

Elevating English Learners (ELs)



Programs for Newcomer Students

This paper, Programs for Newcomer Students, is one of a series of three papers that focus on newcomers. The other papers in the series include Academic Supports for Newcomer Students and Social and Emotional Supports for Newcomer Students.

Overview

Students who arrive in the United States from other countries (newcomers), represent a variety of educational and linguistic backgrounds. States and local education agencies need to be prepared to meet the academic and social-emotional needs of these students. Newcomer students from different countries speak a variety of languages, and have different levels of literacy skills and educational backgrounds. They may have specific needs based on their personal histories and family circumstances, but they generally share various academic and language challenges when arriving in the United

States. Some districts establish dedicated newcomer programs to meet the needs of students who are new to the United States. These newcomers are important assets to the global economy and will make a valuable contribution to the social and economic vitality of the nation. Moreover, these students will help expand the knowledge that native English speakers have of other cultures and countries.

Newcomer Programs

Newcomer programs are as diverse as the students they serve. In districts where the numbers of newcomers are small, newcomer programs may consist of classes within existing elementary, middle, or high schools, which students can attend for part of the day while attending regular classes with the general student population for the remainder of the day. Other newcomer programs are large with as many as 400 students or more and are at separate site locations. The International High Schools network is an example of this type of program (see <http://internationalsnps.org>).

The following goals of newcomer programs in secondary schools have been articulated by Short & Boyson (2012):

- Helping newly arrived students develop beginning English language skills
- Delivering appropriate content area instruction
- Assisting students acclimate to the U.S. school system
- Building or strengthening students' native language skills

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Considerations for Implementing Newcomer Programs

The size of a school district, the number and backgrounds of newly arrived immigrant students, and the available district resources help to determine the best type of newcomer program for a community. Any newcomer program requires a clear vision of the goals to be achieved and careful planning for successful implementation. The planning process involves collaboration among key stakeholders to create a needs assessment, research program design options, visit existing programs, and build community support, as well as identify adequate funding sources for sustainability.

Needs Assessment. The first step in determining the need for a newcomer program is to identify the number of newcomer students in the community and their specific grade levels. When districts receive, or anticipate receiving, students who will need specialized instruction for intensive language and/or academic study, they may consider establishing a newcomer program. The district then determines the best type of newcomer program to serve all of the newcomers' academic, health, social, and emotional needs.

Availability of Personnel. The second consideration is the availability of personnel to meet these needs. Many newcomers—such as unaccompanied children from Central America—who have experienced crisis situations in their recent arrival, struggle with social and cultural adjustments to their new communities in the United States. Schools may serve a key role by providing support staff such as social workers, guidance counselors, and other resources within their communities (Adelman & Taylor, 2008).



Program Location. Choosing a site for the newcomer program is important at an early stage in the planning and may depend on the number of newcomer students and their distribution in the school district. The location choice may be within one or more existing elementary, middle, and/or high schools.

Districts that serve large populations of newcomers may establish special classes or schools to provide specialized instruction, as well as the full complement of needed support services, most effectively. A central location, close to newcomer students' neighborhoods, when possible, allows the students and their families easier access to available resources. However, care should be taken to avoid keeping the newcomers segregated from their never-EL peers for longer than necessary.

Program Design. Newcomer students' needs and their potential length of stay in the program will determine the language(s) of instruction, the curricula, the course offerings, instructional materials, and more. Programs that offer native language and literacy courses report that they are beneficial for students, particularly those with no or low native language literacy skills and/or interrupted education (Short & Boyson, 2012). The extent to which it is possible to offer native language courses depends on the specific languages represented and the availability of qualified personnel who may speak the same languages as newcomers. Bilingual teachers who reflect the students' culture may (1) help the newcomers better understand English learner (EL) academic material, (2) reduce isolation in the school environment, and (3) serve as role models, which may encourage and enhance attendance and graduation rates.

Family and Community Outreach. One goal of newcomer programs is to develop strong connections with students' families or their sponsors through outreach to help them access health, educational, and social

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services. Programs may collaborate and partner with community organizations that can offer free or affordable services. These connections present opportunities for dialogue between the school, the community, and newcomer families and sponsors to help integrate families into communities.

