

# Introduction

The U.S. Department of Education (Department) is pleased to provide this *Newcomer Toolkit*, originally published in September 2016. Schools are among the first U.S. institutions to welcome newcomer immigrants and refugees to local communities. Meeting the physical, linguistic, social, emotional, mental health, and academic needs of these students and their families is essential to their success and can be an opportunity for educators and community members across the country to reflect upon and enhance their practices and processes. Accordingly, this toolkit is a resource for state, local, and school leaders to support multilingual learners (MLs)\* and general education educators who directly serve immigrant and refugee students.

The toolkit consists of five chapters:

Chapter 1: Who Are Newcomers?

Chapter 2: Welcoming Newcomers to a Safe, Inclusive, and Thriving School Environment

Chapter 3: Supporting Newcomers' Social and Emotional and Mental Health Needs

Chapter 4: Providing High-Quality Instruction for Newcomers

Chapter 5: Establishing Partnerships With Families

Each chapter includes (1) discussion of topics relevant to understanding, supporting, and engaging newcomer students and their families or guardians; (2) tools, research-based strategies, and examples of classroom and schoolwide practices in action; (3) chapter-specific professional learning activities for use in staff meetings or professional learning communities; and (4) selected resources for further information and assistance, most of which are available online at no cost. Readers will also find an appendix that summarizes the instructional context and student demographic profile for each school highlighted in the toolkit.

The toolkit serves to support the Department's mission: *to help each and every student reach their full potential and promote student achievement and preparation for global competitiveness by ensuring equal access to educational opportunity and fostering educational excellence.* To that end, the Office of English Language Acquisition (OELA) is charged with providing national leadership to help ensure that all MLs—immigrants, refugees, and those born in this country—attain English language proficiency and meet challenging state academic standards. OELA also identifies major issues affecting the education of MLs and supports state and local systemic reform efforts to improve ML opportunity and achievement.

Below are some key terms used throughout the toolkit.

## Key Terms Related to Working With Newcomers and Their Families

For purposes of this document, the following table describes terms related to the education of newcomer students and to the engagement of their families. In addition to being described here, these terms will also be further addressed in chapters throughout the toolkit.

\*The term *multilingual learner(s)* refers to the student population defined as English learner(s) in Section 8101(20) of the [Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965, as amended by the Every Student Succeeds Act \(ESEA\)](#). In this toolkit the two terms are used interchangeably.

Term	Description
Community Partnership	A strategic relationship between a school or school system and a community organization whose aim is to better engage families in the school community. These partnerships may provide wraparound services to assist students and families related to housing, food and nutrition, clothing, physical and mental health, supplementary education, adult language learning, and/or translation. In most cases, these services are coordinated by district- or school-based personnel who serve as school-community liaisons.
Dual Language Learner (DLL)	Children who are learning two (or more) languages at the same time or learning a second language while continuing to develop their first language. Children who are DLLs come from homes where a language other than English is spoken. For some, both English and a language other than English may be spoken at home. <sup>1</sup>
Multilingual Learner (ML)	An English learner (which this toolkit refers to as a multilingual learner or ML) is “an individual (A) who is aged 3 through 21; (B) who is enrolled or preparing to enroll in an elementary school or secondary school; (C)(i) who was not born in the United States or whose native language is a language other than English; (ii)(I) who is a Native American or Alaska Native, or a native resident of the outlying areas; and (II) who comes from an environment where a language other than English has had a significant impact on the individual’s level of English language proficiency; or (iii) who is migratory, whose native language is not English, and who comes from an environment where a language other than English is dominant; and (D) whose difficulties in speaking, reading, writing, or understanding English may be sufficient to deny the individual (i) the ability to meet the challenging State academic standards; (ii) the ability to successfully achieve in classrooms where the language of instruction is English; or (iii) the opportunity to participate fully in society” ( <i>ESEA</i> , Section 8101(20)).
Family and Parent/Guardian Engagement/Involvement	According to Section 8101(39) in <i>ESEA</i> , the term “parental involvement” means the participation of parents in regular, two-way, and meaningful communication involving student academic learning and other school activities, including ensuring (A) that parents play an integral role in assisting their child’s learning; (B) that parents are encouraged to be actively involved in their child’s education at school; (C) that parents are full partners in their child’s education and are included, as appropriate, in decision making and on advisory committees to assist in the education of their child; and (D) the carrying out of other activities, such as those described in Section 1116.”
Immigrant Children and Youth ( <i>Title III</i> )	“Immigrant children and youth are those who (A) are aged 3 through 21; (B) were not born in any state; and (C) have not been attending one or more schools in any one or more states for more than 3 full academic years” ( <i>ESEA</i> , Section 3201(5)).
Language Instruction Educational Program (LIEP)	Programs that LEAs implement to provide language assistance services to MLs. These are courses “(A) in which an English learner is placed for the purpose of developing and attaining English proficiency, while meeting challenging State academic standards; and (B) that may make instructional use of both English and a child’s native language to enable the child to develop and attain English proficiency, and may include the participation of English proficient children if such course is designed to enable all participating children to become proficient in English and a second language” ( <i>ESEA</i> , Section 3201 (7)).

