



Refugee Student Support and the International Rescue Committee Collaborative Webinar Series

Session 3: Supporting the Academic Achievement of Refugee
and Other Newcomer Students in the Classroom and Beyond

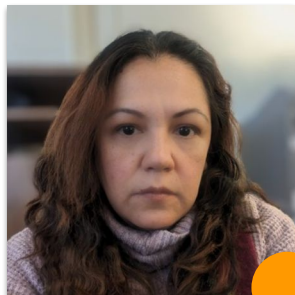
April 2026

Introductions



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Refugee Student Support



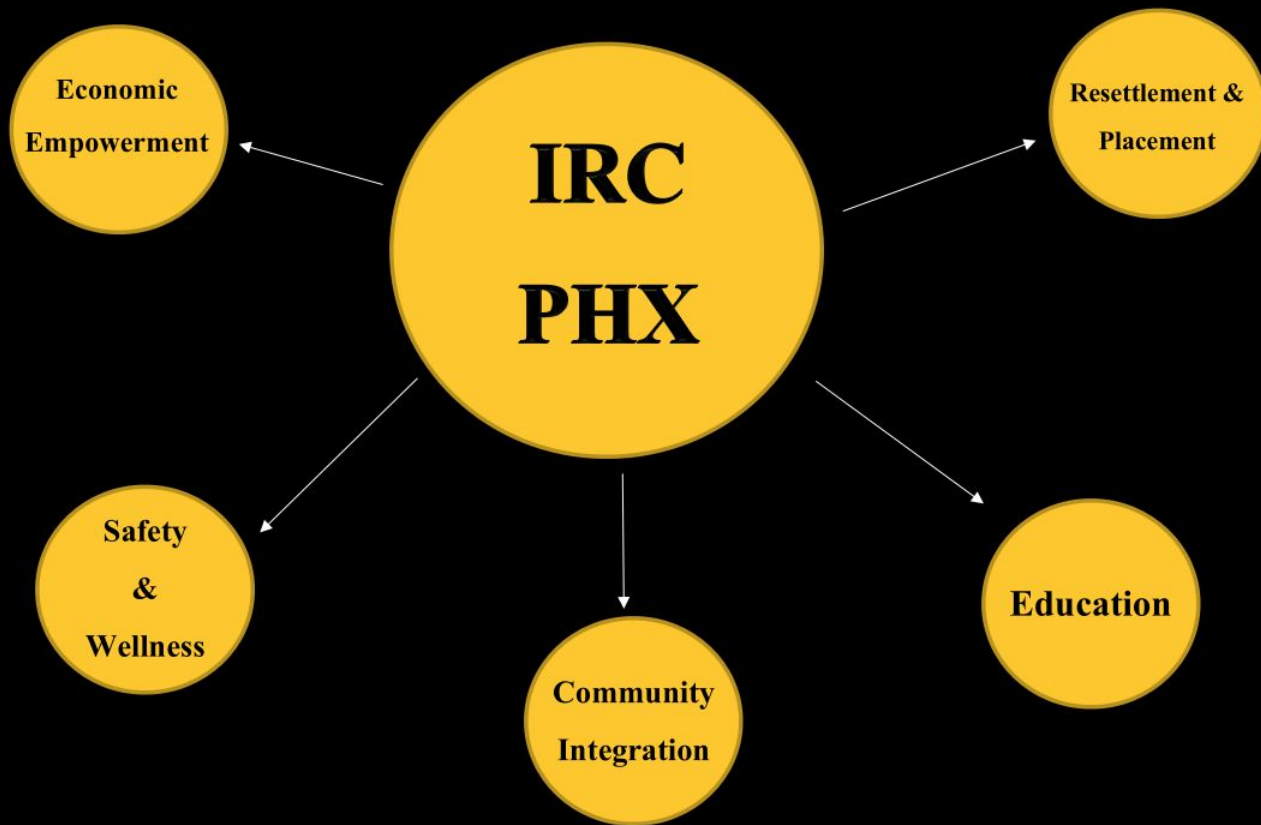
Refugee Student Support (RSS) serves **local education agencies** (LEAs), **community-based organizations**, **students**, and **families** to ensure that newcomer students are **enrolled without delay or discriminatory practice** and have **access** to educational and wrap-around services.



RSS provides **guidance** as well as **direct technical assistance** to ensure awareness and consistency among all stakeholders.

