

# High School Education for California Newcomers

*Landscape Analysis and Policy Recommendations*

*A report prepared for the Sobrato Family Foundation*

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# Executive Summary

## *Landscape and Best Practices*

Newcomers are students who have been in US schools for a limited amount of time, in this report defined as three years or less. They are a diverse group that includes asylees, refugees, and students with interrupted formal education (SIFEs). The overwhelming majority arrive with little to no English, and schools across California struggle to meet their academic and extracurricular needs. Newcomers arriving in high school are at particular risk, with just a few years to learn English and graduate college and career ready.

In the 2018-2019 school year, there were 175,716 newcomer students in California, more than the total student enrollment of several other states. 67% of newcomers are socioeconomically disadvantaged and 40% speak Spanish as a home language. The majority of newcomers are concentrated in five counties, and public districts enroll nearly twice the proportion of newcomers as charter schools.

Federal law requires the state to provide a free and appropriate public education for all minors, regardless of immigration status. *Castañeda* (1981) further stipulates that all programs for English learners be based on sound educational theory, be implemented effectively with adequate resources, and prove effective in overcoming language barriers after a trial period. Many schools in California may fail this legal standard for newcomer instruction due to inadequate resources and expertise.

There is limited funding to support schools in addressing newcomers' needs. The Title III Immigrant Student program allocates roughly \$100 per newcomer in districts experiencing newcomer growth of at least 2% over the past two years, reaching roughly two-thirds of newcomers. Outside of the K-12 system, the CA Department of Social Services supports some high needs immigrant youth through the CalNEW program, with ten million dollars in total funding allocated to serve students from 2017 through 2020.

To support high school newcomers in achieving academic success, districts can implement a number of best practices to meet newcomers' academic and comprehensive needs. Academic best practices include sheltered instruction, integrated content and language instruction, training and prep time for teachers, and extended and flexible scheduling for students. Comprehensive best practices include a robust student intake process, partnerships with community organizations, mental health and counseling services, family connections, and a welcoming school environment.

## *Policy Options*

California high schools require additional technical assistance, instructional resources, financial support, and data to graduate their newcomers college and career ready.

### **Regional technical assistance provision can bring cost-effective expertise to schools and districts.**

Most districts lack the scale to staff experts in newcomer pedagogy and program design, and they would benefit

from expert advisors. In the short run, nonprofit organizations dedicated to newcomers like the Internationals Network can play an expanded role in high incident newcomer regions through public-private partnerships. In the long run, the state should establish regional offices to provide expert support for all English Learners (ELs) instruction in accordance with the goals the California EL Road map. These centers could follow the model of New York's Regional Bilingual Educational Resource Networks (RBERNs).

**Instructional resources can be developed and made accessible online through the California Department of Education.**

There is great demand for a program guide that curates best practice newcomer models and provides actionable steps for program implementation. Curricular resources are scarce for high school newcomers, and the development of open access literacy curriculum would be particularly useful for students with interrupted formal education. Language software such as Imagine Learning and Rosetta Stone commonly used by schools could be purchased in bulk by the state at a reduced price.

**Increased financial support can come through expansion of the CalNEW grant program.**

The program is currently budgeted at \$10,000,000 over three years to support high need immigrant children through the California Department of Social Services. This defrays the costs of necessary wraparound services for some districts and newcomers but the impact is currently limited. Retention and expansion of CalNEW will support newcomer success inside and outside the classroom, while alleviating some of unfunded burden currently shouldered by districts working with particularly high needs populations.

**Newcomers can be included in California's K-12 data and evaluation frameworks as an official subgroup.**

Currently, the state has little understanding of newcomers' population characteristics, geographic distribution, or academic achievement. However, federal law requires districts to report data for all Title III Immigrant Students as well as students' entry dates into U.S. schools; this information is already within CALPADS. Using this information in deidentified fashion, newcomers can be designated as a vulnerable subgroup and included in state data systems. High school graduation rates and English proficiency growth can be tracked at the school and district level. With improved data, district leaders, policymakers, and advocates will be better equipped to evaluate areas of need and support student achievement. Partnerships with trusted researchers can expand the CDE's capacity for analyzing this relatively unexamined data source.

# Introduction

“Newcomers” is a term commonly used to describe students who have recently arrived in US schools. Depending on the usage, it may mean students in their first six months, first four years, or anywhere between. In this report, I will be defining newcomers as synonymous with the federal ESSA definition for Title III Immigrant Students:

- aged 3 through 21
- not born in a U.S. state
- have not attended U.S. schools for more than three cumulative academic years

Newcomers are a highly diverse population with many subgroups, including refugees, asylees, unaccompanied minors, and students with interrupted formal education (SIFEs). They face a variety of mental health, academic, social, and material challenges that other students do not. Most arrive with limited or no English, and many are far behind grade level in academic content due to limited prior schooling. Students in the latter group are not prepared for typical high school courses, but have a limited amount of time to master both language and required high school content before aging out of the K-12 system. In their interactions with peers and teachers, they must adjust to the norms of a new culture and school environment.<sup>1</sup> Many have undergone traumatic experiences in their past, and many are still working to settle into their new communities.

A combination of pedagogical expertise, creative program structures, social integration, and wraparound services are necessary for newcomer success. Schools and districts across the state are struggling to create these conditions for success due to a lack of technical expertise and funding. California has no policies in place that specifically address the education of newcomer students. This report seeks to shine a light on this area of high need in Californian education through a landscape analysis, summary of best practices, district classification schema, and policy options for improvement.

# Data for Newcomers in California

The information in this section comes from a data request fulfilled by the California Department of Education in August 2019.<sup>2</sup> It draws on information reported to CALPADS by all districts for Title III Immigrant Students. To view the data in more detail, you can browse Tableau dashboards online for all [districts](#) and [counties](#) in California.

In the 2018-2019 school year, there were 175,716 newcomer students in California schools. This subgroup is larger than each of the statewide student enrollments in Alaska, Delaware, North Dakota, South Dakota, Montana, Vermont, Rhode Island, and Wyoming. Looked at another way, there are more newcomers than the combined student populations of 24 counties in California. It is a large population to systematically underserve.

*Figure 1: proportion of state population*



Unfortunately, in a state with more than 6 million students, newcomers can be easily overlooked. With 1.3 million English Learners (ELs) making up 19.3% of state enrollment, California educates the largest number and highest proportion of ELs of all states.<sup>3</sup> In this context, the state and local educational agencies (LEAs) generally focus on the EL subgroup at large. With newcomers making up 2.8% of total enrollment, 1 in 36 California students is a newcomer.

