English speakers.** One of the best ways to learn any language is to have frequent interactions with someone who is fluent in the language. However, this can feel a little bit overwhelming. If possible, ask your English-learning students to choose from a few volunteer students with whom they'd like to work. This gives your students a sense of control over their situations. They may also be better able than you are to pick someone that they're comfortable being vulnerable with and asking questions on a regular basis (EduTopia, 2021).

9. **Create "language toolboxes" for your English-learning students.** Or, better yet, start one and leave it full of blank pages for them to curate as they please. Purchase a blank notebook or empty binder, and fill it with illustrated vocabulary and phrase words. You can organize it by theme, such as the different places they might need to use certain words (e.g., a cafeteria section that goes over dining phrases and the names of different foods). When your English-learning students have questions or need help with the linguistics of a new subject — say, they're starting a new history module that has a lot of specialized vocabulary — you can help them build a new page to help them navigate the new area of their studies or their life (EduTopia, 2021).

10. **Make sure that your students can hear you.** This is one of the simple tips that sounds like it won't have a big impact, but it's one of the most important things to focus on. Think about it: If your students are trying to learn English, there's truly nothing more frustrating than only being able to hear every third word you're saying. Invest in a high-quality voice amplification system, test your sound system on a regular basis, and, if your school allows you to, record the lesson and allow your students to have a copy to listen to later. If you're teaching in a situation where your mouth is covered—e.g., if you're masked—consider taking a video of yourself covering the information unmasked, so English learners can see your mouth moving. (This helps a lot with comprehension.) (EduTopia, 2021)

How do we support newcomers' social emotional needs?

Newcomer students go through a lot of traumatic experiences. Their levels of stress, depression, anxiety, and even fear go far above and beyond what many people imagine — even for those newcomer families who seem to be having a relatively safe and healthy integration into American culture. In this brief section, we'll discuss the trauma inherent in many newcomer students' immigration journeys, as well as the ways that we as teachers can work to support the social and emotional needs of our students (Colorin Colorado, 2018).

One 2018 study out of UCLA sought to determine the impact of immigration laws and the immigration processes on young students. Of the administrators surveyed, some 90% reported that they'd seen emotional or behavioral problems in immigrant students (with a significant fraction noting that it was a significant problem). These issues include arriving at school crying, refusing to eat lunch, and having extreme difficulties focusing in their classrooms. Pediatricians who work with newcomer families often see the same thing with their patients, among other more physiological symptoms of stress (e.g., issues with sleeping, headaches, and even stomachaches). (Colorin Colorado, 2018)

Newcomer students often feel a loss of motivation for their studies as a direct result of the trauma that they're going through. This should not be seen as laziness; instead, as an obstacle for educators to help newcomer students work through as gently as is possible. One principal noticed that many students seemed to adopt a fatalist attitude: Perhaps your students may be assuming they won't do well, because they've watched family members go through really tough experiences. Success for them simply doesn't seem like it's part of the picture (Colorin Colorado, 2018).

This is why identifying and addressing newcomer student depression and anxiety right now is so important. As we noted above, the newcomer population is responsible for a large fraction of what makes America great. They work hard and they do wonderful things. However, in order to equip them with the tools they need to go far in life, we first need to meet them where they are and make sure they are emotionally and mentally ready to tackle life (Colorin Colorado, 2018).

Largely, this is an area that we need to do much better in. Recently, the American Academy of Pediatrics released a public statement regarding the mental health dangers of the current cultural climate for newcomer children. They indicated that without significant effort, the amount of toxic stress affecting newcomer students is likely to increase (Colorin Colorado, 2018).

Here are some things that we may be able to do to partner with newcomer students and boost their social-emotional health:

1. Learn about the trauma and anxiety that newcomer students go through. This course is an excellent place to start, but doing some reading on your own about the link between being a newcomer to the United States and trauma, as well as some of the behaviors resulting from that trauma, can help to increase the amount of empathy you're able to show your students (Colorin Colorado, 2018).