Features of Newcomer Programs

Newcomer programs typically enroll students for a short period of time, and then assist them in making the transition to a general education placement, to continue classes in English as a second language (ESL) or bilingual education, as needed.

Entry and Placement Criteria. Being a student with no prior schooling in the United States is the most common criterion for entrance into a newcomer program. Another criterion is the existence of referrals or recommendations from intake centers, home schools, principals, guidance counselors, teachers, or parents/guardians. It is important to remember that parents/guardians have the right to opt out of newcomers services.

Newcomers frequently arrive with gaps in their education due to instability in their home country and time out of school due to migration (Gallegos, 2005), as well as low or no proficiency in English. For placement, most programs rely on the results of an English language proficiency assessment that is administered to determine the appropriate level of English instruction when students register. To place newcomers in appropriate sheltered content classes, some programs use assessments given in the native language, when possible, to determine the students' academic levels. Families or sponsors may opt to have the newcomer whose academic performance is at least two years below grade level attend classes specially designed for students with interrupted formal education within the newcomer program.

Grade Levels Served. The grade levels in newcomer programs vary based on the ages and needs of the arriving student population. Some districts offer newcomer programs for part of the school day with students participating in other educational programming for the remainder of the day. Other programs provide full-day instruction. Some districts serve newcomers in K–12, while others serve only high school age students. Because the number and characteristics of newcomers in the United States may vary greatly from year to year, newcomer programs adjust their scope and services regularly.

Instruction and Assessment. Many newcomer programs individualize instruction to meet the students' educational needs (Short & Boyson, 2012). Newcomer programs provide specialized courses, distinct from the regular language support programs in the school or district (e.g., intensive English language and literacy development; specialized reading interventions and sheltered content area courses for students with limited formal schooling; cultural orientation to the United States and the school system; and more).

Newcomer programs use standardized assessments for various purposes: for student placement in specific classes, to monitor academic progress, to meet federal or state accountability requirements, and to determine readiness for program exit. Additionally, programs employ a large number of informal assessments for a variety of purposes, including measuring students' ESL and content knowledge, and exiting them from the program. Informal assessments include teacher-made tests, textbook tests, writing samples, portfolios, projects, and oral presentations.

Duration of Program and Exit Criteria. A study of newcomer programs revealed that the length of stay varies from one newcomer program to another (Short & Boyson, 2012). Some one-year programs exit all students at the end of their first school year; other programs allow students who make rapid progress to exit after the first semester, based on various factors such as age, individual differences, and linguistic and educational background. Often, students with interrupted formal schooling may remain in a program for more than one year before they make the transition to other language support programs. In the full high school programs mentioned earlier, students may choose to transfer to a regular high school program at

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any time or remain in the newcomer program until they graduate. However, students are free to opt out of the program at any time they choose.

The extent to which a student transitions out of a newcomer program is determined by several factors: the students' level of language proficiency, performance in class, and teacher recommendations. In other programs, readiness may occur when students reach a certain test score or proficiency level. For students with interrupted formal schooling, literacy and basic math tests help determine the students' readiness to exit the newcomer program.

Transitioning Out of the Program. Students not continuing their education in whole-school newcomer programs must make the transition to another school program, one that continues language support, such as ESL or bilingual programs. Some students transition into general education programs. Efforts to make the students' exit successful can include providing mainstream teachers professional development on ESL methods, frequent monitoring and support, and conducting meetings between the newcomer program staff and the receiving school staff to discuss the students' needs.

Illustrative Newcomer Programs and Resources

Information about several existing newcomer programs and additional resources that districts may use to support newcomers are provided below. Most of these programs have existed for a number of years, serving newcomer students generally, and they may offer ideas for districts to consider when implementing or modifying such a program. Information is also provided about one program that was recently established specifically to meet the needs of newcomers arriving in a district.

