



## BEST PRACTICES CLEARINGHOUSE

### - Lessons from the Field -

## Supporting Newcomer Students

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*Wednesday, September 6, 2023 | 3:00 – 4:30 PM ET*  
*Transcript*

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**Greta Colombi:**

Good afternoon and welcome to today's webinar Supporting Newcomer Students on behalf of the U.S. Department of Education. We are pleased to have you with us. In fact, about over 2300 folks have registered for today's webinar reflecting a variety of education focused constituents, including teachers, other school leaders, district administrators, and many others. This webinar is a part of our lessons from the Field Webinar series. This series highlights effective tools, techniques, and strategies employed by everyday practitioners to address significant topics that are on the top of educator's minds. You can access recorded webinars from this series on the webpage now being shared in the chat.

As always, if you have related strategies that you're working on in your community related to supporting newcomers, please reach out to the [bestpracticesclearinghouse@ed.gov](mailto:bestpracticesclearinghouse@ed.gov) to share. After all, all of our work is stronger together and we all benefit from sharing effective strategies with each other. Please note that the content of this presentation does not necessarily represent the policy or views of the U.S. Department of Education, nor does it imply endorsement by the U.S. Department of Education. So my name is Greta Colombi. I am the director of the National Center on Safe Supportive Learning Environments for NCSSLE and NCSSLE is funded by the Office of Safe and Supportive Schools within the Office of Elementary and Secondary Education.

Together we work to build the capacity of state education agencies, districts, and schools to make school climate improvements, foster school safety, and maintain supportive, engaging and healthy learning environments to empower the success of all students. To learn more about NCSSLE and to access a range of resources that address school climate and conditions for learning, we encourage you to visit our website.

To give you a sense of what the website looks like and what it includes, here we share some of our most popular products on the left and an image of our

homepage on the right. We also share the latest resources and events coming out from the field via social media. So please do follow us and please know all the materials that you'll see today, including the slides, reference resources, and the archive version of this recording will be available on the event webpage within this website that I'm showing here. In fact, some of the items, including the slides and speaker bios have already been posted. Please also note you can access again the previous lessons from the field sessions by visiting our webinar series webpage, which is also listed here and being posted in the chat.

So what do we have planned for you today? In just a moment, we will hear a welcome from the U.S. Department of Education. Then move into a context setting presentation that features people with lived experience, Diana Torres and Fernanda Kray, sharing their personal stories before sharing national data on newcomer students and the work they are doing in Massachusetts. We will then move into a panel discussion that is moderated by Gabriela Uro from the Council of Great City Schools with four panelists from Illinois, Massachusetts, Missouri, and Texas, who will describe the approaches they have been using in their districts to support newcomer students.

From there, two colleagues from the Department of Education, Brenda Calderon and Melissa Castillo will share recently released resources that are totally focused on supporting newcomer students from the department that can help states, districts and schools support those students. I'll then do a brief closing of the content delivery before we move into a Q&A and that Q&A is going to be based on the questions that we received through registration, as well as those you enter through our Q&A feature within Zoom here. So with that, I would love to introduce you to Montserrat Garibay, the Assistant Deputy Secretary and Director of the Office of English Language Acquisition at the U.S. Department of Education to provide our welcome. Welcome, Montserrat.

**Montserrat Garibay:** Hi. Thank you. And thank you so much for joining us on Supporting Newcomer Students lessons from the field webinar. Again, my name is Montserrat Garibay and I'm the Assistant Deputy Secretary for the Office of English Language Acquisition. And when we start a new school year, there is always much attention and empathy surrounding newcomer students, and we're certainly one to harness that energy to raise the bar on how we support them. It is important to note that perceptions about students rely a great deal on how we talk about them, and sometimes labeling students as newcomer creates negative perceptions about their capacity to meet academic and social demands in the learning environment. So we must rethink what we say and how we talk about newcomer students. Let's remember that the term newcomer is a temporary designation that we are imposing on students and families arriving in our schools, in our school communities because we have assumed that there are... I'm sorry, prerequisite information and resources they need upon entry to success in the educational system.

It's important then to focus all the discussions about newcomers on the processes that need to be in place to support them and to make them feel welcome. And because newcomers are diverse academically, economically,

linguistically and socially, we must engage educators from all the roles and the responsibilities in engineering in the school environment that meets these diverse needs. Newcomers have incredible potential and they can reach the same ambitious roles that are in place for all our students. And it is our job as educators to develop that potential as we design more responsive learning environments. Over time as we orient newcomer students into our systems, we get to know students better and we can also describe them with an increasing knowledge and accuracy as members of our communities who have valuable assets and interest to grow. We can frame students' growth and needs precisely rather than in a big generalized term.

At that point, the term newcomer no longer serves a purpose. So I want to really thank Ryan from the Global Academy and also Andy from Austin ISD. I've had the pleasure to visit their centers and the work that they do is simply amazing. So thank you for sharing those experiences with us and also all the different panelists. And one last thing, we're super excited today that we're releasing our Dear Colleague Letter on supporting immigrant students and my colleague Brenda will be discussing more about it later on the webinar. With that, I want to thank you and pass it next to my colleagues. Thank you.

**Greta Colombi:**

Thank you so very much Montserrat for your very warm welcome. Without further ado, I would love to hand off to our first context setting presentation with Diana Torres and Dr. Fernanda Kray from the American Institutes for Research. And as I mentioned, they'll share their personal experience as newcomer students, share national data on newcomer students, and then describe the work they're doing in Massachusetts. So Fernanda, I believe you were starting.

**Fernanda Kray:**

Great. Hello. So my name is Fernanda Marinho Kray and I'm with American Institutes for Research. And you're just going to hear a couple of what are many, many stories. I arrived in the US as an undocumented limited English speaker, and this is because of newcomers come here for so many different reasons. In Brazil, we had what we call the lost decades where the economic collapse was so great that if you have an idea, the currency changed not once, not twice, but three times within that time. And it's always the story of us. It's never only the story of just me. So you see the photos of my mother here and of me as an awkward teenager for your benefit, but it's always the story of who are with my family, my culture, my community, and so on and so forth. So arriving here, I will share with you two memories that really marked me as a newcomer.

One is that my mother decided to come here to really help us rebuild a new life, which over the years we did speaking no English, knowing nobody. And her accent with the little English that she spoke was so thick that... and she used to send me to negotiate any questions, any power with any adults. So for example, in my first days arriving here, I had to go argue with the school about why they shouldn't put me a grade back simply because 9th grade was full. So they wanted to put me in 8th grade, and I'm very lucky that I had a mother who forced me to go and have these difficult conversations. And my other great marking memory of a newcomer is arriving and coming to a study period. And I

was so confused about what you do at a study period, why are we just sitting here basically doing nothing?

And I heard the teacher calling the roster and repeating this name over and over again and nobody was answering. And it wasn't until the sixth time that I said, "Oh my God, they're calling my name." So my first day of high school was also marked by students making fun of me for not knowing my own name. It built a lot of character. Here we are, strong and standing now, but it involved a lot of cultural shock and anger at seeing how adults in my community were treated. And it really... I had one math teacher who took the time to say, "It is worth creating the space and time to hear what you have to say, your story to show what you have to do." And that teacher really did make all the difference. And of course, coming to the end of high school, luckily I was able to get my documentation status, but I couldn't have applied for in-state tuition and or grants or loans. So there's a lot of ways where things could have gone. Not a great path for me. And Diana is here to share another story with you.