*Figure 2: Language diversity*

Home Language	Number of Students	% Total Newcomers
Spanish	70,195	39.9%
English	16,770	9.5%
Mandarin	11,724	6.7%
Filipino	7,932	4.5%
Farsi	7,932	4.5%
Arabic	7,391	4.2%
Vietnamese	6,916	3.9%
Russian	3,510	2.0%
Cantonese	3,026	1.7%
Hindi	2,564	1.5%

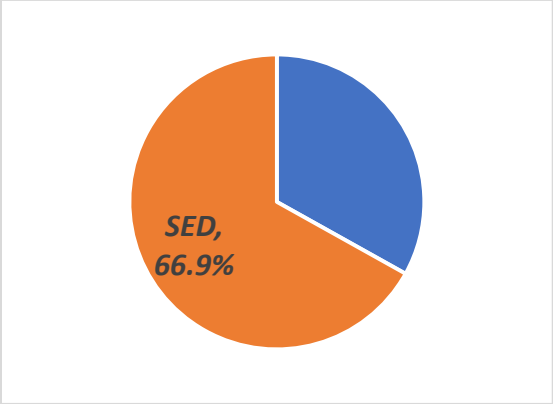
Using home language information, we can estimate that up to 90% of newcomers are English Learners. From this, we can say that English Learner newcomers are make up about 13% (or one in eight) English Learners in California.

There is significant language diversity amongst California’s newcomer students. In contrast to California’s larger English Learner population which is 81% Spanish-speaking, Spanish-speakers represent less than half of all newcomer students.<sup>4</sup>

Newcomers are also socioeconomically heterogenous. Some immigrate with highly educated parents and find immediate material stability, while a much larger group of students faces additional challenges. The socioeconomic background of newcomers is often connected with the quality and duration of prior formal schooling. In California, 66.9% of all newcomers are socioeconomically disadvantaged (SED), here defined as

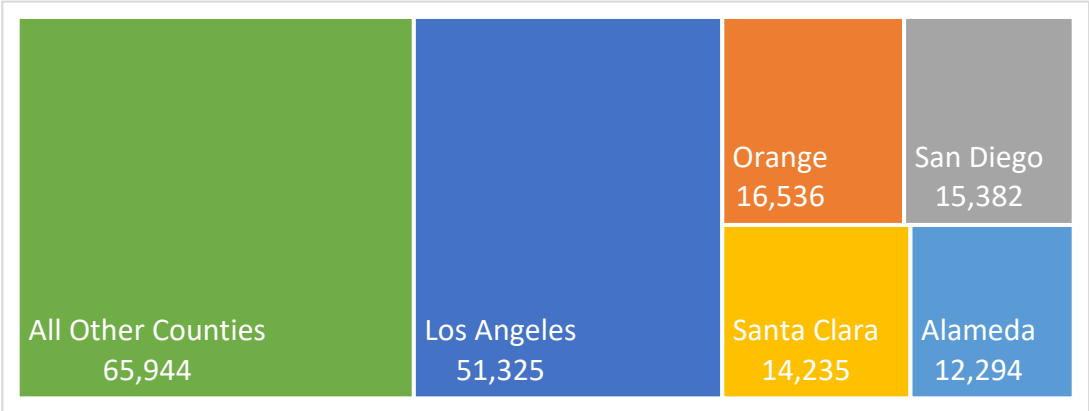
- Neither parent has received a high school diploma
- Eligibility for the FRPM program
- Migrant, homeless, or foster youth

*Figure 3: Socioeconomically disadvantaged status*



Newcomers are enrolled in LEAs across the state, but the majority (63%) are educated in just five urban counties. These five counties are grouped in two high-density clusters, with Alameda and Santa Clara adjacent in the San Francisco Bay Area and Los Angeles, Orange, and San Diego together in the south.

*Figure 4: Top five newcomer counties*



Information for the top ten newcomer-enrolling LEAs can be seen in the below table:

*Figure 5: Top ten newcomer districts*

District	County	Newcomer Enrollment	% District Enrollment	% Charter Enrollment	% SED	% Spanish Speakers
Los Angeles Unified	Los Angeles	29,260	5.4%	3.1%	81.9%	63.7%
Irvine Unified	Orange	5,467	15.5%	0%	23.8%	2.2%
San Diego Unified	San Diego	4,561	4.1%	1.4%	68.3%	26.2%
Oakland Unified	Alameda	3,562	8.5%	3.3%	90.5%	46.3%
San Juan Unified	Sacramento	3,031	7.2%	1.4%	91.7%	6.6%
Fremont Unified	Alameda	2,765	7.8%	1.4%	16.7%	5.5%
Cupertino Union	Santa Clara	2,478	14.3%	0%	4.4%	0.7%
Garden Grove	Orange	2,322	5.5%	0%	80.8%	17.9%
San Francisco Unified	San Francisco	2,043	3.7%	1.2%	71.3%	44.2%
West Contra Costa Unified	Contra Costa	1,918	6.6%	1.5%	85.9%	58.7%

In examining the top ten newcomer districts, it’s important to note the difference in the characteristics of the newcomers they educate. Some districts with large numbers of newcomers – Cupertino and Irvine, for example – have relatively few newcomers that are socioeconomically disadvantaged. Districts with a large number of socioeconomically disadvantaged newcomers – such as Oakland or San Francisco – face additional challenges in providing wraparound services and tailored instruction.

About half of Local Educational Agencies (LEAs) in California enroll fewer than 21 newcomers. These districts educate just 1.3% of the state newcomer population.

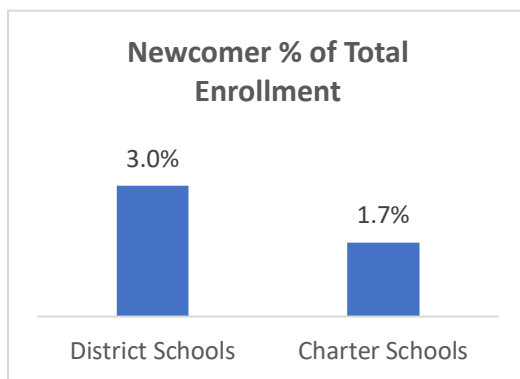
The rest of California’s newcomers are enrolled in LEAs with varying levels of newcomer concentration. Larger numbers of newcomer students in a district can create a critical mass at which newcomer specific programs and staff positions are more efficient. However, these same districts can also struggle with the financial difficulty posed by serving a high-needs population. Low incidence districts face the challenge of educating students with special instructional needs at a small scale.

Figure 6: Concentration of Newcomers in LEAs

Number of Title III Immigrants Enrolled in the District	Number of Districts	Total Number of Title III Immigrant Students	% of Total CA Title III Immigrant Student Enrollment
0 – 20	502	2,412	1.3%
21 – 100	244	12,478	7.1%
101 – 500	224	55,915	31.8%
501 - 1,000	40	28,788	16.4%
1,001 - 2,000	15	20,634	11.7%
2,001 - 5,000	7	20,762	11.8%
5,001+	2	34,727	20.0%

As a proportion of total enrollment, newcomers are enrolled in public district schools at nearly double the rate of charter schools. Newcomers make up 3% of student enrollment in public district schools and 1.7% of student enrollment in charter schools. Since newcomers generally arrive at school with more outside of school needs and academic challenges than typical English Learners, this disparity in enrollment has implications for school funding as well as comparisons in student achievement.

Figure 7: Charter & District Enrollment





# Education Policy Landscape

## **LAWS FOR EDUCATIONAL ACCESS**

Three federal court rulings guarantee EL and immigrant minors the right to a free and appropriately tailored public education.