2. If your school has mental health resources (such as a mental health professional on staff, or community partners who fulfill similar roles), make sure that they are aware of the types of challenges that newcomer students are facing. Give them culturally-appropriate resources to help assist both them and newcomer families as they get used to their new normal (Colorin Colorado, 2018).

3. Take some time to brainstorm with your team. You'll need to identify the support systems that you already have in place for newcomer students, gauge how well they're truly working, and see what type of systems you might need to add in order for newcomer students to have their best possible chance. Some support systems that you could consider might involve specific professional development for your school, higher family engagement and community outreach, or adding peer groups and discussion forums for newcomer students at your school. If there's a newcomer family that's close to your school, it may make sense to include them in this discussion, as they will likely have extremely practical ideas about the support that newcomer families require (Colorin Colorado, 2018).

4. Form a plan to prioritize the most-needed support systems, implement or update any systems as needed, and revisit these systems over the next months or years. Immigration policy changes occur quite often in America, and you may need to adjust your systems as a result (Colorin Colorado, 2018).

5. Communicate these support systems and updates to your entire academic community. This will help newcomer families realize what you're doing to keep them supported and also communicate to your wider community that you're investing in your newcomer population. As a result, your wider community will have a higher awareness of the things they can be doing to welcome newcomer families as well (Colorin Colorado, 2018).

Are there other practices my school can invest in to boost the health and happiness of newcomer students?

Yes, there are. If you've already considered the above steps, consider these investments to truly offer your newcomer students as much help as you can:

Help your students create and maintain a normal routine.

Giving your students a familiar, safe place to go on a regular basis—e.g., your school, or your classroom—can help every student who has undergone trauma (even if that trauma seems relatively light compared to others! Uncertainty and anxiety have a huge impact on mental health!). Following a regular routine on a normal basis will also help your students understand what's happening next, and therefore feel safer while they're at school. Maslow's hierarchy of needs tells us that students must feel safe in order to be capable of learning well. For your entire student population and especially your newcomers, a routine is vital. In order to make this happen successfully, you'll need to ideate a simple and achievable routine, then make sure that all staff members are aware of that routine. You'll then need to employ that routine, day in and day out, only changing it as necessary based on student responses. It may help to review your students' schedules and your staff schedules very carefully while creating your ideal routine to minimize any avoidable disturbances to your routine in the beginning, when cementing that routine will be at its most difficult (Colorin Colorado, 2018).

Equip your staff and teachers to truly listen to your students.

This may feel like a no-brainer or something that you don't really have to invest in so much as just tell people to do it. However, being a good listener is far more than something you just decide to do. One English learning administrator reported that many

newcomer students don't really have an outlet or a mentor to speak with about their stress. In many cases, these students (even the youngest students) are aware that their parents are already stressed, due either to the mechanics of immigration or simply navigating life as an adult newcomer to the United States. As a result, child newcomers often internalize lots of anxiety and stress, which can impact them adversely or even cause them to act out later. Any adult on campus can serve as a good listener to these students. You can get started by finding ways to check in with your newcomer students, whether it be during group discussions or by sitting with them at lunch. While you're having these conversations with your newcomer students, make sure to be mindful of their privacy. Avoid singling them out in front of their peers, and be vulnerable and honest instead of simply disseminating platitudes (Colorin Colorado, 2018).

Educators who have been in this precise situation shared some actions that work for them, which include:

- Making sure that the students have the space needed to share their feelings and talk freely about the things that they're experiencing
- Creating time in class for students to offer up concerns and share their thoughts instead of using a student's free time
- Simply letting students know, over and over again, that they could trust their teachers and that the teachers were there to listen

In addition, you should be aware that you don't have to be your students' only sounding board. If you're able to locate an adult on campus or in the community who speaks the same language as your newcomer or has similar life experiences, you should connect them, as well (if your school deems this type of action appropriate). It may be far easier for you, as an adult, to accomplish this type of networking than it would be for the child to find someone like this (Colorin Colorado, 2018).