<sup>1</sup> U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, & U.S. Department of Education (n.d.) *Policy statement on supporting the development of children who are dual language learners in early childhood programs.* <https://www2.ed.gov/about/inits/ed/earlylearning/files/dll-policy-statement-2016.pdf>

Term	Description
Limited-English Proficient	A term used to refer to MLs prior to the reauthorization of <i>ESEA</i> by the <i>Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA)</i> . This is also a term on the U.S. Census that refers to persons age 5 and older who reported speaking English “not at all,” “not well,” or “well” on their survey questionnaire. Individuals who reported speaking “only English” or speaking English “very well” are considered proficient in English.
Migrant Student	A K-12 student whose parent or guardian is a migrant agricultural worker or fisher and who has moved from one school district to another during the regular school year. Migrant students may be immigrants and/or MLs, but many are not. For more information about migrant students and the programs that support their educational opportunities and academic success, please visit the <a href="#">Office of Migrant Education’s website</a> .
Newcomer Program	Newcomer students who attend public school may be placed in a specially designed program known as a newcomer program. Newcomer programs are temporary, with students moving into general education classrooms as soon as possible, generally within a year of entering the program. These programs are often offered within a school.
Newcomer Student	For purposes of this toolkit, the term newcomer student refers to K-12 students born outside the United States who have arrived in the United States in the last three years and who also are still learning English. This designation is temporary.
Refugee	A refugee is a person who has fled his or her country of origin because of past persecution or a fear of future persecution based upon race, religion, nationality, political opinion, or membership in a particular social group. If the person is currently residing in the United States, the person may apply for asylum. If the person is not in the United States, the person may apply to the U.S. Refugee Admissions Program. <sup>2</sup>
Students who may have experienced Limited/Interrupted Formal Education (SIFE/SLIFE)	SIFE/SLIFE: Student with interrupted formal education/student with limited or interrupted formal education (a newcomer with significant gaps in formal education). <sup>3</sup>
Unaccompanied Children	Children under the age of 18 who come into the United States from other countries without an adult guardian. <sup>4</sup>

Since the toolkit’s prior revision, OELA has published several [instructional briefs](#) and a [family engagement toolkit](#) that add to the field’s research-informed practices in educating MLs new to the U.S. school system. In addition, new research continually improves the field’s understanding of how best to engage newcomer MLs and their families as this research responds to shifts in demographics and changing circumstances surrounding MLs. Furthermore, *ESEA* requires schools and districts to shift the focus from parental involvement to parent and family engagement and requires two-way communication, which sometimes presents issues for schools that have not historically worked with newcomer children and families.<sup>5</sup> Lastly, the COVID-19

<sup>2</sup> U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services. (2015). *Questions and answers: Refugees*. United States Department of Homeland Security. <https://www.uscis.gov/humanitarian/refugees-asylum/refugees/questions-answers-refugees>

<sup>3</sup> Greenberg Motamedi, J., Porter, L., Taylor, S., Leong, M., Martinez-Wenzl, M., & Serrano, D. (2021). *Welcoming, registering, and supporting newcomer students: A toolkit for educators of immigrant and refugee students in secondary schools*. U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences, National Center for Education Evaluation and Regional Assistance, Regional Educational Laboratory Northwest. [https://ies.ed.gov/ncee/edlabs/regions/northwest/pdf/REL\\_2021064.pdf](https://ies.ed.gov/ncee/edlabs/regions/northwest/pdf/REL_2021064.pdf)

<sup>4</sup> U.S. Department of Education. (2015, October 20). *Resource guide: Supporting undocumented youth*. <http://www2.ed.gov/about/overview/focus/supporting-undocumented-youth.pdf>

<sup>5</sup> <https://www2.ed.gov/documents/essa-act-of-1965.pdf>

pandemic has revealed how many student populations require extra assistance from schools to ensure that remote instruction, student support, and family engagement are provided equitably during times of school interruptions and closures.