1. In *Lau v. Nichols* (1974), the Supreme Court ruled that LEAs must take affirmative steps to ensure that ELs can meaningfully participate in educational programs and services.
2. In *Castañeda v. Pickard* (1981), the Fifth Circuit Court established a three-prong test to assess the adequacy of language programs for ELs. All LEAs and schools must provide their ELs with a program that is:
  - a. based on sound educational theory
  - b. be implemented effectively with resources for personnel, instructional materials, and space
  - c. proven effective in overcoming language barriers, after a trial period
3. In *Plyler v. Doe* (1982), the Supreme Court ruled that states are required to provide public education to all students, regardless of legal status.

While all California districts appear to comply with the *Lau* and *Plyler* rulings, many districts may not satisfy the *Castañeda* legal standard for adequate EL instruction for newcomers. Put another way, many districts fail to properly staff or support effective programs for newcomers, and this likely puts them out of compliance with federal law. However, lawsuits are not filed for several reasons. First, most newly arrived immigrant families do not want to call attention to themselves with legal entanglements. Second, districts are generally making efforts to serve their newcomers, but simply lack the requisite funding and expertise to properly support them. Finally, advocates must consider the possibility that a lawsuit to guarantee disproportionate funding for immigrants could have negative political consequences.

## FUNDING

### National Context

In the National Education Association’s most recent ranking of state education spending, California ranked 38<sup>th</sup> amongst all states with \$12,039 spent per student, \$717 below the national average. In absolute terms, this amounted to California schools receiving \$93 billion in total funding from all sources in 2017-18.<sup>5</sup> In the regional context, California spends more than its perennially underfunded neighbors, Arizona and Nevada, but substantially less than states with similarly high costs of living such as Massachusetts and New York.<sup>6</sup> In a high cost of living state with large population of high needs students, the relatively low overall funding level makes it difficult for LEAs to properly meet their legal and professional obligations to newcomer students.

Figure 8: State Per Pupil Spending

State	Expenditure per Student (ADA), 2018	Rank
California	<b>\$12,039</b>	<b>38</b>
Massachusetts	<b>\$19,135</b>	<b>7</b>
New York	<b>\$23,867</b>	<b>2</b>
Arizona	<b>\$8,273</b>	<b>48</b>
Nevada	<b>\$8,380</b>	<b>47</b>
Oregon	<b>\$13,108</b>	<b>19</b>
U.S. Average	<b>\$12,756</b>	<b>--</b>

### Local Control Funding Formula

California distributes per pupil funding to school districts based on the Local Control Funding Formula (LCFF). The formula is graduated such that districts serving larger numbers of high needs students with identified cost factors – English Learner, low-income, or foster youth – receive additional funding. However, each cost factor is only counted once; a low-income English learner is not double counted.

There are three components the LCFF funding process:

- **Base Grants:** All students receive grants based on their grade level and attendance.
- **Supplemental Grants:** High-needs students receive an extra 20% above their base grants.
- **Concentration Grants:** Districts whose high needs populations exceed 55 percent of their enrollment receive an additional 50 percent of the adjusted base grant for each high needs student above the 55 percent threshold.”<sup>7</sup>

Because newcomers are disproportionately likely to be socioeconomically disadvantaged or English Learners, most qualify as high needs students for the purposes of supplemental and concentration grants.

### *Title III Immigrant Student Program*

Under Title III, Part A of the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA), states are required to reserve up to 15% of Title III funds for the Immigrant Student Education Subgrant Program.<sup>8</sup> California administers its subgrants to LEAs that (1) enroll 21 or more Title III Immigrant Students and (2) have had immigrant student enrollment grow by at least 2% over the enrollment average of the past two years. The rationale is that the limited funding available can have the best impact by going to districts with substantial and growing numbers of immigrant students.

With California's total share of Title III funding at \$134,606,632 in 2017-2018, the Title III Immigrant Student program received 8.1% of California's federal Title III grant.<sup>9</sup> That year, \$10,925,860 was granted for 113,280 students in qualifying districts, amounting to an additional \$96.45 in funding per student. With 174,726 eligible Title III immigrant students enrolled in California, this means that approximately 65% of these students received the additional funding.

The 35% of newcomers (61,446) that did not receive this additional funding are enrolled in districts with fewer than 21 eligible immigrant students or districts with steady or declining immigrant enrollments. These districts still face increased costs to appropriately serve their newcomer students, and may struggle with efficiently providing services to students and training to teachers. Districts with large newcomer populations that have declined in the past year face a significant loss of funding from Immigrant Student Program. For example, San Francisco Unified received funding for each of its 3,788 newcomer students in 2016-2017, but received no additional funding for its 3,178 newcomers in 2017-2018 because newcomer enrollment had declined. This equated to a funding loss of roughly \$300,000.

### *California Department of Social Services Funding*

With the passage of Assembly Bill 99, California appropriated \$10,000,000 from the state general fund to the California Department of Social Services (CDSS) over three fiscal years (beginning in 2017-2018) to provide additional services for qualified immigrant youth who have arrived in the country in the last five years. Qualified youth include refugees, asylees, Cubans, Haitians, certain Amerasians from Vietnam, victims of severe forms of trafficking, and Iraqi and Afghan children with Special Immigrant Visa status.<sup>10</sup>

The CDSS also disburses funds through the Refugee School Impact (RSI) Program. In the 2018-2019 year, the federal Administration for Children and Families awarded CDSS \$1,000,000 for the 2018-2019 year to support districts with large populations of refugee students. The funds were split between twelve California districts, with \$80,000 left for state administration.<sup>11</sup>

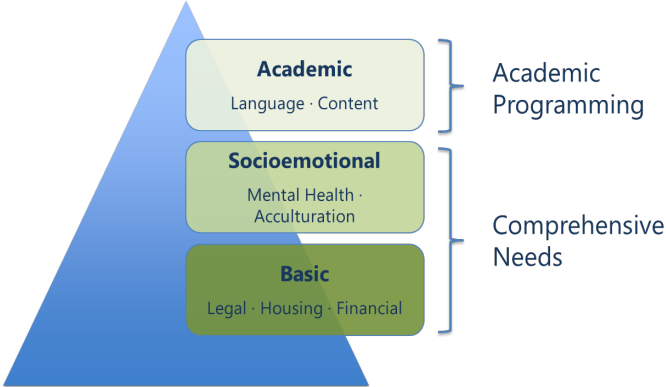
# Best Practices for High School Newcomers

## FINDINGS FROM LITERATURE REVIEW AND EXPERT INTERVIEWS

Newcomer education remains a relatively understudied area in academia. In this section, I draw from and synthesize the most prominent literature in the field.\* There is remarkable consistency in the material covered and the conclusions drawn. These best practices are further informed by interviews and conversations with newcomer educators, technical assistance providers, and academics studying newcomers and EL education.

For newcomers to succeed in high school, educators and researchers agree that certain basic needs must be met as a precondition for English language acquisition and academic achievement. This can be conceptualized as a revised Maslow’s hierarchy of basic needs.