**Diana Torres:**

Hi, welcome everybody. My name is Diana Guadalupe Torres. I was born in Ciudad Juarez. I currently live in El Paso, Texas, so a border town. My parents migrated to the United States in 1991. I was three years old. And here is my beautiful dress that I was so proud to wear all the time. Anytime there was a birthday party or a special event, this was my dress. So I have multiple pictures with this dress, but I come from a family of five. I have an older brother, an older sister. My sister's in education, my brother's a civil engineer, and we come from parents that didn't complete middle school. My mom completed 6th grade. My dad earned his GED when he was close to 40, and that was because he needed a real job, a higher paying job. So he pushed himself to go to school. The first five years of my life, we lived in hotels, in shelters with family members in their living room.

Wherever they would accommodate us, that's where we would spend most of our time. Just varied living arrangements. Now, I do remember spending countless hours crossing the border, five hours, three hours, depending on the length of the line, what we call here. And I remember my first three years I didn't go to school, but once I got to be four and five, I started going to school and I remember crying going to school, crying while at school, and crying coming back home. And I never felt a sense of belonging anywhere. I remember my parents would instill this fear in me of, "Don't say we live in El Paso because people in Juarez are going to think we have a lot of money," which we didn't, "And don't say that you live in Juarez because people are going to say you don't belong here." And this fear of who am I and where do I belong because I don't belong in Juarez anymore and I don't belong in El Paso. So who am I?

It is something that to this day as an adult, it really drives what I do. It drives the passion of why I am here today. Because one of my very brilliant colleagues, Mary Bridget Burns, that leads one of our projects with DESE, she said it once, "These kids grow up and we do," we're here, Fernanda sharing her story, me sharing my story, we're here. And there is something so magical in what we do day-to-day to support our newcomers that we have a little piece in their lives

and one day they're going to be sharing their stories. So that's why I'm here today and I'm so excited to be here. And with the webinar topic being newcomers, that's me. So who am I and where do I belong? I'm Diana Torres and I am right where I need to be, which is helping other educators, helping and supporting other newcomers, and having a little piece in other newcomer stories.

So that's a little bit about me. Now I'm going to share with you some national data on newcomers. And this data comes from the toolkit that they will be referencing towards the end of our webinar today. It is such a powerful and jam packed of resources toolkit. So I really do encourage once you get the link to review it and use it. But I'm going to start with the definition of newcomers. Remember, this is a temporary term, but it has a lifelong impact on our students. So who are our newcomers? They are K-12 students born outside of the United States that arrived here within the last three years. And they're still learning English. They're not proficient in English. So that's just a brief definition.

Now, the common reasons for migration, there are many different reasons. The one for my family was economic opportunities. My parents wanted to give us an opportunity to a brighter future. Another reason might be that newcomers are coming to reunite with family members, maybe the father, the mother or somebody that one of their family members came before them and now they're coming to join them. Now, another reason could be occupational skills. So in science, technology, engineering and math, some employees or employers send their employees here for those skills. So that's the reasons. Now for top 10 immigrants origin countries, as you see here, these are the top 10 countries that our immigrants are coming from. Mexico coming in at 24.3%. But here you see that with all of these countries where we have immigrants coming from, there's something so important. The languages, the very languages that these students come from, it is no longer just supporting students who speak Spanish. Now we have these top five languages right here. 64% is still Spanish, but as you can see, the demand and the need for supporting other languages is increasing.

And the toolkit that they're going to be sharing with you today gives you some of those strategies, some of those ideas on how you can support students. So these are the five languages. And I want to end my part which is sharing this, English learners and children of immigrants by U.S. state here. If you have a chance to visit the link, we will be sharing with you. If you scroll through the state, it tells you the actual number and this is information from 2020 and 2021. But you can see this listed by state. If you don't see your state listed here, you can always go to the bottom, select your state, and you can see it. It is sorted by number of ELs, so California and Texas being at the top, number one and number two with number of ELs enrolled. So without... Actually, I'm going to turn it over to my colleague, Fernanda, to share a little bit about the work that we're doing with DESE.

**Fernanda Kray:**

So we're talking about newcomers in general, and we will focus here on a subset of newcomers who are students who arrive with limited or interrupted formal schooling or SLIFE as we call them in Massachusetts and sometimes SIFE in

other parts of the country. So American Institute for Research has been in collaboration with the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education to bring much needed attention to these students. So in order for student to be classified as SLIFE in Massachusetts, one, they must be an English learner. Two, they must be eight to 21 years old. They have some kind of experience of limited, interrupted, or no formal schooling at the same time that we know they bring lots of life experiences and different types of learning, and they're functioning two or more years below Massachusetts grade-level expectations in literacy and numeracy. And we've begun to talk about there's so many potential reasons for interrupted schooling from health to housing insecurity, war, refugee status, so on and so forth.

But that's the subset of students who we're talking about. And why are we talking about this now? Massachusetts serves as a refugee center for immigrants seeking asylum. And as the pandemic hit in 2020, the borders closed for folks who are seeking asylum status. And so the numbers went down. But once that restriction has been lifted, the numbers are coming up again. So there's a new influx. And just so you have an idea, right now, emergency shelters in Massachusetts are housing 80% more families than late in 2020 last year. And our schools have been asking for help, and we all need to be prepared to receive and serve these students. So who are the students who are coming to Massachusetts? Many of them come from Central America, from Brazil, also from Venezuela, from Haiti, from Ukraine, also Afghanistan and other places like Central and East Asia.

So really there's a great variety in there. And the top five languages, that SLIFE students in Massachusetts speak are Spanish, Portuguese, Crioulo, Haitian Creole, and Chinese. What is this project that AIR and DESE are doing together? Well, we're bringing together educators in a very collaborative model. So we have administrators and teachers to discuss, share best practices, ask questions together about how we can best support these students. So folks are sharing professional knowledge, resources, what are promising practices and how do we, again, dig into the research, which there isn't a whole lot of research. And the variability of this population is so great that we really need to create these networks and develop new knowledge to best serve these students. And while these sessions are happening, there's also professional development that's embedded in there to help teams improve both programmatic and instructional practice.

The original plan was to involve 20 districts, but the need was so great that 40 districts... we doubled the number of districts joined with more joining this year. And the districts represented in these communities of practice represent all of the regions of Massachusetts. They represent schools that are from urban, suburban, rural, or regional settings, and a wide variety of cultural and linguistic groups. So the first year that we just ended of this project, what did we do?

We held virtual meetings with that PD involved. We had site visits, so three in-person and one virtual where all of the members of the CoP or as many as can get to really visit a site, ask questions, examine the practices, and we've also

been doing some conferences for that. So sharing the knowledge that we are co-creating and gathering with these educators. So we're excited about year two, which is about to begin soon. And one of the reasons is that we will be creating a SLIFE toolkit that is going to summarize a lot of these practices and resources that these groups are bringing together. We will continue to do the meetings and site visits and we will be expanding the coaching that is happening in the CoP and for the coaching, we are partnering with support ed who's offering coaching to as many of the districts that could do it. So we started with 16 teams last year and hopefully we'll do more this year and I will transition it over to Gabriela Uro now.

**Greta Colombi:**

That's great. Thank you so so very much Fernanda and Diana for your personal stories and the national data. So very grounding and just powerful. And it is especially helpful to just hear about the work that's happening in Massachusetts to help districts support their newcomer students. And I'm really looking forward to hearing more. And we will through Gabriela Uro, so she will be starting to kick us off with our panel discussion.