In addition to revisions necessitated by new research and changing perspectives on ML education, several aspects of the toolkit were revised to increase its relevance and functionality. These aspects include the following:

**Audience.** The revised toolkit is geared toward state or district staff who work with ML and general education teachers and are best positioned to tailor the information in ways that are most compatible with their instructional environment and student populations. The authors envision state and district leaders using this information to help create optimal learning conditions for newcomers.

**Content Depth and Breadth.** Recognizing the limitations of providing suggestions and recommendations for the varied instructional and schooling scenarios that exist, this updated toolkit focuses on describing the landscape and research regarding each educational factor for newcomers and providing resources that the readers can examine and tailor to their school or district's ML population and instructional context.

**Definition of Newcomers.** For the purposes of this toolkit, *newcomers* are defined as K-12 students born outside the United States who have arrived in the country in the last three years and are still learning English. The definition employed in the previous version of the toolkit stated that newcomers referred to any student born outside the United States and his or her family who have recently arrived in the United States. The term *newcomer* is often seen as an umbrella term that refers to many different types of students new to the country, such as refugees or students with limited or interrupted formal education (SLIFE). However, the educational, linguistic, physical, social, emotional, and mental health needs of refugees and students with limited or interrupted formal education can be quite different when compared to students who have recently immigrated to the country voluntarily or with strong formal education in their first language. In addition, because pre-kindergarten and early elementary newcomers (e.g., K-1) have more time than older newcomers to acquire English, these learners often do not face the same educational challenges as older newcomers.<sup>6</sup> Despite those differences, the toolkit does not address solely the needs of refugees or SLIFE, many of whom are also refugees, although some of the material may be applicable. Also, please note the focus of the toolkit is newcomer students who are still acquiring proficiency in English.

In addition, it is important to be aware that while the information presented in the toolkit can apply to K-12 newcomers, for some very young newcomer students, the content in the chapters may be more applicable to working with the families rather than with the students themselves. It is also essential to note that *newcomer* is a temporary designation. An ML may still require language assistance services but not be classified as a newcomer.

**Parent and Family Engagement.** Given ESEA requirements, the new OELA [English Learner Family Toolkit](#), and OELA's goal to focus on family engagement, the topic of family engagement is woven throughout each chapter. Accordingly, while some chapters may have a more specific focus on how to work with newcomer ML families, all chapters will address how to engage families for all educational components discussed.

**Remote Learning/Engagement.** To ensure that newcomer students and families have the support they need during times of school interruptions and closures, this toolkit highlights remote instruction and family engagement considerations, as well as resources for ensuring equity during such times.

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<sup>6</sup> National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine. (2017). *Promoting the educational success of children and youth learning English: Promising futures*. The National Academies Press. <https://doi.org/10.17226/24677>

Users of the toolkit may consider developing professional learning sessions for educators and school staff who work with newcomers and their families.<sup>7</sup> After becoming familiar with the content, users of this toolkit may consider tailoring and sharing this information with their staff by using some of the recommended activities that accompany each chapter. To help ensure professional learning enhances teacher knowledge and leads to enactment of the featured instructional practices, the professional learning should

- Be content focused,
- Incorporate active learning,
- Be of sustained duration,
- Be job-embedded and collaborative,
- Model practices outlined in the professional learning, and
- Provide opportunities for reflection and feedback.

Some productive formats in which to engage educators and other staff on these topics include the following:<sup>8</sup>

1. Whole-group workshops
2. Professional learning communities
3. Communities of practice
4. Mentoring programs for new staff
5. Instructional coaching
6. Instructional rounds

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<sup>7</sup> Please see Section 8101(42) in *ESEA* for a definition of professional development.

<sup>8</sup> *Whole-group workshops* refers to activities led by one or more facilitators to provide direct instruction to teachers on a given topic; *professional learning communities* are groups of educators who meet regularly to improve their teaching towards the academic performance of their students and are often led by an administrator; *communities of practice* also refers to a group of educators who interact regularly on the topic of improving instruction for learners, but the improvement of practice is led from within the group rather than by someone such as an administrator; *mentoring* involves providing teachers new to the profession with sustained support and guidance in the skill and knowledge development of teaching; *instructional coaching* is job-embedded, professional learning grounded in the teacher's day-to-day practices with the aim of improving instruction for learners; and *instructional rounds* is a professional learning format adapted from the medical profession where groups of educators observe teaching with the purpose of comparing the observed instructional practices to their own practices in order to improve instruction.