Figure 9: charter & district proportion



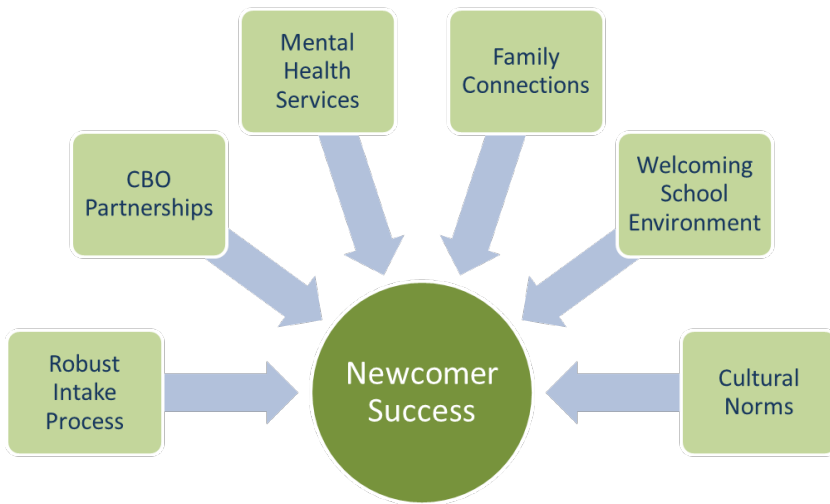
This hierarchy can be further broken down into two broad categories of best practices: delivering academic programming and meeting comprehensive needs. Since comprehensive needs must be met for academic programming to be successful, we will examine best practices in that order.

\* Four publications in particular stand out in the field of high school newcomer education: Castellón, Martha, et al. *Schools to Learn From: How Six High Schools Graduate English Learners College and Career Ready*. Stanford Graduate School of Education. 2015. Short, D.J., and Boyson, B.A. *Helping Newcomer Students Succeed in Secondary School and Beyond*. Center for Applied Linguistics. 2012. Sugarman, Julie. *Beyond Teaching English: Supporting High School Completion by Immigrant and Refugee Students*. Migration Policy Institute. 2017. U.S. Department of Education. *Newcomer Tool Kit*. 2016.

## MEETING COMPREHENSIVE NEEDS

The best practices for meeting newcomer comprehensive needs are varied, with some requiring additional resources and others feasible to implement with existing school and district staff.

Figure 10: comprehensive needs



### Robust Intake Process

A robust intake process serves to assess students' need and make important connections.<sup>12</sup> The academic component of assessment must determine basic language proficiency and prior schooling experience. The comprehensive component of assessment should screen for potential needs in housing, food, legal aid, and mental health services. Students (and their families) with acute needs in these areas can then be connected with available services in the district and the community. Districts should have intake procedures in place and designate specific staff responsible for this process.

### Parent Connection

Because family involvement in students' academic lives is strongly connected with academic success, districts and schools should connect directly with parents as part of the intake process.<sup>13</sup> For newcomers, family involvement takes on additional importance since students are entering an entirely new cultural, social, and academic environment.<sup>14</sup> Since many families come from countries with different cultural expectations around parents and schooling, districts should explicitly communicate school expectations to parents, including attendance policies, homework policies, codes of conduct, schedules, and ways to get involved at school.

### Community Partnerships

With needs assessed and parents connected, students and their families can be supported by community-based organizations.<sup>15</sup> Although students' outside of school stability is a precondition for academic success, it is beyond

school districts’ role and capacity to address all of these needs. Government and nonprofit groups are essential partners in this work.

*Mental Health Services*

Some newcomers have undergone serious trauma and nearly all experience significant acculturation shocks.<sup>16</sup> Counselors can provide support through both individual and group sessions, either in school or an outside community setting.

*Welcoming School Environment*

Moving countries is inherently stressful. Students are dislocated from their home communities and thrust into strange new environments, often without strong social networks. In the academic context, it is well-established that students who feel alienated and uncomfortable in school struggle to develop the confidence necessary for academic success.<sup>17</sup> This being the case, it is imperative that schools make every effort to actively welcome and affirm newcomers as valued members of their communities. Newcomers’ backgrounds, home languages, and customs should be actively celebrated and welcomed by staff and other students.

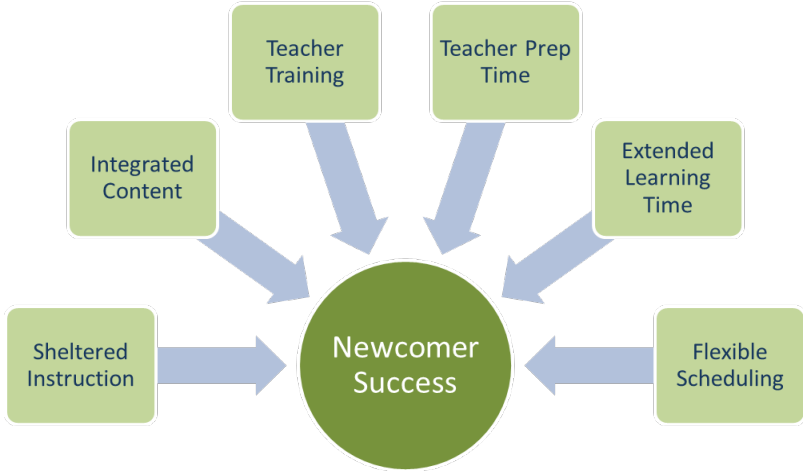
*Cultural Norms*

Some newcomers may benefit from cultural orientation to American social and schooling norms.<sup>18</sup> School norms include protocols for raising hands, when to talk in class, lining up, and expectations around punctuality. Social norms include expectations around greetings, eye contact, personal space, interaction with the opposite sex, and general socializing.

**ACADEMIC PROGRAMMING**

As students comprehensive needs are addressed, effective schools demonstrate a number of common best practices for helping students develop English proficiency and master academic content knowledge.

*Figure 11: Academic programming*



### *Sheltered Instruction*

The majority of newcomers will benefit from some form of newcomer-specific instruction for at least their first year. At schools with sufficient numbers of newcomer students, specialized classes are ideal, and where that is not possible, they should be grouped in the same mainstream classes so they can be efficiently supported. In mainstream settings, teachers must provide additional scaffolds, supports, and small group instruction to make material accessible. Depending on their academic profile and the capabilities of the school, newcomers may transition to mainstream instruction after a single intensive year, spend their whole high school experience in an environment specifically tailored to their needs, or anywhere in between.

Where there is a large enough population of newcomers, high schools built specifically around newcomer education have proven highly effective. These may be four-year comprehensive programs, or may be one to two-year programs focused on preparing students to transfer to a traditional high school. Where the population is smaller, unified programs within a comprehensive high school can offer similar benefits, with programs ranging anywhere from one to four years long.

### *Integrated Content*

While most newcomers will require at least one class focused on language acquisition, the majority of instruction for newcomers should happen through grade-level academic content in math, science, and social studies. Language cannot be learned in isolation – students grow by applying new skills in the classroom and acquiring content-specific vocabulary.<sup>19</sup> Programs that have taken the approach of exclusively teaching language before content (see Arizona) have proven unsuccessful.<sup>20</sup>

In addition to the pedagogical necessity of learning language through content, newcomers simply do not have time to waste on classes in which they are not mastering grade level content. In order to graduate high school college and/or career ready, students must begin accumulating academic credits in a timely manner.