Equip your students with healthy ways to manage their stress and deal with difficult emotions

As we noted above, many newcomer students tend to act out and display behavioral or academic issues. One likely reason for this is simple: These students are placed in very frustrating and often scary and confusing scenarios, expected to act normally, and are forced to bottle up their emotions until they break down. It's important that we give our newcomer students ways to work through and express their emotions. One team out of Texas embraced a proactive strategy to help newcomer students manage their stress:

They gave their students daily opportunities for art therapy. In some cases, the art that the young students produced told a story that allowed the staff to support the children further — e.g., some young students drew images depicting their separation from their families, allowing the staff to jump in with targeted emotional support (Colorin Colorado, 2018).

Some specific ways to help students work through stress might include:

- Allowing them time to journal
- Helping them write letters to elected officials
- Creating comic books telling their story
- Asking them to brainstorm ways to make their community or school better
- Stress-busting activities, such as meditation or exercise
- Taking in art, such as listening to music or watching a play
- Talking with friends or adults about their stressors (or specifically about anything other than their stressors, depending on what the child needs) (Colorin Colorado, 2018)

Equip your students with the words that they need to express themselves.

There's nothing quite as frustrating as searching for the precise word you need when you're already angry. Especially for your English learners, giving them the words and phrases that can represent many different types of emotions — particularly the more difficult ones — can be an incredible way to offer the needed support. Specific ways that you may be able to provide this support include:

- Providing your students with sentence starters (e.g., "I feel like", "I was angry when," "I think I need to…") and a bank of words they can use to express themselves and reduce conflict. That way, when they're going through a tough emotion, discussing what's going on and their needs won't represent an added difficulty.
- Printing these sheets and other, similar resources in both English and the language in which your newcomers feel most comfortable. (This will also help with actual English learning and comprehension.) (Colorin Colorado, 2018)

Focus on assisting your students as they develop their social-emotional skills.

All students are going to need help developing their social-emotional skills, but your newcomers may have more stressors than most to deal with—and have less natural support than many of your native students. Here are some strategies that you might be able to leverage to help your students practice expressing their emotions and develop social bonds:

- Early in the year, have your students practice activities that allow every student the opportunity to express themselves. Preferably, these activities should take place in both group and individual settings, in order to ensure that students have many different avenues in which to seek support (Colorin Colorado, 2018).
- Actively teach your students soothing and bonding strategies. Particularly if your students were younger during the 2020-2021 push for remote learning, and especially for your newcomer population, they may not be used to being in large groups of people. They may not have had the opportunity to be socialized or to learn how to coexist with people unlike themselves. Some children may intuitively grasp what is needed of them in these situations. Other students are going to need active support (Colorin Colorado, 2018).

Keep an eye on your students' behaviors, and be ready to take action if you notice that something has changed.

Newcomers may go through many stressful (and even traumatizing) situations early in life, but they may not know how to communicate their experiences and needs effectively. As teachers, we need to be able to see the signs that can indicate a student is going through a negative emotional experience, instead of rushing to punish the negative action itself. The most important thing that we as educators can do in this arena is to forge a relationship with our students. That knowledge of each student's unique personality traits and behaviors can help us see when a student is misbehaving or when a student really needs our help. This is to protect the child from disciplinary or behavioral referrals that can end up doing more long-term harm than good, particularly for students who are acting out as a trauma response (Colorin Colorado, 2018).

Think twice about special education referrals.

In a recent book on transformative practices for newcomer students, the book's researchers noted that many teachers might consider sending newcomer students to special education programs because of changes in their behavior. Taking newcomer children out of the school community when one goal of their school attendance is integration into that community may not be an effective or desired solution. The book's

researchers followed one teacher who was planning on sending a newcomer child to special education. They recommended that the teacher perform a home visit prior to making the referral. At that home visit, the teacher learned that the newcomer family was undergoing substantial trauma related to their immigration status, and the newcomer child was not receiving a healthy level of care. Because of this heightened awareness of the student's experience, the teacher decided to rethink the special education referral and instead worked with the school district to provide more support for that family (Colorin Colorado, 2018).