**Gabriela Uro:**

Thank you so much Greta. Yes, thank you so much Greta. So schools play an important anchoring role in helping newcomer students and families navigate new society. And I think hearing Brenda and Diana was a perfect example of that. We know that newcomer students usually are the first in their families to learn English, and they often help families navigate living in the US. Welcoming newcomer students has been the story of our nation's schools. The panelists who will hear today are bright spots in this work to welcome families from nations across the globe who come seeking refuge freedom and a better tomorrow.

The panelists come from four states that have unique immigrant experiences. Texas, Massachusetts, and Illinois have a long history of welcoming newcomers. In these states, immigrants represent about between 14 and 17% of their state population. And Missouri a newer destination for immigrants. Immigrant population represents about 2.3% of the states. In each of these four states, no more than 5% of the immigrant population is of school age compared to more than 20% of the US foreign population in each of the respective states. So let's learn from our panelists on how they created and sustained successful programs to welcome newcomers. We're going to hear from Jessica Gonzalez, an EL Coordinator for Ludlow Public Schools in Massachusetts, from Ryan Rumpf, Program Administrator of the International Welcome Center in Kansas City Public Schools, Missouri, Dr. Karime Asaf from Chicago Public Schools, the Chief of Language and Cultural Education, and Andrew Johnson from Austin Public Schools coordinator of the International Welcome Center.

Starting with Dr. Asaf, we're going to go through ... You each have 2.5 minutes. I am going to put a timer. And I'm going to wave, so if you see my hands disappearing on the screen, at the one-minute mark before you conclude. But Dr. Asaf, could you please provide a brief overview of the work you are doing to support newcomers. And if you can, please include examples of stakeholders,

whether they are internal to the school district or external, that have proven to be instrumental in lifting this work.

**Karime Asaf:**

Yes. Good afternoon and thank you for inviting us. I really appreciate the introduction and the clarification that newcomers is a temporary term that we use for specific support, but many of us on this panel and on this call were also at one point newcomers. I'm also an immigrant. I came as a young adult to the United States. This slide will help you understand how in Chicago public schools we use the term newcomers so that you have a better idea of what is included in what we do and how we create supports or procure supports for the students.

In terms of specific partners who have assisted us, definitely the mayor's office within the city. They have been incredibly helpful in connecting us to organizations and agencies like DFSS. The Chicago Teachers Union has created wonderful partnerships with us. They assist us in finding and organizing enrollment efforts at police districts and in other locations. We also include immigrants, non-immigrant students, international exchange students, refugee students, and asylum-seeking students. As you can see in the graph, it could be a combination of English learners, students living in temporary situations.

Okay. For the next slide, it gives you an overview of how our district enroll students and the different pathways for enrollment. Any family can go directly to a school and the staff will support them with that enrollment, our school clerks. In CPS, as we work with DFSS, we also receive the list of students in shelters for the districts, and then we support enrollment directly with them. Either we go to the place of temporary residence or we have them come to our Welcome Center, which is the last option that we have listed.

The Welcome Center is a wraparound ... it provides wraparound services for newcomers and their families, and that helps immensely. This is what the newcomer Welcome Center would provide. These are the resources and the staff that we have available for them, along with registration, there's language screening and different other services that we expect and we would like to make available to families.

**Gabriela Uro:**

Dr. Asaf, thank you so much for that overview. If I may, we're going to move on to Ryan. And then we can get more details about it, especially maybe when we're answering questions from the audience.

**Ryan Rumpf:**

All right. Hello, I'm Dr. Ryan Rumpf. I'm the principal of the Global Academy in Kansas City Public Schools. We are a half day program for students in first through sixth grade. We consider ourselves a soft landing for recently arrived immigrants and refugees as they make the transition to life and school in Kansas City. While they're here, they get academic instruction. They do their language arts and math while they're here. We also do cultural exchanges so they can understand the things that they're seeing in the city. They are all Kansas City Chiefs fans within a month of being here. Go, Chiefs. Just had to throw that one out there.



We do have a nice mix of students from all over the world. We have a lot of Spanish speaking students. We have a lot of East African students that speak Swahili. Kenya, Rwanda, several others. We see students from Myanmar, lots of Cuban and Venezuelan students this year. It's just kind of different every year. We are part of the International Welcome Center in Kansas City, so that is ... We have an enrollment office where humans can interact with families that speak up to 12 languages. We can fill out the English enrollment forms and get everything they need to do, kind of a one-stop shop.

We also have a clothes closet, make sure they all have shoes and coats for the wonderful winters in Kansas City. We have a food pantry where we can load up their car before they leave. And we also have community partners that help us with the trauma. We have a in-person clinician that works with the more extreme cases. And then our partners, Jewish Vocational Services, sends trauma clinicians to the schools to help students process through some things there as well.

**Gabriela Uro:**

Thank you. Andy, if we can turn to you and hear from you.

**Andrew Johnson:**

Of course. Hi, everyone. Hello from an unbearably hot and unrelenting heat of Texas. My name's Andrew Johnson. I'm the coordinator for the International Welcome Center here with Austin Independent Public School Districts ... Austin Independent School District.

In our office, we have two teams that work as part of the Welcome Center, that help to enroll newcomer students from diverse backgrounds, and really support them throughout their first years as students here with us in Austin ISD. We have two teams of liaisons that work with both refugee families. That team is funded through the Office of Refugee Resettlement. And we have another team of what we call Newcomer Family Liaisons that really work with mixed immigration status families. That team is funded through ESSER funds. Both teams really work together to provide, I like the term soft landing, for families, who are newly enrolling in the district, that are facing lots of barriers when they're entering schools.

And then, beyond that work, we really are trying to elevate the work and elevate the needs of newcomer students throughout the district. I know that part of the question was talking about key stakeholders. I think, really, the work of our office is considering all departments throughout the district as key stakeholders for newcomers. We work with everyone from front office staff and school administration, special education, technology departments. Really, we try to get our message and the needs of newcomer families that we work with out to the entire district in order to make things easier and more welcoming for families.

In addition to the enrollment registration and social service wraparound support that both of our teams provide to families when they first arrive, we're also out within the broader schools within our district doing trainings, professional developments, and working directly with multiple departments throughout the

district to help newcomer families in a variety of ways. So we're very glad to be a part of this. I'm sure I'll get into more details in a little bit.

**Gabriela Uro:** Thank you so much, Andy. Last but not least, Jessica, on this first question, if you can share with us.

**Jessica Gonzalez:** Sure. Good afternoon. My name is Jessica Gonzalez. I am here from Massachusetts, representing a much different type of district than the other panelists today. A district that is part of the greater metropolitan area of Springfield but is a suburb. We are a town of just over 20,000 people and have 2,300 students across our four schools. So while the numbers are not as large as what you might see in these urban districts, we're at almost 7% ELs. So you can imagine that when we have newcomers come in, if we have three, four, five, 10 at a time, the impact really is great in our schools and in our district.

One thing to note, that I want to make sure that everyone is aware, is that our governor, August 8th, declared a state of emergency due to the number of immigrants coming to Massachusetts. We are a little bit different than many other states in that we are a sanctuary state. So, proportionally, the number of immigrants that we do see in Massachusetts is comparable to what other sanctuary cities or other states might see.

That being said, I want to say that the Massachusetts Department of Ed has been really incredible in supporting our schools and districts, both urban and suburban and towns in just really progressing and moving forward on supporting immigrant students, and SLIFE students in particular. You heard Fernanda and Diana talk about the SLIFE community of practice. Our district has been part of that. We've gotten to visit other districts and see the programs that the SLIFE students are attending. Schools within a school more than anything else. We have 18 Welcome Centers in Massachusetts. Western Massachusetts, we are, again, a small suburban town. So you're looking at the Welcome Center.