### *Teacher Training*

To teach newcomers most effectively, teachers must be properly trained by coaches with newcomer expertise. Most secondary-school teachers are trained to teach a particular area of content and their pre-service education does not usually focus on supporting English language development through content areas. Teachers instructing newcomers must learn to integrate content and language instruction together in their practice.

### *Teacher Prep Time*

Adapting grade-level content for newcomers with appropriate scaffolding is time-consuming labor. Content teachers need time to adapt instruction for newcomers and to plan with other teachers so that they can reinforce language objectives across subjects. Designated ESL teachers need this time to coordinate with content teachers as well. Accordingly, teachers serving newcomer students require additional prep periods during the week to teach most effectively.

### *Extended Learning Time*

Newcomers who arrive in high school with limited literacy and academic skills must be given additional learning time to catch up. Many students will need additional years to graduate high school college and career-ready and should be supported in doing so. Some older SIFEs may benefit from being placed in ninth grade to get additional time, even if age would typically place them in a higher grade. Extra learning time may also take the form of Saturday school, summer school, or evening classes.

### *Flexible Scheduling*

Some high school newcomers are at risk of dropping out due to conflicts between school and work. To address this issue, districts have successfully experimented with modified school schedules. For example, a district that offers classes ending by 1pm will allow students to stay in school while still working an eight-hour shift in the evening.



# District Evaluation Framework

Appropriate program structures and services for newcomers will vary based on a district and school size, the number of newcomers, and the newcomers’ level of need. This heterogeneity in learning environments for newcomers presents a challenge for district leaders, policymakers, and consultants in understanding what steps should be taken in different contexts. There are currently no frameworks in common use to evaluate districts for newcomer education.

The evaluation framework to the right offers a general schema to categorize and conceptualize district newcomer needs. If the information for each category is known in a district, reasonable recommendations can be made for comprehensive services and academic program design. District leaders may use this framework as a tool for self-evaluation and planning, while policymakers and researchers may use it for landscape analysis, facilitating district partnerships, and targeting districts for support and research. An explanation of each area in the tool is below.

*Figure 12*

## DISTRICT EVALUATION FRAMEWORK

<b>District Basics</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Enrollment</li><li>• Newcomers</li><li>• EL</li><li>• FRPM</li></ul>	<b>Newcomer Characteristics</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Refugee</li><li>• Asylee</li><li>• Unaccompanied</li><li>• SIFE</li><li>• Languages</li></ul>	<b>Community Characteristics</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Urbanicity</li><li>• Prior Immigration</li><li>• Community-Based Organizations</li></ul>
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### *District Basics*

A large district with more than a thousand newcomers likely has the critical mass of students to create comprehensive schools or in-school academies dedicated to newcomer education. At this scale, it is cost-effective to dedicate staff at the district level specifically to newcomer instructional and socioemotional needs. This may include roles for program directors, instructional coaches, community liaisons, and translators. A smaller district with fewer newcomers may not be able to support this level of specialized staffing. Districts without the critical mass of newcomers for specialized staffing will require motivated educators and office staff to wear multiple hats in addressing needs unique to the newcomer population.

The composition of a districts’ other students matters as well. A district with a large EL population will have more instructional expertise relevant to newcomers, and a district with a large free and reduced-price meal (FRPM) population will have more experience addressing needs associated with living in poverty. Districts with lower incidences of these populations may be less prepared in some ways but have more financial resources for student supports.

### *Newcomer Characteristics*

Newcomer students that are refugees, asylees, and unaccompanied minors are likely to arrive in U.S. schools with significant trauma. They are likely to require counseling, socioemotional supports, and help addressing basic needs outside of the school context.

SIFE newcomers will require intensive, intentionally-planned academic intervention to be successful at the high school level. These students must rapidly acquire English, academic content, and academic habits of mind. Newcomers with a high level of formal education in their home country may require far less specialized support of that type. With a foundation of home language literacy and generalizable content knowledge, most are able to transition to general education courses more quickly.

Language diversity is a key knowledge point for districts serving newcomers. If there is a large concentration of a single language group and qualified staff, bilingual courses may be useful. Heterogeneity in home language will make this impractical. No matter the language composition, it is important that district staff access interpretation and translation services to comply with language access requirements under civil rights laws.

### *Community Characteristics*

Denser, more urban districts will generally have more efficient transportation options and be better equipped to offer newcomer programs that cluster such students at particular schools. Rural districts may face more challenges in clustering students for efficient instruction.

The level of urbanicity is also often correlated with the presence of community-based organizations (CBOs). When present, CBOs can collaborate with districts in serving newcomers' health, housing, and legal needs.

A community's history with welcoming immigrants is a final factor in understanding a district's landscape for newcomers. For example, if several Mam-speaking newcomers from Guatemala arrive in a district without an established Mam community, it will be more challenging to find translators and interpreters, as well as to support students' maintenance of their language—for example, by employing bilingual teaching assistants. If there is already history of Mam-speakers in the community, the newcomers' path will be eased through community support and partnership.

## DISTRICT CASE STUDY: OAKLAND

Oakland Unified School District is a large, urban district with large EL and low-income populations. Within this general high-needs context, Oakland serves a large number of newcomers with significant academic and integration challenges. The diversity of languages presents challenges for bilingual instruction and Oakland has elected not to take this approach with its newcomers.

Figure 13

### OAKLAND UNIFIED SCHOOL DISTRICT

District Basics	Newcomer Characteristics	Community Characteristics
Enrollment: 37,049	Refugee: 118	Urbanicity: Urban
Newcomers: 2,606	Asylee: 158	Prior Immigration: Long history
EL: 32.6%	Unaccompanied: 572	Community-Based Organizations: Many
FRPM: 74.5%	SIFE: 594	
	Languages: Many	

The high incidence of newcomers in Oakland makes newcomer-specific staffing and programming imperative. A district-based director of newcomer services supports site-based programming and coordinates the wide variety of comprehensive services provided by the district. A liberal bastion, port city, and historic resettlement site of the International Rescue Committee, the city has a long history of immigration. In this context, the district is able to partner with nonprofits and the immigrant community in supporting its students.

Oakland serves its high school newcomers at five schools. Brett Harte provides a ninth-grade programs for first year newcomers, with students transferring into general education after one year. Castlemont and Fremont are comprehensive high schools providing sheltered newcomer instruction for one to three years depending on student need. In years two and three, newcomers begin to attend general education classes outside the program, with a goal of transitioning students entirely by their fourth year. A subset of SIFE newcomers receive sheltered instruction at these schools for all four years. Oakland International School is dedicated entirely to newcomer students. It is part of the Internationals Network for Public Schools and receives additional funding from outside sources. It was the first newcomer-specific site of its kind in California and provides technical advice to educators across the state. Finally, Ruidsdale Newcomer Academy is an opt-in alternative education program for at-risk students aged 16 and older. The shorter school day, modified graduation expectations, and intensive wraparound services aim to keep newcomers in school while allowing flexibility to work.