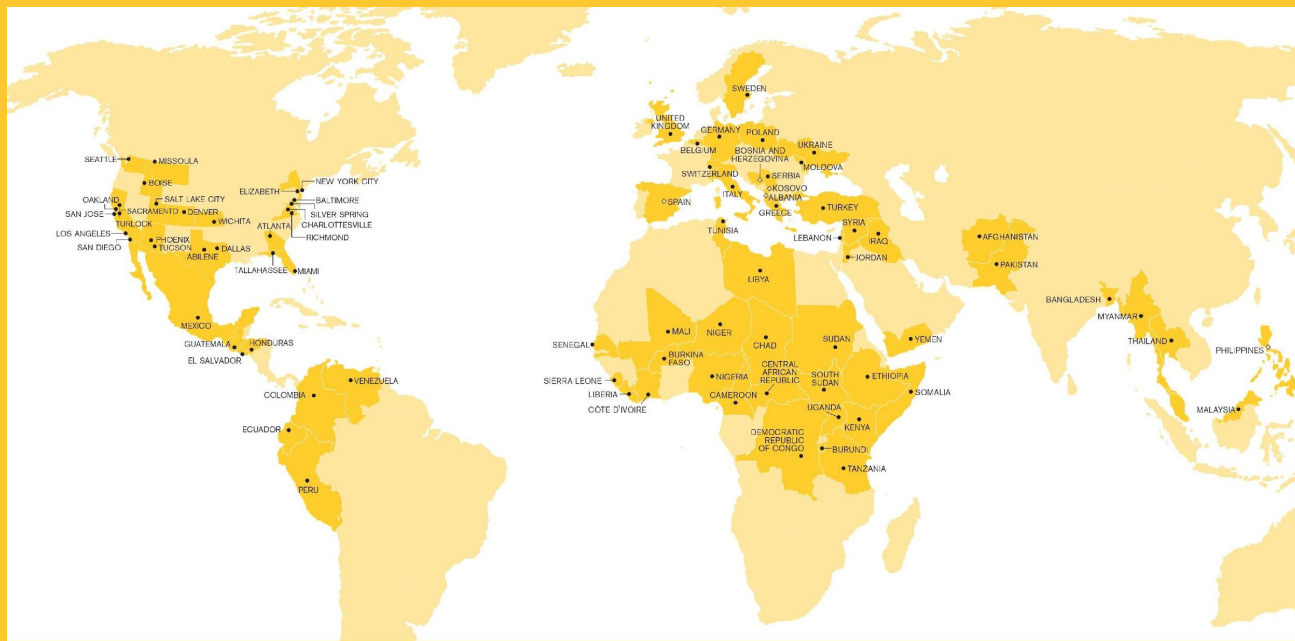


Through **collaborations** with LEAs, resettlement agencies, external (state and national) partners, and other community-based organizations, RSS aims to **facilitate connections** between newcomers and those who may support them.





Where We Work Around the World



Where We Work

The IRC helps people whose lives and livelihoods are shattered by conflict and disaster, including the climate crisis, to survive, recover and gain control over their future. Founded in 1933 at the call of Albert Einstein, we work in over 40 countries worldwide.

Together with our supporters, we help people in some of the toughest places on Earth, including Venezuela, Myanmar, South Sudan, Ethiopia and Syria. In the U.S., we are leaders in resettling refugees, and worldwide, we help families integrate into their new communities.

LEGEND

- ◆ Partner Support Programs

Common Acronyms and Terms

Education-Based

- **ADE** - Arizona Department of Education
- **RSS** – Refugee Student Support
- **HEP** - Homeless Education Program
- **LEA** - Local education agency
- **EL** - English Learner (student)
- **LEP** - Limited English Proficiency (parent)
- **SIS** - Student Information System
- **MOU** - Memorandum of Understanding
- **TA** - Technical Assistance

Immigration-Based

- **IRC** - International Rescue Committee
- **ORR** – U.S. Office of Refugee Resettlement
- **DES** - Department of Economic Security
- **Arizona RRP** - Refugee Resettlement Program
- **R&P** - Reception and Placement (First 90-days Program)
- **RSIG** - Refugee School Impact Grant
- **LSS** – Lutheran Social Services



Objective

Attendees will understand...

- **Evidence-based challenges** impacting refugee and other newcomer student academic achievement,
- **High-leverage solutions** to positively impact refugee and other newcomer student academic achievement, and
- **Valuable resources** to serve students and families inside and outside of the classroom.



Introductions

What is your **role** in your school, district, or organization?

What part of **Arizona** do you serve?

Do you serve **refugee or other newcomer students** in your community?

Were you able to join us for **Session 1 & 2**?

Share your
answers in
the pop-up
poll!