If you're considering a referral to special education courses for a newcomer student, consider first whether there might be a reason for the student's behaviors (which can include a disinterest in their studies). See whether a mental health professional at your school can learn more about the issue, or whether the student requires more support but can ultimately stay in your classroom (Colorin Colorado, 2018).

Help your newcomer students connect to your curriculum.

If you're seeking ways to help your students gain empathy for newcomers or to help integrate your newcomer students into your classroom, creating a shared experience that feels relevant and vulnerable through your existing curriculum can be one good way to go (Colorin Colorado, 2018).

For example, you can (if appropriate) choose literature to accompany your courses that includes or reflects the immigrant journey, or that echoes current issues prevalent in our world today. This can help all students engage more with their coursework, but can also help newcomer students see themselves in your classroom (Colorin Colorado, 2018).

Looking for ways to get started? Here are some practical ways that you can help increase student engagement with your curriculum:

- If possible, ask your students what they're interested in, and find ways to weave those subjects into your course plans.
- For some coursework, consider allowing your students to take a project-based learning approach (where they take the lead in identifying a research project and carrying it out, giving them ownership and responsibility over their studies).
- Integrate community partners into your students' projects. Delving into issues that may impact your students and their families locally can help them feel that their coursework is worth their time.

- If your students feel comfortable, give them the opportunity to choose to present their work to their parents, other classrooms, or even community members. While this can be intimidating, for students who want to do this, it can be a hugely pride- and confidence-boosting event.
- Prioritize telling stories through your curriculum that focus on the benefits newcomers have brought to our country. (Colorin Colorado, 2018)

Don't ignore challenging topics, but take care when and how you discuss them.

Whether you're teaching younger or older students, whether you teach a specific subject or stay with your class throughout the day, chances are that a polarizing subject is going to come up at some point and you're going to need to figure out how to mitigate it. For example, one teacher who specialized in government studies found that there were students in her class who tended to give long comments in support of family separation while newcomer students who had undergone similar traumatic experiences were sitting right there (Colorin Colorado, 2018).

In these circumstances, it'll be your job to defuse any tension. You'll need to prioritize respect for all of your students, who are entitled to their own world views while reducing any harm that may come to your more vulnerable populations. It's also unrealistic to hope that you can avoid or ignore these subjects, as they are issues that impact our world today. To help empower you to guide discussions of controversial or challenging subjects in the most healthy and helpful way possible, consider:

- Investing in your own research when it comes to relevant controversial subjects
- Considering the fact that you likely have subconscious biases regarding those subjects, and brainstorming ways to remain as neutral as possible despite your feelings on a subject
- Prepare specific talking points and phrases that you can use to defuse tense discussion when emotions run high
- Try to reduce occasions where you or other students provide fuel for tense conversations (e.g., respect the privacy of your newcomer populations, even if (or especially if!) you're discussing something in class that you know they may have experience with)
- Creating and establishing guidelines for respectful discourse within your classroom, particularly when students vehemently disagree

- Helping your students grow in empathy and understanding, so that - ideally - even when they do disagree with another student, they are still able to treat that person with respect or avoid saying unnecessarily inflammatory things in a public space (Colorin Colorado, 2018)

Practice empathy, compassion, gratitude, and appreciation in your classroom.

While we mentioned this point above, it bears repeating. If your students are able to be empathetic, you should notice that your school or classroom has a higher level of respect and community. In turn, this should help your newcomer students enjoy fewer instances of arguments or attacks. There are many people who believe that empathy is one of the most critical 21st-century skills for mental health and simply being a member of society. Starting to ensure that your children have ways to practice this integral skill now will have long-lasting benefits for everyone concerned (Colorin Colorado, 2018).