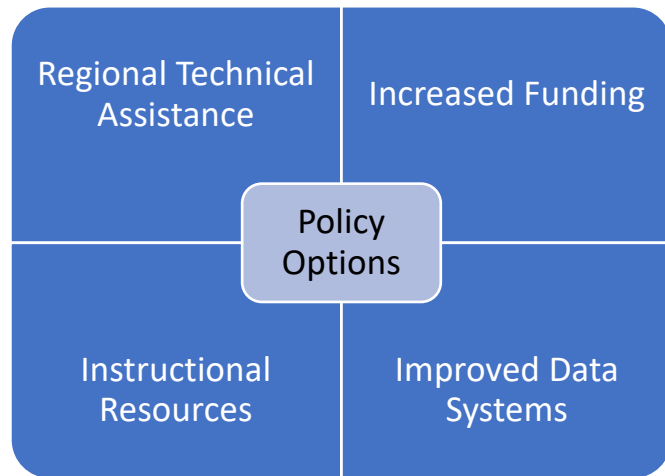
Much of Oakland's best practice newcomer work is supported by outside funding. A Salesforce grant of \$1.1 million per year funds a team of social workers and counselors for middle and high school sites serving newcomers. Due to their high profile and high incidence of unaccompanied minors and SIFEs, they also receive a \$611,000 per year from CalNEW, which helps fund early literacy programs, a program for at-risk newcomers, and an additional specialized newcomer counselor that works across school sites. Another grant from the Haas Fund supports professional development.

Despite these additional resources, recent financial setbacks have caused Oakland to focus on secondary newcomers and scale back its programming for elementary newcomer students. In the past, the district clustered young newcomers to a few elementary schools deemed newcomer “hubs”, where a newcomer teacher was staffed to do pullout teaching from general education classes. As Oakland’s funding situation has deteriorated, these discretionary positions have been cut. The most recent union contract stipulates a 0.5 FTE teacher at every site with at least 50 newcomer students and a 1.0 FTE at every site with 100, but some teachers claim this is not being fully implemented.

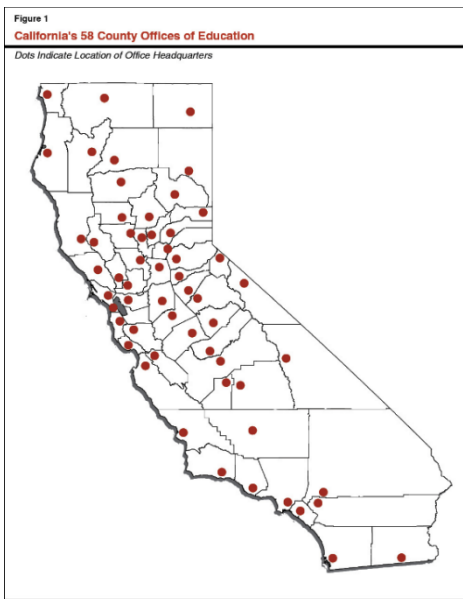
# Policy Options

California has little policy in place that directly addresses the needs of newcomers. There is no single policy that will easily solve this complex issue; instead, we must examine multiple areas and avenues for improvement. In this section, we will examine four broad areas for intervention:

For each policy area, we examine three options. While the options in the Regional Technical Assistance category may be mutually exclusive, the policies in the remaining categories can all be considered additively. In evaluating policy options for newcomers, it is important to consider cost, efficacy, and feasibility of implementation.



## **POLICY AREA 1: REGIONAL TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE**



A major need facing nearly all LEAs with newcomers is technical expertise in program development, class scheduling, curriculum adaptation, and teacher training. This knowledge is highly specialized for high school newcomer education in particular.

A huge district like Los Angeles Unified has the economies of scale to develop and staff their own in-house experts. For other districts, even large ones, it can be financially difficult and inefficient to staff district-office-based newcomer experts while also supporting the extensive programming needed for newcomers at school sites. For small districts, rural districts, and districts with a low incidence of newcomers, it is simply not viable to staff newcomer specialists.

The California EL Road Map envisions a state full of bilingual students from all language backgrounds. However, most districts struggle to meet its goals. In addition to the acute needs of educators serving newcomers, there is a broader need for EL support services in general.

**A regional solution is necessary** to provide expert guidance, facilitate collaboration, share resources, and train teachers in specialized EL instruction. Below we look at three possible options.

### *Build Capacity in County Offices of Education*

A network of regional technical service providers already exists across the state, and is the most logical place to look first. The state constitution establishes superintendents for each county, and the 58 resulting county offices of education (COEs) look very different. While the average COE serves 16 LEAs, the Los Angeles COE serves 80 and seven COEs serve only one.<sup>21</sup>

State law tasks COEs with specific responsibilities – educating students incarcerated in county jails, reviewing districts’ budgets and academic plans, and providing differentiated assistance to a school districts if any student group does not meet performance standards for two or more LCFF priority areas.<sup>22</sup> However, many COEs fill bigger roles not required by law, and provide districts with business services, legal services, trainings, data support, student services, program design, and career & technical education programs for their students.<sup>23</sup> Services provided by COEs vary by their funding levels, district needs, and superintendents’ priorities.

In theory, COEs could serve as central hubs of pedagogical expertise on newcomers. COE staff could assist multiple LEAs in program design, curriculum development, teacher training, coaching, and collaboration between sites with similar populations. Eleven COE Regional EL Specialists are staffed across the state, though their current role is often more administrative and compliance-oriented than it is advisory.

Unfortunately, there is a wide degree of variability in the capacity of each COE and the trust it holds with its LEAs. While some COEs, such as Fresno and Los Angeles, are perceived as active and successful members of their county’s educational landscape, others are not. In a recent brief, the California Collaborative on District Reform reviewed three reports from 2016 and 2017 on the COE system and expressed concerns over efficiency and efficacy of the current COE system.<sup>24</sup> They recommended shifting the COE role to focus on LCAP continuous improvement, reallocating funding and responsibilities from COEs to districts, and encouraging COEs to act as collaborative facilitators. A 2017 Legislative Analyst’s Office (LAO) report argues that directly funding COE optional services benefit neither the state or the district. COE funding, they write, is contrary to the state’s overall philosophy of autonomous district control, and districts have little recourse if they’re dissatisfied with the services they receive.<sup>25</sup>

While COEs are a natural place to turn for regional technical assistance from an infrastructure perspective, many educators and some policy analysts would not support their expansion. With so many responsibilities already, the COEs may struggle to effectively develop EL and newcomer technical assistance capabilities.

### *Create Regional Technical Assistance Centers*

In New York State, the need for language-centered technical assistance is addressed through Regional Bilingual Education Resource Networks (RBERNs). There are seven of these regional hubs distributed throughout the state, each with a staff of experts offering technical assistance and support to the districts with the highest needs. They are further supported by an eighth, statewide office that helps coordinate services and assistance.

Establishing similar regional EL technical assistance centers in California would be costly but efficient in the long run. Both small and large districts could benefit from shared trainings and technical know-how. High incidence newcomer districts would be less burdened by answering calls for help from low incidence districts, and regional centers would have a vested interest in helping high incidence districts develop their curriculum for sharing with low incidence districts. Low incidence districts could get the guidance they need for small populations and unique local circumstances.