Our registrar receives students. They come in to register. She picks up the phone and says, "Hey, Jessica. We got some students that I think I might need your support with." So then we bring in our ESL teachers. We bring in our office staff. We have created partnerships with local agencies like the Rescue Mission, who has been key in providing our families with simple things like toiletries and blankets. Those kinds of things. Again, we're not urban, so we don't have all the food pantries and all the resources that other larger cities might have, but we have a really great community that pulls together in time of need. I'm excited to talk to you a little bit more about that today.

**Gabriela Uro:** Thank you so much, Jessica. For our second question, we're going to start with Ryan. Can you speak to the tools, strategies, and best practices you use with newcomer students to help them build the skills for them to thrive? If you can squeeze, in that 2.5 minute that you have, an example, that would great.

**Ryan Rumpf:** Sure. I'm going to give several. The first is called Maestra Suite. It is a AI-generated audio dubbing software ... or video dubbing software. Kids watch

videos these days. We make instructional videos that are embedded into our curriculum. Two to three minute videos. A lot of them are done on a document camera, and then we put them through Maestra Suite. We can dub them in all of our languages, except for Karen. That one's a hard one. So just imagine, we knock down the language barrier right at the beginning of a unit. That also goes into the school readiness, routines and procedures, riding a bus. We made a video about how you wait for the bus instead of running from the bus stop down the middle of the road to get on the bus. We make a video about sitting on a carpet, make a video about walking down hallways. These are all just two to three minute videos that we can dub. It just helps them understand it right away.

We also have a program called GrapeSEED. GrapeSEED is a fantastic program for early lower elementary. We did experiment this summer because we were forced to share a huge room for summer school, and really, some of the older kids were using it too. It's straight out of Steve Krashen's toolbox. We have seen tremendous growth using this program.

We've also used Language Lizard. For me trying to figure out the whole reading comprehension issue, in the past, it seems like we generally trained students how to fill out graphic organizers, but we started getting these dual language books from Language Lizard. They sell this pen that'll read the books to them in their native language. So we can read books ... As a group with mixed languages, we can read a common book and have a legitimate book study, and do real comprehension activities together despite the different languages in the room. So Language Lizard has been a huge asset to us. There's more, but I'm out of time.

**Gabriela Uro:**

Great. Thank you. Thank you, Ryan. Andrew, can we go to you to see some examples?

**Andrew Johnson:**

Yeah, of course. My office works more on the social service side. We support families throughout the entire district outside of the classroom. So I'm going to talk a little bit about some of the more district educational instructional supports that we provide, and then I'll talk a little bit more about what our office actually does.

At a district level, our office is probably housed under our Multilingual Education Department. We employ two teams of both secondary and elementary instructional coaches for teaching staff who are working with multilingual students. Those district staff members work directly with teachers on curriculum, on instruction, on technology and resources in the classroom. They're available to classrooms both elementary, middle, and high school. I always say, when I do these presentations, I'm not an educator, I'm a social worker, so I'm hesitant to talk too much about a lot of educational resources, but we work closely with that department. They're always available to teachers who need extra support.

From my offices, from the work that we're doing, we really try to be ... I think the best tool that we have is we really try to be experts on all district policy, in order to break down barriers to enrollment and success, long-term, each school year. So I do my best ... One of the best tools we have is to really train our staff to be, I guess, kind of experts of everything, to try to work with families when issues arise. We try to be cultural liaisons and experts when issues arise maybe in the classroom, or for a family or student who needs extra support if there are issues. So really, we employ a variety of strategies and tools to really break down barriers, to help families get in school, stay in school and be successful. I'm hoping during the question and answer portion that I'll have a little bit more time to get into some of the specific tools that we use for particular problems that arise throughout the school year.

**Gabriela Uro:**

Thank you, Andy. Jessica?

**Jessica Gonzalez:**

Hi. Thanks. When we're thinking about tools that we've used, I think big pieces, big picture are the partnerships. In smaller districts like us, we have to leverage what we can. We have to reach out to our communities. We have to tap into our communities. So partnering with organizations who are willing to provide tutors, who are willing to ... maybe they have a person who speaks the native language of our students, tapping into resources like that.

Learning about the culture of the family. So a new student arrives ... Like, a couple of years ago, back in 2021, in November, we received 10 Afghan students. That was a brand new culture to us. We had two families that were from Afghanistan, but they were born here, they had acculturated, and were in our school's ESL program, and whatnot. However, we had a new group of kids at new grade levels. While the majority of them went to our high school, we had a couple in the elementary levels. We had Pashto speakers there. That was so much easier than receiving high schoolers and trying to figure out, "Are they SLIFE? Are there limited native language literacy?"

We had girls who may or may not have gone to school. We had boys, and some of them went to private school, some of them went to other kinds of school. We found out that some of them had studied in Afghanistan, then Pakistan, and then were back to Afghanistan, and now they're in the United States. So tapping into all of these things and learning about the culture, we had to figure out, "How do we learn about their culture? Who can talk to us about the culture?"

We were able to learn culturally that we needed to just spend time with them, and share meals with them, and have tea. That's not something that we typically do in our district, but we did. We learned about the families, and we overcame some of those barriers. So being willing to think outside the box, and being willing to do things, and have your administrators who are willing to say, "Yes, do it. Try it, if you think that's going to work." Administrators, you have the power to say that. You have the power to say, "Go for it. Let's try it. We haven't tried it before. It's new. Let's do it."

So partnering with families, the cultural piece, professional development was key. Bringing our teachers together. We hired a consultant who was a Middle East expert on politics and culture. That was huge for our teachers and staff. We also brought in a person from the Welcoming Alliance for Refugee Ministries. She came in and talked to us about our local families. Not just the Afghans, but the other communities that were coming in. It was a great opportunity for our teachers, and empowered our teachers to be able to be confident in creating new relationships with our students.

**Gabriela Uro:**

Thank you, Jessica, for that. If we can hear now from Dr. Asaf. What are the tools and strategies that have been most helpful in your work?

**Karime Asaf:**

Yes, thank you. One of the central strategies for us is where we place students. So being very thoughtful about, "Where are the English learner programs?" We really want to continue to target schools that have dual language programs. We are firm believers in biliteracy, multilingualism, and multiculturalism. We promote that. That is one of the biggest strategies, is working in our very large district with network chiefs and the principals in finding the absolute best placement for students. And being ready, as these families are quite mobile, to then support transfers that will take place. If not now, in the near future or throughout the school year.

We have curriculum in Spanish. We have something that we use for artes del lenguaje del español through Skyline. That was a big effort that recently several departments collaborated on. We have technology, and we have a system for tracking student interventions, which is called Branching Minds. Very, very important. We also are developing a transfer process that includes the behavioral health teams from each of the schools. They're sending and receiving students to try to make that as easy and flawless as possible.

We are always thinking about basic needs first. Our students, many of them, are still in temporary living situations. Once they arrive, we're counting on our loving principals, our loving teachers who welcome the children with open arms. Offering them a meal, a classroom, friends, some sort of consistency and normalcy. This is the reason why many of our families decided to take some of these incredibly dangerous, in some cases, journeys. It is to give their children a better future and the best education possibly.

The last thing I think I want to share in terms of tools is we are also exploring a partnership with a researcher and author called Andrea DeCapua. I'm sorry, I hope I'm not butchering her name. Yes, thank you. She is amazing with the work that she does with districts and educators on understanding English learners who have had a disruption in formal education. But we are very definitely transmitting this notion and this mindset that this is an amazing opportunity to continue to enrich our very multilingual, multicultural city, and to our classrooms.