Interested in getting started? Here are a few practical action items you may be able to employ:

- Talk to your school's administrators to see which types of social-emotional learning resources you may have. These resources should have modules dedicated to building empathy in young students, which may include ideas for classroom presentations, activities, self-reflection exercises, and more. If you already have access to these resources, use them!
- See if you can identify specific measurable goals for helping your students develop empathy. Empathy can be a hard-to-measure skill, often determined primarily through its absence (e.g., when unkind words are said and when fights break out). With your colleagues, try to determine some practical empathetic skills that you may be able to help your students grow in (e.g., kind ways to defuse arguments, or ways to comfort people who clearly need some help) (Colorin Colorado, 2018).

Practice expressing appreciation in your classroom.

It may surprise many to realize that many students, newcomer or native, don't have easy or practiced ways to express their appreciation for other people. Yet doing so is one of the simplest (quickest, least expensive) ways to build a community and develop empathy for others. Teaching our students to have an ongoing habit of finding things that they like about others, or positive behaviors and traits, and mentioning those things in a kind, appreciative way, will build self-esteem for both parties. Having your students do this

can also help you as the teacher realize qualities in your students that you may have otherwise overlooked (Colorin Colorado, 2018).

Here are some practical ways you can help your students build appreciation skills:

- Create an "appreciation mailbox" station: The awkwardness of compliments or expressing appreciation in person, particularly at young ages, can constitute a huge barrier for most students. Giving your students an easy route to deliver appreciative notes without having to deliver the sentiment in person can vastly increase the amount of appreciation actually articulated in your classroom (Colorin Colorado, 2018).
- Give your students guidelines, boundaries, and examples of appropriate appreciation. Depending on the age of your students, it could be easy for the nature of appreciation to veer into inappropriate areas. Perhaps make it clear to your students that these notes (or appreciation delivered in conversation) should not center on another person's physical appearance, for example. Instead, steer your students towards writing or saying appreciative things that are more focused on actions and personality traits, such as "This person is a really good soccer player," or, "It was really nice that this person helped me pick up my books when I dropped them." (Colorin Colorado, 2018).

Listen to what your students say (and don't say) about immigration.

While newcomer students and their families make up an increasing segment of the American population, the story around immigration (and other methods of coming to the United States) can be confusing. It can vary depending on who's telling the story, and it can be highly polarized for many. As a result, young children may either decide to avoid talking about the difficult subject entirely or (accidentally) say harmful things when the status comes up. Newcomer children have to navigate these subjects on a daily basis. The silence of others can be just as harmful as their words (Colorin Colorado, 2018).

In order to provide a positive starting point for helpful dialogue - and give your students the ability to practice these skills starting from an early age - finding specific occasions to celebrate diversity would be an excellent idea. These occasions can allow students to relax, ask genuine questions, or feel better about being vulnerable about their own experiences (thus building empathy) (Colorin Colorado, 2018).

It can be difficult to find a line between events that celebrate diversity and events that make newcomer students feel targeted or uncomfortable. It's important to remember that respecting our students' privacy is paramount. Therefore, as we start to help our students feel more comfortable discussing these topics, we should begin by listening. We can use books or activities to give students opportunities to take in and engage with rhetoric about today's social issues. We can shine a light on the benefits that newcomers bring to our country. And, if our newcomer students feel very comfortable doing so, we can ask them which topics of interest related to diversity they would like to learn more about in class. (This gives them some level of say about where the classroom conversation goes without asking them to 'tell their story' or relay private information.) (Colorin Colorado, 2018)

Practical tips in this category specifically include helping your students build their empathetic toolkits. Assigning diverse children's literature can also be an excellent idea, as well as brainstorming and implementing proactive modules in your curriculum (e.g., lessons designed to cut through myths surrounding immigration, or discussing the larger state of the world so your students have some understanding of the reasons why people might choose to bring their families stateside) (Colorin Colorado, 2018).

