



Success Indicator PI01: School creates and standardizes a system to support newcomer English Learners (ELs) and their families as they adjust to the new school environment. (5871)

Overview: Upon entering a new school and new country, ELs and their families experience a stressful adjustment period. Schools can be a place where they learn about community resources as well as where their children receive an education. This indicator discusses what Local Educational Agencies (LEAs), faculty, and staff can do to smooth the transition for newcomers including immigrants, refugees, migrant workers' families, and families with undocumented members.

Questions: What are the issues facing newcomer ELs and their families? What kind of challenges might faculty, staff, and administration face in reaching out to EL and their families? What kind of support system might ELs and their families need to adjust to the new school environment? What kind of challenges might faculty, staff, and administration face in standardizing a system for reaching out to ELs' families? How can LEAs, faculty, and staff participate in the creation and implementation of standardized outreach to new ELs? How can community partnerships benefit ELs and their families?

What are the issues facing newcomer ELs and their families?

Newcomer ELs and their families may be dealing with very different issues depending on their circumstances. Some may have issues with adjustment trauma, legal status, temporary family structures, and poverty. Families of refugees and undocumented workers may also be dealing with trauma from escaping war zones, and persecution as well as trauma from refugee camps and entry experiences. Upon arrival, they may face discrimination, family separation issues, changes in their social status, fear of deportation, or retaliation from their persecutors. Studies of ELs have shown that students under these stressors experience depression and anxiety and are at a higher risk of dropping out of school, teenage pregnancy, and social maladjustment (Adelman & Taylor, 2015; Navarez-La Torre, 2011). Rather than focusing on deficits, researchers encourage the school community to focus on the resilience and strength of this community and offer them the services they need to adapt to their new community (Suárez-Orozco, Rhodes, & Milburn, 2009).

What kind of challenges might faculty, staff, and administration face in standardizing a system for reaching out to EL and their families?

Informing and enrolling newcomers in programs may be a challenge due to social, administrative, and language barriers. The entire family may arrive with limited education, English proficiency, and economic resources causing them to rarely venture out from their communities (Navarez-La Torre, 2011). Depending on the family's circumstances, they may not have official documents or may not be willing to share their information with official agencies like a school. Consequently, enrollment may be problematic, specifically when determining residence, age, placement and previous education. Even if the child is transferring from another school, transferring records can be slow, particularly

if students have moved many times. Thus, newcomers may need a great deal of assistance in the enrollment and placement process.

What kind of support system might ELs and their family need to adjust to the new school environment?

Before immersing ELs or their families in their new community and educational environment, researchers recommend introducing them to the expectations and protocol of a school environment by offering support systems such as welcome centers or newcomer programs (Navarez-La Torre, 2011; Adelman & Taylor, 2015; Arias & Morillo-Campbell, 2008; Tarasawa & Waggoner, 2015). Since newcomer families are a diverse group with very different needs, these programs should make efforts to learn about the newcomers' culture. The goal of these support systems should be to integrate ELs into mainstream classes and the entire families into their new community by offering support systems that slowly decrease over a period of 6 – 18 months (Adelman & Taylor, 2015). The intent of such programs is to help students and their families ease into the transition and help them with issues related to limited English proficiency, low literacy, and limited schooling, and cultural differences.

In addition, schools should consider partnering with existing support systems in the community, which can offer continual assistance in areas that school program cannot such as health care, mental health services, and career counseling. Non-governmental organizations (NGOs) offer a wide variety of support services including interpretation and translation, language training, employment and career services, health care, youth programs, citizenship classes, and counseling services (Guo & Guo, 2016). By directing families to social workers and long-term support programs families can receive help negotiating the complicated systems of education, social welfare, and health care. Their initial involvement in orientation programs also tend to increase their involvement with parent engagement programs available at the schools. A few sources for helping schools' direct families to such services are listed below:

The Office of Migrant Education: <https://www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/oese/ome/index.html>

The US Committee for Refugees and Immigrants: <http://refugees.org/>

The International Rescue Committee: <https://www.rescue.org/>

Handbook on Family and Community Engagement: www.schoolcommunitynetwork.org

How can LEAS, faculty and staff participate in the creation and implementation of standardized outreach to new ELs?

The education community can start by learning about the immigrant groups in the community. Rather than making assumptions about the language(s) spoken, level of education, and the family's needs, Medina, Morrone & Anderson (2005) recommend a survey of the community in addition to an individual assessment. By finding out about both the community and the individual, some of the problematic practices found in research can be avoided. For example, in a study by Navarez-La Torre (2011), a family from Mexico was assumed to speak Spanish. However, this family spoke an indigenous language and did not know Spanish. When the school assumed that they did, they were being asked to operate in two languages they do not know. In another study Figureroa (2017) suggested that certain assignments were forcing children to relive traumas. For example, filling out a family tree can be traumatic for students who recently lost a family member and children with undocumented parents may hesitate to complete assignments related to ancestry or their family history of immigration to the United States. Finally, the entire community can show sensitivity to parents with limited English proficiency. Cheatham & Ro (2011) offer specific tips for faculty and staff when communicating with parents with limited English proficiency.

- When scheduling meetings, try to send information in advance to provide parents with a context of the meeting.
- Be sure to speak slowly and allow pauses for parents to process the material and ask questions.
- Speaking in a second language is tiring, so try to discuss important points first and keep the meeting short and concise.
- Vocabulary is likely to be an issue, so avoid acronyms, jargon, and idioms. When jargon is unavoidable, make a list and take a few minutes to explain it before you begin.



LEAs: LEAs can support systems, offer resources, and suggest assessments of newcomers' programs. Because immigrants are a diverse group with varying needs, a 'one-size fits all' solution to engaging ELs and their parents is unrealistic. Rather, LEAs should allow the schools freedom to adjust their assessment and programs, yet offer them concrete ideas for creating programs and the resources to implement them. For example, research suggests creating reading interventions, support systems for refugee students, and parents as teachers' programs (Castagno & Hausman, 2017). Moreover, each may require materials in different levels and languages. Some may even require audio materials if the parents are illiterate.

LEAs can also assist EL families by requiring the student records are kept electronically and can easily and promptly be transferred if a student changes schools (Navarez-La Torre, 2011). Electronic records will aid new schools in developing an IEP for students and simplify complicated procedures that parents may not be able to accomplish.

Faculty and staff: Having consistent policies and procedures for enrollment, school supplies, uniforms, parent-teacher conferences, and anything else the parents are responsible for will help ELs' parents to understand. Immigrant communities tend to be close-knit. It's likely that someone in the newcomers' community will explain how enrollment and other school procedures work. If the school is consistent in their procedures, parents will know what to expect and focus on what is being said rather than trying to understand how the process. The same consistency applies to classroom procedures for students who will most likely talk to their new friends.

Resources

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