**Gabriela Uro:**

Yes, thank you so much. Thank you so much. If we can go now to our third and final question. I'm going to start with you, Andy. If could share important

lessons learned in working with newcomer students, and/or, actually, you can share a few great successes. I know it's limited time, so you can pick or you can speak very quickly to each.

**Andrew Johnson:**

Yeah, I'll just go quickly. I'll just say, I was looking at this question before and I was like, "Man, what am I going to choose?" I'll choose to say that I think that every student that we get enrolled in the classroom is a success given the bearers that a lot of our families face. And so I try to celebrate that as much as possible because I think as we all know, everyone who's probably on this webinar understands that the immense barriers that these families face and the work that it takes to help them be successful in the classroom. And so I'll just go ahead and celebrate that every enrollment, every time we have kids start, every semester finished successfully is a huge success for us. And I will say lessons learned is that what I always tell social work interns that I work with and my team is that we have to just build patience and understanding.

We have to be able to listen to families and we try to be as available as possible as a resource for district staff because they're really the ones who are interacting with families on a regular basis as well and they also need support. And so we're really trying to be a resource for not only families and students, but staff in order to make the customer service experience, which sounds weird, but I feel like it's not, if you think about it, the customer service experience for families at schools and also just helping staff feel heard in the challenges that they face with newcomer students being successful. So I try to celebrate every day, a little success every time a family comes in is really happy, is very successful, and we just continue to work away at the barriers that we face on a daily basis.

**Gabriela Uro:**

Great. Thank you, Andrew. And we actually have a little bit of time, and I'll just add to that when we visit our school districts, our member school districts, EL families are among the most supportive of the schools. They're so thankful for the opportunities and the support they receive. So definitely is worth the celebration. Jessica, I'm going to turn it to you to share.

**Jessica Gonzalez:**

Yes. So one of the lessons I think we learned in the last few years as our EL population has grown by 75% in our school district is that sometimes our teachers, and this is like boots on the ground, so again, admin give your teachers permission to change up how they're teaching, change up what they're teaching. Because if we don't meet the most basic needs of the students when they're coming in, many of them are coming through traumatic experiences. Many of them are coming from war torn countries. Many of them have traveled days and days and days to get to where they're at. They went from living life and being able to eat when they wanted to, to being told when they had to eat or not having food or not knowing when their next meal came from.

So we need to prioritize those things. They need to know that they're safe, they need to know that we have free breakfast, we have free lunch, you will eat today. Simple things like that before we can really teach them new things, before their brains are available to learn. And so giving teachers permission to

do that, giving teachers permission to maybe grade on what students are producing and not necessarily against the normal rubric that we have, allowing our schools to schedule kids with alternative types of courses. Your grade nine student coming in who is maybe a SLIFE student, may not be able to take bio and British lit and, and, and, and. We need to get those English language skills developed. One of the success stories, not necessarily from Ludlow, but in our community, in our surrounding community, there was not a ton of clarity around enrolling newcomer students and getting them in.

However, the commissioner in April of '22, the commissioner of Massachusetts Department of Ed, Commissioner O'Reilly put out a memo saying, "Don't keep these kids out of school, enroll them, expedite this enrollment." And so once there was some clarity around there, some of the schools and districts started enrolling students who were a little bit older. And so there was one girl who was 17 and the district was not going to enroll her. However, my director of curriculum contacted that director of curriculum and said, "Hey, there's this student who really wants to come to school. She's 17, she's been through it all. Help us out. What can you do?" And she said, "I want her name, I want her number, and she will be enrolled. I promise you this." A year and a half later, she's now a freshman at Westfield State University in the nursing program.

**Gabriela Uro:** Great success. Thank you. Thank you so much, Jessica. Dr. Asaf, if you can share with us.

**Karime Asaf:** Yes. For us is that humble need of staying in constant improvement mode in our very large district is we need to constantly be reviewing processes and increasing services, increasing through maybe mobile units. Instead of having the families come to us, we go to them. And the issue, for example of transcripts for youth that are at the age of attending high schools, it can be a little bit tricky. So working with our options network, which will continue to facilitate those processes and engage youth in post-secondary programs and opportunities also are challenges always to expedite enrollment also, regardless of where the children and the youth might be. They could be at the airport, we are figuring out ways to get to them and enroll them to the closest schools possible. And in terms of success, before I go there, it's very difficult to manage, but we have amazing teams and amazing collaborators throughout the city to make sure that these processes are taken care of.

And in terms of success, that's part of the success of course, is I just really have to say that it is the human contact, the human disposition, the love, the compassion, the welcoming, the celebration of newcomers in our schools, in our networks, and eventually in classrooms, lunchrooms, recess spaces. We firmly believe and elevate the support of network chiefs, school leaders, and educators within our district who are making the experience of children and parents so meaningful and successful with lots to learn still. But it really is amazing to see how far they go to provide necessities, basic necessities, and to include this amazing, resilient, vibrant children into our school communities. Thank you.

**Gabriela Uro:** Thank you so much, Thanks so much, Dr. Asaf. And Ryan, you're going to bring up the rear here.

**Ryan Rumpf:** All right. So I guess in our context, the biggest lesson we learned, there's no beginning of the school year for us. The kids come throughout the year, there's a variety of students with interrupted education and some very highly educated newcomers. So we use a competency-based system where kids get to move at their own pace, they don't have to wait for others to move on. So it's very individualized. So our curriculum really doesn't have a beginning or an end. We don't have scripted, we can't do that. That's like trying to fit a square peg into a round hole. So we got rid of that right away. Moved to a competency based system where kids can change classrooms every six weeks depending on how far they've moved. And we really talk a lot about this balance between compassion and expectation. We want to be compassionate towards their situation, but still have expectations about growth.

There's no "pobrecito" syndrome here. We expect them all to keep growing and if they're not growing, we have conversations. Again, using our software, using the AI that's out there, really we can have these real conversations. And from a leader's perspective, it's very important in this world of scripted curriculums to really try to foster this culture of creativity, experimentation, and reflection, and give teachers take away that fear of failure and let them experiment. Because we can say we know what works and what doesn't, but at the end of the day, there's still a lot to learn about working with this group of students.

**Gabriela Uro:** Thank you so much. Well said. So I just want to have everybody give you a round of applause. Thank you so much for sharing with us. You can use your emoji and see all these things bubble up. Thank you so much. I know there's been a lot of questions. I was looking at the chat, it's like, there's a lot of questions coming up, so I just want to say thank you for the wonderful job that you're doing and all your great ideas and I'm going to turn it over to Greta.

**Greta Colombi:** Excellent, thank you so very much, Gabriela. And to our panelists, Dr. Asaf, Jessica, Andy, and Ryan. What a wealth of knowledge and experience and just passion. I mean, you can really tell how much you care about your students and how committed you are for them to be growing and doing well. So thank you so very much. Right now we've been talking about some of the resources, our panelists have talked about some of them, but we're going to switch gears so we can hear about a couple of really important resources that speak to some of what our panelists had shared. Not all the specific examples, but some of the big, big pictures and as I think it was Diana had mentioned the toolkit for example, that Melissa will be describing is just so much information. We really hope that it's going to be helpful for you. So with that, I'm going to hand it over to our colleagues from the department to share those resources. And we're going to start with Brenda.