Have plans in place to help newcomer families enjoy heightened social-emotional health.

Different cultures may have different ideas regarding how to boost mental health. When your newcomer family comes to the United States, they may need help brainstorming ways to deal with the challenges in their path effectively. Your staff will need to have cultural liaisons (e.g., ESL staff, or bilingual staff) as well as school psychologists to make sure that the newcomer family is coping with stress and trauma as well as possible. Whether they need help meeting their practical needs or need assistance with mental health techniques, strengthening the social-emotional health of the newcomer family unit will go a long way towards boosting the self-esteem and happiness of their students (Colorin Colorado, 2018).

One social worker intimated that a great way to get started with building social-emotional health for newcomer families might involve speaking directly with them about:

- The ways that the family has been able to overcome tricky or difficult conditions in the past (without directly asking them what those conditions or situations may have been)

- The family's perceived strengths
- What the family sees as their children's strengths
- Coping strategies popular in their own culture
- Their own ideas for how your school might make them or members of their culture or community feel more supported and welcome
- How the school might be able to support them as they build their own community or work to rebuild their family network (Colorin Colorado, 2018).

How can school officials help newcomers attain college- and career-ready levels of English language proficiency?

Above, we touched on a few specific ways that teachers can make life easier for their young English learners, such as investing in closed captioning and using a high-quality sound system when possible. To round out this course, we wanted to provide some resources and tips for helping English learners go above and beyond comprehension in English to full fluency and competency — which is often a goal for newcomers when they enroll in an English-speaking school. Today, in many cases, fluency according to certain English standards is expected in the workplace and at many American colleges. While this may change in the future, now, one goal that teachers should work towards with their American students is true English proficiency that's specifically pointed towards career and college readiness.

There are actions that both administrators and educators can take to work towards this goal. Here, we'll provide a few recommendations for both levels.

Administrator Actions that can Help Newcomer Students Succeed in Mastery of the English Language

- Prioritize clear communication with families at every turn. Your school district should strive to be one of the clearest, most dependable, and most understandable sources of information in your newcomer family's life. This may require some creativity and flexibility on your part, particularly if your newcomer family speaks very little English to begin with. To start, try to offer your newcomer family a wide range of methods of communication, so you come to them where they are instead of asking them (for example) to download a new app or use a platform they'd never regularly check anyway. In order to achieve the goal of

creating clear streams for two-way communication between you and your newcomer families, consider:

- Investing in translation services. In your goal of supporting your students as they attain English proficiency, it may seem like a backwards step to start by conversing in your newcomer family's native language. However, supporting your student adequately needs to start in a place of trust and comprehension. As you and your school are the entity in your current scenario that has more resources and comfortability, it's key that you make the effort to start by making sure your family's needs are met in a way that they fully understand. If your school has the resources, investing in oral and written interpretation and translation services for at least some period of time for those families who require language assistance can help ease the transition they're going through. Over time, you can work to rely less and less on these services (ODE, 2021).

- Offering the entire newcomer family English proficiency assistance. As you're helping your student attain English proficiency, it can really help them and their family if you offer the family similar education and/or resources. This should be done with sensitivity; for example, it may not be a goal of the family to converse in English at home. It's key that the offer is made, however, as you work to support your student and their family (ODE, 2021).

- Make sure that the panel of administrators in your school district working to communicate clearly and provide resources for English-learning families includes members of your district's more diverse families. This assembled team should take time to assess the various ways that your school provides information, such as its website and email communications (ODE, 2021).