In California, regional EL technical assistance centers could be established in each of the eleven COE superintendent regions. This would amount to a massive upgrade from the current Regional COE EL Specialist system, which currently staffs 11 people statewide within certain COEs. Since establishing such centers would be a massive investment, establishing a pilot hub for a single region would be reasonable exploratory step.

Financing for the new centers could come at least in part from redistributing funds currently allocated for COEs. According to LAO estimates, more than half of COE annual funding is spent on optional services, and many districts find these services unnecessary or poorly delivered.<sup>26</sup> Reallocating a portion of these funds might be politically difficult but the funds may be used more effectively by dedicated EL technical assistance centers.

### *Support Nonprofits in Establishing Newcomer Centers*

Although the state ultimately has the legal obligation to appropriately support the education of its students, certain nonprofit groups with newcomer expertise may be best suited to immediately fill the role of regional technical assistance provision. An expert organization with backing from a combination of philanthropic and state sources could cost-effectively advise high-incidence regions. The Internationals Network for Public Schools, a New York-based nonprofit dedicated to newcomer advocacy and school support, is well-situated to fill this role in the San Francisco Bay Area, with schools in Oakland, Richmond, and San Francisco already operating under its umbrella.

If a nonprofit receives sufficient philanthropic support to begin operations, the state could allocate funds to help the nonprofit expand its impact across a wider region, as well as facilitating connections with LEAs and COEs.

This approach could have a very positive effect in the areas where nonprofits choose to set up shop, but there are equity concerns. Less centrally located LEAs with newcomer populations will not benefit as much under this option, as coverage would likely take place in fewer areas. On the other hand, it may be the most actionable of the three regional technical assistance options in the short term.

## **POLICY AREA 2: FUNDING**

### *Change the Unduplicated Nature of LCFF Funding*

The fact that supplemental and concentration funding levels are calculated based on unduplicated student counts means that a district receives the same amount of funding for a low-income (LI) student as a student with

all three identified cost factors (LI, EL, and foster). Logically, one can see that a student with all three high need statuses will typically face more barriers and require more resources than a student with one high need status.

Particularly at the high school level, newcomers require more support both inside and outside of school than typical ELs. They are frequently of LI status and some have experienced significant trauma. Under the status quo, most districts have difficulty supporting newcomers with the programming they need to become college and career ready. Additional resources are needed for teacher training, counseling, wraparound services, and program management.

In their 2018-2019 education budget analysis, the California LAO recognized that the unduplicated nature of the LCFF system might be “reasonably questioned” by policymakers, “as students with a greater number of risk factors might be more costly to support.” To address this issue, they present the option of changing the rules for EL/LI funding so that a student with multiple identified cost factors would generate additional financial support. They estimate that it would cost roughly \$2 billion to allocate supplemental funding based on duplicated EL/LI counts.<sup>27</sup>

### *Allocate Additional Per Pupil Funding for Newcomers*

Providing additional funds for newcomers is already recognized as a legitimate policy mechanism by the federal Title III Immigrant Student Program. However, as written earlier in this report, this amounts to only \$100 per student in California, and only in districts where the newcomer population is rising. Given the educational needs of newcomer students, this funding level is helpful but inadequate. Additional per pupil funding for newcomers from the state would directly support districts in educating students with unique educational needs.

### *Retain and Expand CalNEW Grant Program*

The CalNEW grant program began in 2017-2018 and will run through 2019-2020. With ten million dollars appropriated over three years, grants have provided support for some (but not all) of the many high-needs newcomers in the state. With additional funding, all high needs newcomers might be supported. Targeting funds towards wraparound services for the highest need newcomers limits costs compared to allocating additional funds for all newcomers, and may have the larger impact on student outcomes on a per dollar basis. After all, only 66.9% of newcomers are socioeconomically disadvantaged.

President Trump’s anti-immigrant policy and rhetoric served as an impetus for CalNEW’s passage, and the desire to support newcomers still runs strong in the state. With precedent already in place, advocates may consider this the most politically feasible avenue for increased newcomer funding.

There is also real merit in continuing the involvement of the California Department of Social Services in newcomer student services. Too often, schools are expected to address a wide litany of student needs beyond their mandate and capacities, and many of the best practices for high-needs newcomers are related to the provision of social services. Acknowledging the important work that the CDSS already does and advocating for its expansion is a positive thing.



### **POLICY AREA 3: INSTRUCTIONAL RESOURCES**

Due to the often isolated and localized nature of newcomer education, many educators feel that they are constantly “reinventing the wheel”, and would benefit from a common place to access information on best practices. This is particularly true for low-incidence districts without a long history of newcomer education. The CDE could play the role of a clearinghouse for high quality content. Working with best practice organizations and districts, resources and guides could be made available freely on the CDE website.

#### *Provide Open Access Curriculum*

To a large extent, educators who work with newcomer students must develop and adapt content material for their local populations and needs. Ideally, English should be taught in an integrated fashion through grade level content, with specific language objectives introduced and practiced within a meaningful context. In this sense, a generic newcomer curriculum for all subjects goes against known best practices. However, there are still ways in which newcomer-specific curricular materials would be highly impactful.

The first general need is for “survival English” materials. A basic scope and sequence for the essentials of English communication will be especially helpful for educators operating outside of formal newcomer program structures. An open access roadmap for teaching language fundamentals will help newcomers build the skills to better access grade level knowledge.

Beyond oral language, there is a demand amongst educators for a high-quality foundational literacy curriculum for SIFE students. Many schools are currently forced to rely in part on elementary school phonics packages which are developmentally inappropriate for high school students. Californian educators should have open access to a high-quality curricular guidance for their high school newcomers.

There are three major options for high school level foundational literacy curriculum:

1. **Curate teacher-created curriculum.** Work with Californian LEAs to package and make accessible the most advanced teacher-created curricula. This would most likely come from sites with large, developed newcomer programs such as Oakland, San Francisco, San Diego, and Los Angeles. Curricula, lesson plans, and supporting documents should be professionally developed and made accessible in an electronic format.
2. **Purchase a curriculum and make it open access.** Put out a call to publishers and nonprofits to develop a curriculum for open access use. The state would then pay their chosen publisher a fee, and the resulting curriculum would be made openly available on the CDE website. For a rare example of such curriculum already produced by a for-profit organization, see Benchmark Educations’ *Rigor* series.
3. **Collaborate with Bridges to Academic Success.** The Bridges SIFE literacy curriculum is specifically targeted at the most high needs newcomers – those without prior English instruction, and with limited literacy in their home language. It is commonly described by educators with access as the best curriculum of its kind available. Bridges is “an extensive collaboration among high school language and literacy teachers; subject

area teachers; school administrators in several high schools in New York State; and CUNY [City University of New York] researchers.” They are funded by New York City and New York State Departments of Education, and their curriculum is not publicly available (though some California teachers access web materials with secondhand log-ins). The CDE could explore buying into their model and program, making a version of their curriculum publicly available.