**Brenda Calderon:** Thanks so much, Greta. I'm Dr. Brenda Calderon and I serve as a senior advisor in our office of elementary and secondary education here at the U.S. Department of Education. And I just want to thank Greta and our wonderful



panelists for sharing such rich information. We know that districts and schools create safe, welcoming communities for students and we're really excited to hear from your stories and from the approaches that you've taken across the country. I'm also here to share a wonderful resource that we actually released today. So we're previewing this for you all here on this webinar today a letter from Secretary Cardona on Serving immigrant students. First, the Dear Colleague letter which will be added here to the chat, is a reminder that all children in the US have an equal right to enroll and participate in elementary and secondary schools without regard to their parents' immigration status. It's very important to make sure that students cannot be denied access to an education because of their immigration status or perceived immigration status.

Further, our Dear Colleague letter outlines a number of programs that could be used to support immigrant students in... Have very specific requirements criteria. I've seen questions here in terms of who is a newcomer? And, who is an English learner? And, who is an immigrant student? Our letter clarifies and provides information on each of those definitions. So we do encourage you to take a look at the specific eligibility criteria for each of the programs to understand how the program may be used to support different groups of students from pre-kindergarten to 12th grade and beyond. First, a very critical reminder that funds under the Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief or ESSER funds as well as the Governor's Emergency Education Relief or GEER funds may be used to address the impact of COVID-19 pandemic on immigrant students. We heard from Andy earlier about how they're using the ARP funds to support the welcome center in Austin.

We've also heard from other districts across the country that are using these funds to support professional development. For example, assistant teacher recruitment and support additional credentialing for educators such as a bilingual endorsement. We know that support for educators is quite critical at this time as well. The funding that could be used to support immigrant students is further detailed in the letter, but also covers formula funding such as ESEA Title I, Part A, which is funding that goes to states and then sub awarded to districts to provide all children with an opportunity to receive a fair, equitable and high quality education and close achievement gaps. Our second big pot of funding that could be used to support immigrant children and youth includes Title III, Part A, and that's the English Language Acquisition Program. Under Title III, Part A, ESEA awards subgrants to districts then provide supplemental services to English learners, which may include immigrant students.

A couple of other programs of these are further details in the letter include the Education for Homeless Children and Youth Program, the Student Support Academic Enrichment Program or Title IV, Part A of the ESEA, the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act or Title II of WIOA, which includes Adult Education and Family Literacy Act, as well as other discretionary grants that we have here at the Department of Education. Each year we compete millions of dollars and a number of programs that could be used to support immigrant students or educators of dual language students or may provide additional support or wraparound services to a wider range of students. So we encourage

you to look at our different funding schemes and see which ones may apply, may be relevant to you, either in your school, in your district or your community.

We also want to make sure that we're providing technical assistance. We've received so many questions today and really are thankful and appreciative of the engagement in this area. And we know that there's a lot of questions around how this funding could be used. And we do encourage you if you're a teacher or a school leader, to elevate your questions, your district and share those questions at the LEA level. If you're an LEA and you have a question around how I can use my ARP funds to support immigrant students or how can I use Title III funds, for example. We encourage you to elevate those questions to your state educational agencies. And if you're an SEA and you have a question about allowability of funds, please reach out to your U.S. Department of Education program officer and I will add that information here in the chat so you have that information available to you.

The U.S. Department of Education remains committed to supporting all students, including our newcomer students, and we're very happy to provide technical assistance in that area. So thank you so much again, we're excited to share our Dear Colleague letter and I'm going to turn it over to my colleague, Dr. Melissa Castillo, who's going to share additional resources from us.

**Melissa Castillo:**

Thank you, Brenda. Good afternoon everyone. As Brenda shared, my name is Melissa Castillo and I'm a senior advisor in the Office of English Language Acquisition. And just like Brenda, it was wonderful to hear all our experts share what they're doing in the field, boots on the ground with our wonderful children. So thank you to all of you for joining us today. Thank you for everything that you do every day. So I'm just going to share a few of the resources that we have that we think will be highly beneficial for you and will be posted in the chat for you so that you can have access to them and use at when need be. And so the first one I'm going to start with is our new Newcomer Toolkit, which was recently updated and shared with the field in June. And this resource is really intended to help our states and local education agencies in meeting the legal obligations of our newcomer students and ensuring that we're providing them with the supports that they need in order to thrive in school.

And of course at the end of the day, meet college and career readiness standards just like everybody else so that we put them down a trajectory of success. You can find the Newcomer Toolkit on the National Clearinghouse for English Language Acquisition or what we like to call NCELA for short. The NCELA Clearinghouse is overseen by us at OELA and it's really essentially the face of OELA. It's where we house some great resources to support with technical assistance and to support you in again, your daily efforts to meet the needs of our newcomer students and our other English learners that you work with each and every day. As our assistant deputy secretary likes to say, it's the best kept secret in OELA. So please take some time to go to that site and not only use, find the Newcomer Toolkit, but look to see what else is there that might be helpful in what you're doing every day.

So if you'll go to the next slide, please. You'll see that the toolkit is broken up into several different chapters, and each of these chapters explain the civil rights of our English language learners, provides checklists that you can use and monitoring tools that will help you in your efforts, sample tools that will be used, that you can adjust and make work specifically for your efforts. And what we always want to make sure that we remind you of is that there is plenty and plenty of resources in there and some which were shared with you here today, but also keep in mind that it's not an exhaustive list of resources and we know that there are many more out there, but this is certainly a place for you to start as you work to address the needs of our newcomers. You'll also find some relevant research in the Newcomer Toolkit that will be helpful as you have conversations around compliance and some of what you might do to meet the needs of our students.

We also are going to post for you in the chat some of our resources from our Office of Civil Rights, which is to protect access to education for our migratory children fact sheet and are protecting access to education for unaccompanied children fact sheet. These fact sheets were issued jointly in June as well with the Department of Justice. In general, these fact sheets aim to help public schools understand their responsibilities to serve migratory and unaccompanied children under federal civil rights laws enforced by OCR and DOJ.

I'm also going to ask that we post, let me just look up the website for you, another resource that we want to share with you that comes from our Department of Labor, and this is called [youthrules.gov](http://youthrules.gov). What you'll find on this page is some wonderful resources to help young workers understand their rights as well. It's got some wonderful videos under their video library that can be used with young children to help them understand what their rights are. It also, you will find has an educator page that has some helpful tips, resources, and additional videos that will also help in building understanding with parents and children in regards to parents or child labor requirements. And again, with that, please be sure to take a look at our NCELA webpage where you'll find over 25,000 additional resources to help you as you're working with English language learners. Thank you.

**Greta Colombi:**

Excellent. Thank you so very much, Melissa for sharing those resources. And our colleague Sarah has been popping those links in for you. The English Learners Tool Kit seems to be loading slowly, so please hang on. It does eventually open, so just be aware of that. I noticed some of you are having problems with that link. With that, we have heard so much between Montserrat welcoming us at the beginning and the focus and commitment the Department of Education has in supporting newcomer students, hearing from Diana and Fernanda, with their personal stories and the national data and what they're doing in Massachusetts. And then Gabriela moderating a wonderful panel with Andy and Ryan and Dr. Asaf and Jessica talking about what they are doing. So thank you so very much speakers and presenters for providing such excellent information with so much heart.