- Ensure that the enrollment and registration process for English learners is as accessible as possible. When your newcomer student first begins their journey in the American school system, they may experience the highest possible barriers (in terms of the paperwork and testing associated with starting school and in terms of their English proficiency) they will experience during their early school years. As administrators and educators, we need to take steps to reduce these barriers. Make sure that all of the enrollment and registration steps and processes for first-time enrollees and their families are available in their native language, and provide interpretation services when possible. In addition, it would be a kind

gesture (and one that would increase the efficiency of the process) if your school district researched and wrote a bilingual guide to the enrollment and registration process that included comprehensive, easy-to-understand resources about integrating into the community - from the specific documents that a newcomer family might need to produce in order to provide evidence of residency to the best restaurants in town and the phone numbers of other newcomers who have volunteered to provide mentorship. In addition to simply being a nice thing to do, this is the type of step that will help your newcomer family build trust in your school system (ODE, 2021).

- Provide support for both the English learner and the educator who is charged with teaching them. Helping students gain proficiency in English is not a task that necessarily falls directly on the shoulders of their teacher. Administrators need to work with educators to ensure that systems are in place to help English learners participate as much as possible in school activities. General education teachers should receive professional development (and adequate time and bandwidth to focus on professional development) that will help them guide their English learners effectively and gently to class participation. Ensuring that teachers have multilingual resources as well as a wide array of instructional strategies will help them better support their English learners and their entire class at the same time (ODE, 2021).

- With your educators and panel of multilingual newcomer representatives, create a measurable, explicit list of objectives in English proficiency that your newcomer student can work towards. Your school's individualized education program team may be able to help you determine milestones that your newcomer student can set their sights on, as well as accommodations (such as test translation services, or extended time for certain assignments) that may make these goals more realistic (ODE, 2021).

- Give your educators and students as much information as possible about any state-required language proficiency assessments. If your state requires that newcomer students sit these exams, help your student prepare, and help your educators understand the outcome of these assessments (ODE, 2021).

- If your newcomer students fail to progress as might be expected according to these assessments, work with your school's panel of empathetic experts (which should include, if possible, a member of the student's own community as well as school psychologists) to see if there are any areas of support that have been

overlooked for that student. If necessary, the school should be able to provide targeted support for English instruction (e.g., tutoring) if that is deemed wise for a specific student's case (ODE, 2021).

- Help English learners who are exiting your school system transition as gracefully and effectively as possible. Your state may have systems in place for overseeing the transition of English learners. For example, the governments in some states are required to monitor the progress of former English learners for a period of time (e.g., two years) after their students exit their academic programs. Provide your English learners with as much information about the linguistic support available to them as possible, and try to make sure that English learners do not prematurely exit English learning programs without a level of proficiency deemed standard by your state's government (ODE, 2021).

- If your English learner is enrolling in a later grade — say, high school, instead of at a younger age, your school may need to have resources at hand to aid with the interpretation of transcripts. You may need to navigate the process of providing credits for coursework that your student has already completed in another school system. Your state may have a flexible credit transfer policy; it may also have more stringent requirements. In either case, you will need to find a way to validate the work that your newcomer student has already done, and fight on their behalf to ensure that they don't need to repeat work if it's truly unnecessary for them to do so. One method for doing this is to help your students prepare adequately for proficiency tests or to work with your school's special education department to design accommodations for these tests to ensure that your student has the comfortability necessary to do as well as they possibly can under admittedly stressful circumstances. Working to help your student finish high school on time despite any apparent gaps in their education career will help your student feel more a part of their new community. This may require creativity. For example, there is some precedent for students fluent in other languages to satisfy their English credit requirements by demonstrating their competency in their native language and by working hard to become conversationally proficient in English. You should also assess whether it may be worthwhile for your newcomer student to attend high school past the age of 18. In many states, English learners do have the right to work towards high school graduation through the age of 21. Work with your student and their family to see whether this is an option that would fit with their goals in moving to America (ODE, 2021).

