



## *Creating language and cultural bridges one training at a time*

### Welcoming Culturally and Linguistically Diverse Families to Our Schools: Special Considerations



As summer comes to a close and a new school year approaches, schools need to prepare for conversations with families about their children's education. When discussing this topic with newcomers, such as refugees and immigrants, there are specific points schools and other service providers should be aware of. The following information can be covered during the school enrollment appointment, orientation, or other points before or at the beginning of the school year.

- Give a general overview of the U.S. education system and then review information specific to the school and the student's grade level. This is important since not all newcomers have received information about the U.S. education system before enrolling their children in school. For example, refugees receive Cultural Orientation through refugee resettlement agencies, but immigrants do not (depending on the legal pathway they entered the U.S.). Even for those who have already received this information, repetition can help. See the resources section of this article for information to cover, as well as resources to share with families.

- **Note:** To have more productive and informed conversations, schools and service providers should learn about the experiences and educational systems of newcomer families and students. Some families may not know how to ask about things that they are not aware of. A way to provide more comprehensive information is to learn about similarities and differences between education systems in the U.S. and abroad. For example, many school systems outside the U.S. rely on rote memorization and lecture-style lessons, so students may be unfamiliar with engaging in learning by exploration. In this case, schools and service providers should explain that lecture-style learning is less common in the U.S. education system. See the backgrounders in the resources section of this article to learn about different education systems outside of the U.S.

- Share information about programs that schools and community-based organizations offer to newcomer students and their families (ex, National School Lunch Program, special education, afterschool tutoring, school supplies drives, etc.) See the resources section for resources and information to share with families.



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- **Note:** Some refugee and immigrant students are overlooked for gifted and talented programs, so make sure to provide information about these programs. Some students may have also experienced interrupted education before coming to America, so make sure to emphasize ways for students to ask for and access academic support (ex, after-school tutoring).
- **Inform parents about U.S. laws related to education and child neglect and abuse, including:**
  - Legal age requirements for school attendance (can vary by state; check your state's department of education website)
  - Legal consequences of multiple unexcused absences or truancy. Note that in certain cultures, it is acceptable for girls to miss school when on their menstrual cycle. Make sure to clarify with parents that girls are required to attend school unless they have documentation for excused absences.
  - Requirements and procedures about who can pick up a child from school
  - Requirements to be present with their child at the bus stop, supervise children when they play outside, etc.
  - U.S. laws for child discipline and neglect, including schools contacting Child Protective Services (CPS). Note that corporal punishment may be a common practice in schools and homes in some countries.
  - Legal requirements for school and work (awareness of child labor laws in the U.S.)
  - Requirements and consequences of appropriate and inappropriate behavior in school
- **Review requirements, expectations, and opportunities for parental involvement in their child's education (ex, ensuring attendance, attending parent-teacher conferences, and more)**
  - **Note:** In some cultures, parents believe schools and teachers know what's best for their children, so provide ample encouragement and ways for parents to be involved in their child's education. For example, schools can encourage parental involvement by discussing the educational goals of students. Additionally, schools can leverage the cultural strengths of families to motivate involvement. For example, many newcomers come from more communal or less individualistic cultures. Uplifting this cultural strength can be a great strategy to encourage parents to be involved in their child's education.
- **Throughout these conversations, keep in mind that refugee and immigrant parents have a strong desire for their children to start and/or continue their education. They believe this is the primary pathway for their children to build a better life and future. A majority of cultures outside the U.S. place a high value on education. This is why it's important for schools and service providers to inform parents and families about the U.S. education system and support parents' efforts to ensure their children receive quality education.**
- **Refrain from making assumptions during conversations. Always ask families questions to clarify confusion or gain new information. This is important to keep in mind, as each student and family is unique in their experiences, strengths, and circumstances.**



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- Consider different communication styles of newcomer families when discussing this (and other) topics. For example, some families can be more direct when communicating, while others may be more indirect and avoid eye contact out of respect.
- Because these conversations can be sensitive and complex at times, schools and service providers should use appropriate interpretation so families can receive accurate and complete information. Also, it is encouraged to share materials in the family's language. Materials should be appropriate for the family's literacy level (written materials for literate clients vs audio-visual materials for pre-literate and illiterate clients).
- Practice patience and repetition of information to reinforce learning for families and students. Newcomer families must learn a lot of information about how to navigate different systems and life in the U.S., which can be overwhelming. Provide support and encouragement as families and their children adjust.

#### Resources for Schools and Service Providers

- Welcoming, Registering, and Supporting Newcomer Students: A Toolkit for Educators of Immigrant and Refugee Students in Secondary Schools (Institute of Education Sciences)
- CORE Backgrounders on different refugee populations
- Switchboard Education and English Learning resources on increasing family engagement, bullying prevention and response to support newcomer students, IEP support for newcomer families and more.

#### Article Sources and Resources to Share with Newcomers about U.S. Education and Local Services

- Education in the U.S. (SettleIn)
  - See Cultural Adjustment and Children and Youth sections of the webpage (available in English, Dari, Spanish, Russian, Ukrainian)
- Afterschool Activities in the U.S. (SettleIn)
  - Webpage available in English, Dari, Pashto, Spanish
- Tips on Getting Children Ready for the School Year (SettleIn)
  - Webpage available in English, Russian, Ukrainian, Dari, Pashto, Spanish
- Sesame Workshop: Supporting Young Children and Families from Afghanistan (SettleIn)
  - Webpage available in English, Dari, Pashto
- Sesame Workshop: Supporting Children and Families from Ukraine (SettleIn)
  - Webpage available in English, Russian, Ukrainian, Dari, Pashto, Spanish
- See the Refugee Welcome Collective State Resources Map for a list of local service providers for afterschool tutoring, free school supplies etc.
- See the Settle In Summer Activities and Camps for Children for a list of summer activities and camp options in the community