We also want to thank all of you as participants for your active participation and questions and comments throughout this webinar and your emoticons, of course. We just really do appreciate it. Please remember, you can find all the resources that have been shared today on the event webpage, which our colleagues, Sarah Jefcoat has been popping into the chat throughout and with that I just want to remind you before we transition to our Q and A that we do have other webinars coming up. We will be continuing our miniseries on supporting students' social, emotional, behavioral, and academic wellbeing with next week, or two weeks from now focusing on families. Then in October, educators and school-based staff, and then later in October on student support teams. And next week we will be continuing our human trafficking webinar series with a focus on boys and male experience in trafficking.

So really do keep an eye on your email as we will be pushing out those announcements basically on a weekly basis. So with that, just would really love to have those of you who can stay with us have a really nice Q and A. We have about 19 minutes, which is more time than we usually have. And just as a reminder as well, we do have the feedback form. I'm just jumping to the live Q and A because I'm so excited. But we do have our feedback form and Sarah's been pumping that link in there as well. We really would appreciate your feedback. So with that, let's shift to our Q and A and all of our speakers will be available to be able to answer questions that you have. And, we have got quite a few questions, so I'm excited to jump in. How about Jessica, our first question. Somebody had asked in registration, "Are there any stipends to increase the pay for dual language teachers?" And, I'm just wondering if you have any experience of that in Ludlow?

**Jessica Gonzalez:** So while I don't have experience within Ludlow, I have worked in urban districts before, and there are some local urban districts where teachers who are working in critical needs shortage areas receive stipends. So some of the more urban districts around us, in their teacher contracts, they do have, if you're working in an ESL position, if you're working in EL math or science, things like that that are critical needs areas, there are stipends for that. Same thing with some of the dual language schools that are starting to open more and more around here, there's a differential impact.

**Greta Colombi:** Great. Thank you so much Jessica. Anybody else would like to respond before we move on? Okay. Another question we have, how about Andy to try this one out? "What are best practices for combining funds?" So for example, "Title III, the respondent had suggested refugee school impacts, state funds," etcetera. What examples or best practices do you have for combining funds to support newcomer students?

**Andrew Johnson:** Sure. Yeah. So as I mentioned earlier, our office is comprised of two liaison teams. One that is funded completely by a refugee school impact grant that has now six full-time staff members working with families. And then, we also have the other side of our office, which is ESSER funding that employs three newcomer family liaisons. And so, it's a blend of funding. The way that we structure it, I don't know if it's a best practice. I can talk about what we do here

and what works well in my personal opinion is that we provide the same services to all of the families that come through our office.

And, the way that I train our staff is that anyone can work with any of the families regardless of language or culture. We try to be a very well-rounded staff and regardless of the funding source, we provide the same services and avenues to services for district staff as well too. So, I mean know that, yeah, I think that that's how we structure it here, and it allows us to be diverse in the amount of clients that we serve through one office. And I know, yeah, I think that's all I really have to say. But yeah. We have two teams that work under the same umbrella, different funding sources, but all of the same pathway and the same service track.

**Greta Colombi:** Wonderful. Thank you so much for sharing, Andy. Super helpful. Anybody else want to share their experiences or thoughts or ideas using different sources?

**Andrew Johnson:** I can talk about one more thing actually, I just thought, so I did want to add, so one thing that has been really helpful having the RSI funds of the district is it allows us to be independent of some of maybe the other rules that local funding sources have. And so, I saw a question that just popped up now that asked, "Do we have any school counselors who specifically focus on newcomer populations?" And, that is something that we've been able to do with our RSI funds. So, we now this year have hired a refugee school counselor who works specifically with refugee students under the RSI grant. And so, that's something that we've been able to be creative about, and that's something that's only available because of those RSI funds and the independence they give our office.

**Greta Colombi:** Wonderful-

**Gabriela Uro:** Greta, I'd like to add something to that Greta if I may. In terms of the refugee grants, I think one thing that people can do is reach out to the state refugee coordinators because typically a lot of our LEAs, our districts do not receive these funds. These are our funding stream that's separate from what we typically get through ESEA, right, from the federal government. This is through HHS, so I would recommend connecting with your state coordinator, refugee coordinator, and sort of seeing what opportunities you have there for funding or for support.

**Greta Colombi:** I love it Gabriela. There are other sources that can be used in different ways that can support the same students. So, that's wonderful. Thank you for that example. How about, I have the next question for Ryan. I'm just wondering, you talked about tools that you use to help speak different languages. Can you talk more about how you access them, and are they free, and how can folks get access to these free resources?

**Ryan Rumpf:** Yeah, so we think about different scenarios in a classroom where you need to communicate with children. Some of them are very predictable. So, we make a lot of videos and use this Maestra Suite AI software to create videos. I don't work for them by the way, but it's just been a very useful tool and it's very, very

affordable. If you can stick to the two to three minute timeframe. There are some free tools out there. We started with the good old-fashioned Google Translate conversation app, but nearly all of us have transitioned to the SayHi app because the voices are more human, and there's a lot more languages that it's able to do. And then, it really helps that our program is housed in the same building as the international welcome center where we have other staff that are available to translate in person for us.

**Greta Colombi:** Thank you so much, Ryan. That's great. How about for Dr. Asaf? We're just wondering, "How have you been assessing student social emotional needs?" So, we've heard from a couple of you talking about acknowledging the trauma that students have experienced and some students needing more intensive supports than others. How have you done that at CPS?

**Karime Asaf:** So, we had at the end of August, it made the year, the anniversary of the first round of newcomers. Obviously, Chicago is a very international, multilingual place. I think that this is an area that we continue to explore with different agencies. We have meetings with Lurie Children's Hospitals, and they have a wonderful organization for children resiliency.

We also have an office of social emotional learning within the district, and they provided specific training for school counselors during the summer and for other professionals. And so, we are working with also bringing to the behavioral health teams that are in each of the schools more specific resources for these newcomers to be very attentive to trauma, to be very attentive to other things like some of the panelists mentioned about the concept maybe if you were born in Venezuela and you come here, the concept of having, for example, a public Chicago park district close at 11:00 AM. I'm sorry, at 11:00 PM. It can be foreign because they do not see actual gates with locks closing or the concept of needing vendor licenses to sell food and other goods for parents. And same with children, some of the examples that were already mentioned. The social emotional learning is something that's very central in my mind. And again, we are continuing to work interdepartmentally to figure out with other agencies on how to continue to support better and better this particular group of students in our district.

**Greta Colombi:** Wonderful. Thank you so much, Dr. Asaf. Just want to give a moment for Andy Ryan or Jessica and possibly Gabriela, any other strategies that you've been doing to assess the social emotional behavioral needs of newcomer students?

**Jessica Gonzalez:** I'll just share briefly. SEL is huge right now, especially post pandemic. We can't kid ourselves. This has had a significant impact on our students. My bachelor's is in psychology, my master's is in educational psychology. Andy, I'm right there with you on that social work, the social emotional piece. We can't ignore it. We have to address it, and we have to address it sooner than later. And, we can't expect our classroom teachers to be addressing this day in and day out. There are certain pieces that, yes, they'll own it in the classroom, but we have to provide this extra supports.

And so, we do have a district wide, we use Panorama to do kind of quick assessments and even the little ones like K and one, there's a piece that we can do with them. And so, we're pulling data out of that. We have an SEL committee that is working towards this. We've kind of changed and shifted a little bit with some of our counseling department and kind of changed job descriptions a little bit to start addressing some of this. With the ELs is where my heart is, but also with that social emotional piece because it's so impactful. And so, yeah, I mean that's kind of what we're doing. But again, this is big. This is big. Thanks Dr. Karime for sharing on that.