For each of these options, philanthropic support might be reasonably enlisted. The Gates, Hewlett, and Schusterman foundations are good examples of philanthropies with an interest in developing high quality, open access curriculum.

### *Purchase Language Software in Bulk*

Newcomer educators report that English language learning software such as Imagine Learning and Rosetta Stone are useful supplements for students arriving with limited to no English. Unfortunately, this software is expensive – a single license can cost \$120 annually. The CDE could negotiate with Imagine Learning or Rosetta Stone on behalf of all LEAs serving newcomers, purchasing licenses at a bulk discount.

### *Create Guides for Program Design*

While a few papers and reports outline exemplar schools and programs for newcomers, none do so in a way that would facilitate easy emulation, and few address situations when there are small numbers of newcomers in a given district. This leaves districts around the state frequently starting from scratch in designing programs for their newcomer populations.

To address this issue, the CDE could conduct research around best practices in program design for varying newcomer contexts and disseminate actionable guidance to through a web-based guide. A program design guide should address:

- Intake procedures
- Entry and exit criteria
- Master schedules
- Four, five, and six-year pathways to graduation
- Continuation schools for newcomers
- Critical mass thresholds for
  - Targeted newcomer classes
  - Bilingual programming
  - Stand-alone newcomer schools
  - District-based newcomer positions

## **POLICY AREA 4: IMPROVE DATA & ACCOUNTABILITY SYSTEMS**

### *Data Tracking*

There are many challenges to collecting newcomer educational data. The first relates to privacy, which is at a premium for a population which may be undocumented. The second relates to achievement. Since newcomers are such a heterogeneous group, it is important to provide additional contextual data to help stakeholders understand student outcomes. For example, an unaccompanied minor with limited formal education should not be expected to progress in exactly the same way as the child of a recently immigrated professor. There is truly no perfect solution. Nevertheless, **it is important to collect data for newcomers to understand who they are, where they are, and how they are doing.**

California districts are already required to collect data for new students with a home language use survey, which is the first step in identifying ELs at enrollment. The state also keeps records as to when children first entered U.S. schools. However, data for newcomer students is only publicly available in aggregate on the CDE's Title III Immigrant Student Program webpage. It is not available at site, district, or county level through DataQuest, the state's portal for educational data. Districts are not required to track newcomers' achievement or presence as a distinct subgroup, as they do for gender, race, ethnicity, special education, low-income, homeless, and foster statuses.

Without data for newcomer demographics and outcomes, it is impossible for policymakers and educational leaders to fully understand if newcomers are being effectively educated. This knowledge is needed at the state, county, and district level to inform decisions around funding and instruction. California can improve on the status quo in two ways.

First, newcomers can be designated as a distinct subgroup distinct from English Learners for the purposes of data collection. As shown from the data request that was fulfilled for this report, the CDE already has the capability to safely and usefully detail demographic information for newcomers in every LEA. This can and should be done annually in some form for the use of policymakers, educational leaders, researchers, and the broader public.

Second, outcome data in the form of high school graduation can be tracked at aggregate levels for LEAs. This can be done using the "entry date into U.S. schools" data that already exists in CALPADS. Since there are concerns around student privacy, this could not be done for individual schools or LEAs with a small number of newcomer students. However, it can be safely done where there are higher concentrations of students.

### *Research Partnerships*

Little is known about the current distribution, achievement, and characteristics of newcomers across California, and there is no central clearinghouse to review outstanding best practices and models. The data analysis and qualitative research this would entail may be beyond the CDE's current capacity. However, there are many academics in education, sociology, economics, and public policy that would happily share this work.

Expanding CDE research and evaluation capacity through academic partnerships could be as simple as creating a fund, putting out an RFP, and assembling an expert committee to review the proposals.

### *Expectations for High School Graduation*

Currently, the California dashboard for school achievement system expects students to graduate high school in four years. For most students this is a reasonable expectation, but many newcomers need additional time to acquire English and earn enough academic credits to graduate. Under the status quo, some schools with high numbers of newcomer students may appear to be failing when their newcomers take more than four years to graduate, when in fact they may be wildly succeeding. To recognize this difference, the state could disaggregate newcomers from the EL subgroup in the evaluation dashboard with expectations for a five or six-year graduation rate. This would also clarify which schools have low graduation rates due to inadequately serving their long-term English Learner population. Ultimately though, undifferentiated high school graduation expectations will have to be addressed at the federal level in the next ESSA reauthorization.

# Recommendations

The policy options outlined above are extensive and will not happen all at once. Balancing cost, impact, and feasibility of implementation, I recommend pursuing the following options first:

**1. Create a leadership position at the CDE to coordinate newcomer education efforts.**

This newcomer expert could facilitate all other policy initiatives and serve as a focal point for the CDE to collaborate with districts, non-profits, academics, foundations, other states, and the U.S. Department of Education. Creating this position could have a large impact for a relatively small cost.

**2. Explore nonprofit regional technical assistance options.**

In the short run, this is the most viable option for bringing newcomer instructional expertise to highly impacted regions. The Internationals Network is a natural partner, and could begin operations with support from foundations and collaboration with the state. In the future, as newcomers become better recognized as a distinct subgroup with unique needs, it may be appropriate for state actors to take a more direct role in regional assistance.

**3. Retain and expand the CALNEW program.**

CALNEW is outstanding in supporting newcomers with the highest outside-of-school needs, but its funding runs out after the 2019-2020 school year. Retaining the program – and expanding it if possible – is much more likely than changing the unduplicated nature of LCFF or adding per pupil funding for newcomers.

**4. Collaborate with Bridges to Academic Success and curate program guides.**

Expanding access to the Bridges foundational literacy curriculum is low-hanging fruit that would benefit schools immediately. It could also help form the beginning of a collaborative relationship working on newcomer issues with New York state, a leader in the space. Practical program guides are highly desired by district leaders around the state and could disseminate best practices in an accessible manner.

**5. Include newcomers in state data systems.**

If newcomers are absent from official data systems, they will continue to be absent from conversation, strategic planning, and instruction. Recognizing newcomers as a vulnerable subgroup with unique needs – in a similar manner to foster and homeless youth – will surface their issues for policymakers and educational leaders. The CDE can begin quickly by utilizing data already in CALPADS to begin regularly reporting deidentified demographic data (as has been done in this paper) and tracking outcomes at the district level.

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# Interviews

This analysis would not have been possible without the generous aid of individuals at the following organizations.

## *Government*

- Alameda County Office of Education
- California Department of Education
- California Legislative Analyst's Office
- Hudson Valley Regional Bilingual Education Resource Network
- New York Department of Education
- Texas Education Association
- U.S. Department of Education

## *LEAs*

- Los Angeles Unified School District
- Oakland Unified School District
- Rowland Unified School District
- San Francisco Unified School District
- Sanger Unified School District

## *Academia*

- Stanford University
- University of California, Berkeley
- University of Oregon

## *Nonprofits*

- Ed Trust West
- GEMAS
- Learning Policy Institute
- Migration Policy Institute
- New America
- Internationals Network
- Public Advocates



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- <sup>26</sup> Ibid
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