Illustrative Newcomer Programs for Students with Limited English and Formal Education

- San Francisco International High School (SFIHS) in California is currently serving approximately 400 students, 25 percent of whom are from Central America. SFIHS provides a whole school, four-year program in which newcomers can prepare for college and their careers. The Student Support Services Department at SFIHS coordinates a system of resources—including counseling, crisis intervention, mental health, and a wellness program—that, in partnership with family and community, creates a safe and caring learning environment where all students can succeed. It provides a support system for students unfamiliar with English and with many aspects of U.S. culture. Appreciation of diversity is fostered among the students, and staff members encourage students to celebrate their cultural and linguistic individuality. Most students graduate from high school and go on to college. For more information about the departments and programs see <https://international-sfusd-ca.schoolloop.com/>
- The International Newcomer Academy (INA) in Fort Worth, Texas, welcomes newcomer students in grades 6–9 from many countries around the world, with approximately 33 percent from Honduras. Enrollment in the middle school is approximately 150–190 students, and in high school, 180–260 students. The program emphasizes staff development for effective student instruction and follows the Quality Teaching for English Learners (QTEL) principles. Courses focus on rapid English language learning and acquisition of content to bridge the gap between INA and the language centers in the district's regular middle schools and high schools. Students receive orientation to United States culture and the school environment as well. A wide range of support services—such as health, counseling, language interpreting, community agencies, tutoring, work and career exploration, and coordination with the home schools—is provided. For more information on this program see <http://ina.fwisd.org> about this program.

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Illustrative Newcomer Programs, continued

- The Doris Henderson Newcomers School in Greensboro, North Carolina, is a one-year, full-day program that currently serves 243 newcomers in grades 3–12 who are novice level English speakers. Thirty-six dedicated staff members, including administrators, teachers, and other professionals trained to work with English learners, provide instruction and other services. Content area objectives are integrated into ESL lessons to provide students access to mathematics, social studies, science, and English language arts. Many additional services are available to the students, including professional staff members who provide emotional support to students who have experienced crisis situations. For more information on this program, see http://Newcomers.gcsnc.com/pages/Doris_Henderson_Newcomers
- The Columbus Global Academy in Columbus, Ohio, is a combined middle/high school (grades 6–12) newcomer program that serves approximately 450 students who are recent arrivals in the United States. Many students arrive with little or no literacy skills in English or in their native language. The main focus of the ESL program is to facilitate student learning within five designated skill areas: listening, speaking, reading, writing, and cultural enrichment. The Academy also offers a strong curriculum in core courses taught by teachers who receive ongoing, specialized training in teaching English learners. Students who enter at the high school level may remain in the program until they graduate. For more information on this program, see <http://columbusglobalacademy.ccsok.us>
- The newly established Newcomer Academy at Morris Innovative High School in Dalton, Georgia, is serving about 40 immigrant students due to the influx of new immigrants between the ages of 13 and 20 from Guatemala, Honduras, and El Salvador. Many students live with sponsors or foster parents, and the Academy provides services to meet the students' physical and emotional support. At the Academy, the students receive intensive English classes and basic academic instruction in the content areas by three teachers who are specially trained in ESL. Cultural orientation to the United States and the school system are also offered in this program. The Dalton community has a large Hispanic population, and peer support from other Hispanic high school students is especially helpful to the newly arrived students as they make the transition into U.S. society. For more information, see <http://mihs.daltonpublicschools.com>

Resources for Students with No/Limited English and Limited Formal Education

- The Office of English Language Acquisition (OELA) sponsored a webinar on meeting the needs of students with limited or interrupted formal education. The webinar is archived here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1x16UcA4NV0>
- *Indiana Department of Education: Office of English Language Learning & Migrant Education*. This report features practical approaches for working with students with interrupted formal education. It is available at <http://www.brycs.org/documents/upload/ELLswithInterruptedFormalEducation.pdf>
- *Helping Newcomer Students Succeed in Secondary Schools and Beyond*, from the Center for Applied Linguistics, reviews newcomer programs across the country, detailing features of successful programs, including student qualities, and offering case studies of exemplary programs. It is available at <http://www.cal.org/resource-center/publications/helping-newcomer-students>

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Resources for Students, continued

- *Enabling Academic Success for Secondary Students with Limited Formal Schooling* is a research report from Brown University that documents programs for students with interrupted formal education. It is available at <http://www.brown.edu/academics/education-alliance/publications/enabling-academic-success-secondary-students-limited-formal-schooling-study-haitian-lit>

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