**Greta Colombi:** Absolutely. And, Ryan?

**Ryan Rumpf:** Yeah, I can add that I don't have a educational background, but we do try to be proactive. We have yoga every Wednesday for about 30 minutes that we have a curriculum, one of a former colleague of mine passed along. So, we try to do that every week and be a little proactive towards the kids and them self-regulating and giving them strategies that they can use. And then, we also have our clinician, like I mentioned earlier, who does meet with small groups of students, and she really just leads us in that area.

**Greta Colombi:** Wonderful. Thank you so much Ryan. So as newcomers arrive, there are food insecurity issues, housing insecurity issues, social emotional needs. There are also some students who come who have disabilities. Just wondering if maybe, Andy, you can start by just talking about the special considerations that you've been taking for families and or students with disabilities who are also newcomers.

**Andrew Johnson:** Yes. Sorry, I was looking at the... Can you repeat the... I was typing answers to questions here in the chat trying to answer some stuff. So, are we talking about the students with disabilities-

**Greta Colombi:** Students With disabilities, mm-hmm.

**Andrew Johnson:** Yeah. So, one thing that our office has tried to do in addition to registration enrollment and I've kind of tried to take this on myself is develop workflows and partnerships with districts, special education staff to provide expedited services to newcomer families and also to identify and track those families as soon as possible. And so, we have been working with our SPED departments within the district here as much as possible to work with school administration on that workflow. So, we now have an official process within our district of how we handle newly arrived students with disabilities, and what is the kind of chain of events that needs to happen in order to get that evaluation consent signed, how do we staff those students, and what services they need?

And so really, for us, I think, and if my experience extrapolates to other districts, I think it really is going to take interdepartmental collaboration and to develop very sound process that everyone follows in the same way from front office staff who maybe initially interact with the family when they first arrived to the

school, to the special education support coordinators and teachers at that campus, to the district staff to our office as well too.

One thing that I've seen is that not only do we not have any history or many times you don't have any medical or social or educational history for these families. There's also a huge learning... It's an incredibly complex process, Special Education 504, that's difficult even for me to understand. I get overwhelmed, and I think one of the biggest tasks that I have in this role is special education and helping to maintain students and get students into services. And so, that varies even more bigger. That's not the right grammar, but even larger for newcomer families who are not familiar with the systems and how to advocate for their students within a large and complex system. And so, really I think it's about having really functional institutional processes that work well and having the underlying support for families to guide them through and continue to move things along in those processes.

**Greta Colombi:** Thank you so very much, Andy. Anybody else want to add to that?

**Jessica Gonzalez:** I would just piggyback on that in saying that the processes are really, really important. If a family's coming in and a parent mentions that they had some type of plan or they suspect something, we have to believe them. The parents know their children the best, and we need to believe them, and we need to be on that. We need to make sure our kids are safe in school. And so, if a child has a disability that may make them not safe in a gen ed classroom, we need to recognize that and take that seriously. And so, we have some really great support with our special ed director here, and they're willing to expedite things for us. And, we do assess students in the extent practicable in their native language, which also is really, really important. And sometimes, it's giving kids time as well. So, the processes and collaborating with your teams, that is key. That is key.

**Greta Colombi:** Excellent. So, in all of these responses, what I hear a lot is that there are processes, you want to be flexible with processes, but processes are really important to be able to support and understand needs and serve needs, etcetera. As you think about students progressing, those newcomers progressing, somebody asked about what data should be used to track their progress. Can you talk to us about that? I think maybe, Jessica, if you wouldn't mind starting.

**Jessica Gonzalez:** Sure. Teachers in the classrooms, formal, informal assessments day in and day out, this is what teachers do. So, how you put that down on paper so that you can show their progress might be a district thing, might be that you use something that WIDA has put out, if you're a WIDA state. Or, other assessments that your, maybe if you have a curriculum that your district has purchased. There are benchmark assessments and so moving right along and assessing those. That piece is pretty straightforward in the academics. "Are they learning what I just taught, and how am I assessing that?" But, there's other pieces that are really, really difficult to assess, the social emotional piece.



If we're talking about little things like when our Afghan students came, we talked about what courses they took. One of the courses that they took was on computers. I'm like, "This is fabulous." We're going to sit down and give them a computer assessment only to find out that they had never actually touched a computer before. It was just all textbook based, but they were very efficient in using smartphones. So, iPad, it was. So, little things like that that you can assess day to day. "Are my preschoolers able to zip up their coat or not? Are they able to follow that direction or not?" So, there's that informal assessment. You have your summative assessments, so there's a wide array, and there's a lot out there if you just kind of Google.

**Greta Colombi:** And, Ryan?

**Ryan Rumpf:** Yeah, I can piggyback on that. We do rely on standardized assessments in education these days. And language proficiency is, I'll throw out some jargon, but it's construct irrelevant variance. So, it invalidates assessments whenever we administer these in English. So, those classroom-based assignments or activities that we do and a lot of districts are using proficiency scales now and going towards a standards-based system. That is the best data that we could have. And if you use it wisely, you can see progress just on the proficiency scales and how far they're growing. So, I would just caution those listening. We don't understand. We don't know what the kids know, if we're looking at a standardized test result. The best judge is in the classroom.

**Greta Colombi:** Excellent. Well, we have reached 4:30, that 19 minutes of Q and A zoomed by so fast. I'm just wondering if we could go around really quickly, if you can, only if it makes sense to you. Just something that gives you hope, just a word, a phrase, or something that gives you hope as you continue doing this work. Is there anybody who'd like to start as we wrap up?

**Andrew Johnson:** Yeah, I can start. I mean, I think our family's rule. I think they're super rad, and I think that when you, all the frustrations that come along with a lot of the complications and the daily work, I think it's all validated by just working with super rad families all the time. For me, it keeps me going and something that I value.

**Greta Colombi:** I love that Andy. Anybody else want to share a word of hope?

**Karime Asaf:** I would like to say that I've said to school principals and educators, "It would be the most exciting families and students walking into those classrooms. All the sacrifices they made was for a better future of each of the children that you are receiving into your schools." And, they usually are super engaged, super energized to be in classrooms, and the parents are super grateful for the opportunities we're providing for children.

**Greta Colombi:** Thank you so much, Dr. Asaf. Anybody else want to share a final quick...

**Jessica Gonzalez:** I would just say to all of our audience members, no matter what you're doing, whether you are a policymaker or a paraprofessional or custodian in a building

or anything in between, all over the map, you have the power to make or break a child's education. Choose to make children's education. The frustrations are worth it. The sleepless nights are worth it. These kids are worth it, and they are our future. We fail them, we fail us. Stick with it. Thank you guys so much for your time.

**Greta Colombi:** Thank you Jessica. And, Ryan?

**Ryan Rumpf:** And, I think the thing that gives me hope is that the amount of attention this particular group of students has received just over the past few years, significantly more than whenever I started my career 20 years ago. So, what gives me hope is that we're talking about it and that so many people showed up to watch a webinar. So, I just think we keep going, and we keep trying to move the needle as far as giving these kids a chance, not a chance, but giving them a quality education from the time they show up to school until the time they go home. So, I think we're moving in the right direction.

**Greta Colombi:** Excellent. Well, thank you all so, so very much for being such wonderful speakers, speaking from the heart in your wonderful thoughts, and it's just really powerful. So, thank you all very much again, and we look forward to you joining us for a future webinar. Remember that all this presentation will be archived on the website tomorrow. The event webpage already has a bunch of resources and the slides and speaker bios so you can learn more. So with that, I just want to thank you again and hope you all have a wonderful rest of the day. Thank you.