Teacher Actions that Can Help Aid with English Mastery for Newcomer Students

- **Give your newcomer students as many chances to practice English (in a non-stressful way) as possible.** It's incorrect to assume, particularly after a student has had time to become accustomed to their new school environment, that we are doing them a favor by going easy on them in school. Instead, we need to figure out a balance of holding our newcomers to high expectations, giving our students key opportunities to practice and grow, and ensuring they have all the support systems in place to do well without becoming overwhelmed. (Clearly, this can be a big ask, which is why it's essential that your entire school staff is ready to assist with this mission!) Keep an eye on your English language learners. Assign their roles carefully when you're initiating paired or group work in your classroom. Make sure that they clearly understand how the activity works, and that they have the vocabulary necessary to complete the activity. If you believe that this is the case, let them complete the activity with as little interference as possible. Allow your students to ask for help if they need it (Colorin Colorado, 2021).

- **Help your English learners become more comfortable with working in groups.** This can be a difficult aspect of integration into American classrooms for English learners to master. The key here is to keep expectations clear and give your newcomer students as much control as possible over the situation. Give your students the opportunity to practice their skills and express themselves. If they're clearly uncomfortable doing so, review the support you're giving them, and speak with them, their parents, and your team to see whether you can provide opportunities for them to grow which may be more in line with their comfort levels (Colorin Colorado, 2021).

- **Ensure that your English-speaking students feel comfortable engaging with your newcomer students.** Some researchers have noted that English learners themselves may often exhibit a higher level of comfortability conversing with their peers than students who have lived here for years have conversing with the newcomers. We can spend a lot of time focusing on support for the newcomers without realizing that it needs to be a two-way street. If you notice this happening in your classroom, try to create opportunities (such as small groups, or even one-on-one paired learning situations) where native-speaking students will need to speak with newcomer students, as long as they feel comfortable doing so (Colorin Colorado, 2021).

- **Encourage your English learner to use their own home language, too.** This can feel counterintuitive or even unproductive. However, using the language in which your English learner can communicate the most confidently can help them become comfortable in your classroom, help build their comprehension of the English terms you're using, and even give your English learner an easier way to express themselves on a regular basis. All of these results will make it easier for your newcomer student to become more comfortable and fluent in English and make it easier for them to embrace their non-English studies more effectively (Colorin Colorado, 2021).
- **Seek out ways for your English learning students to practice their oral academic skills.** When newcomers are learning a new language, reading tends to come the most quickly to them, followed by casual, informal spoken language (such as they might hear on the playground). Their oral academic skills may be the last to naturally develop, so it's a good idea to proactively create situations in which they will need to practice their oral academic language. Ask them to show their work and explain their thought processes in the classroom (or just to you, if you don't feel like putting them on the spot in front of their peers) (Colorin Colorado, 2021).
- **Be aware of the 'silent period'.** Typically, when students (particularly young children) are learning a new language, there will be a period of time in which they are just soaking up the language around them. This is not laziness, nor is it a sign that your integration efforts are not working. Rather, this is actually the first step of language acquisition. If this is occurring, remember to be patient with your newcomer student. If they show signs of emerging from their silent period, allow them to do so at their leisure (Colorin Colorado, 2021).

Section 2 Key Points

1. Assimilation can connote erasure of people's identity and culture, which can be traumatizing. Instead, the goal should be integration: Welcoming people and making them part of our country while celebrating their individuality.
2. Supporting our newcomer children starts with a good amount of support for their parents. Research tells us that a student's nuclear family unit has an incredible amount of influence on how well they do in school.
3. For the social and emotional health of the English language learners in our midst, it's key that we make education, friendships, and community as accessible as

possible for even the English language learners who have just begun their journey.

Course Summary and Conclusion

Whether your school has the budget in place for significant investment in newcomer support or you find that you and your colleagues will mostly be tasked with welcoming your newcomers by yourself, there are ways that you can work to make sure that the transition is as easy as possible for your students. From investing in clear sound systems to ensuring that you communicate with newcomer families as helpfully as possible, your goal should be to provide trusted, frequent, and inherently useful information for your families as you help them integrate into their new communities.

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