Sessions 1 & 2 Overview

Webinar Series Session 1 & 2

Foundational Knowledge for Serving Refugee and Other Newcomer Students and Families

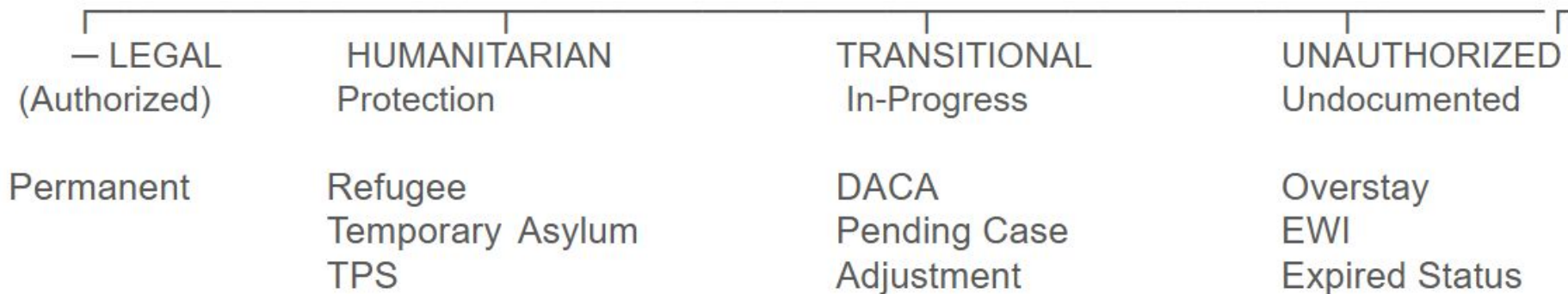


Today's session will build upon information shared in session 1 & 2, which covered topics on:

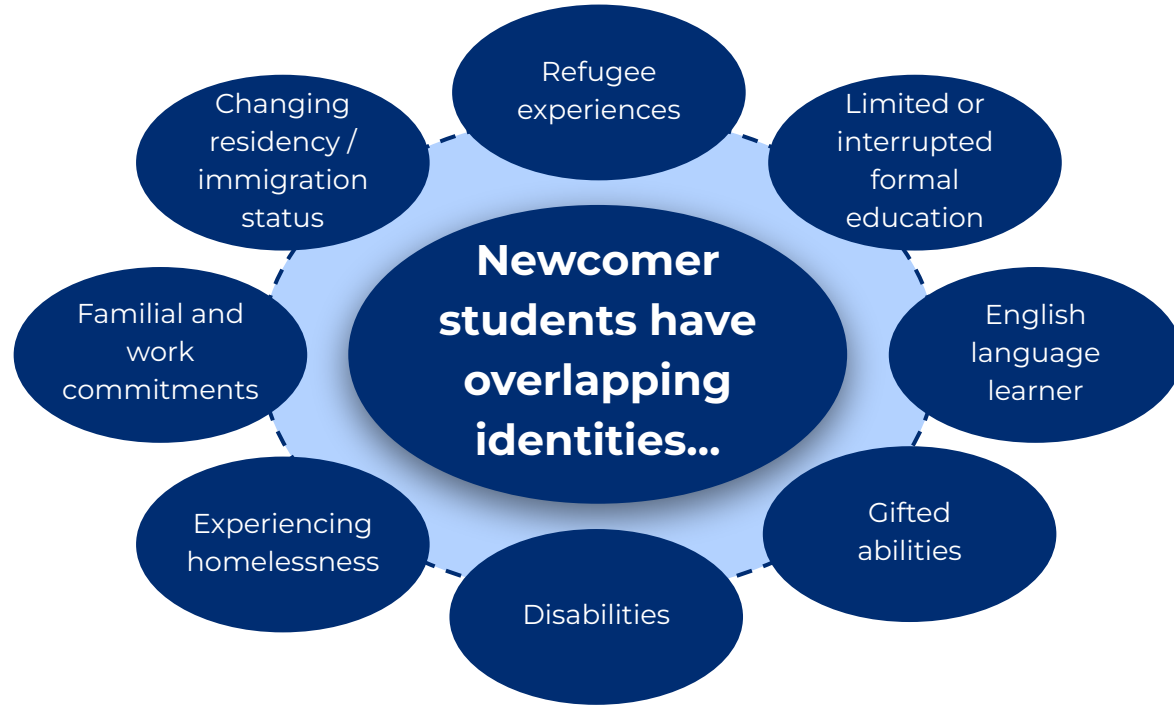
- Foundational Knowledge for Serving Refugee and Other Newcomer Students and Families
- Ensuring Educational Access for Refugee and Other Newcomer Students

In case you missed it, slides and a recording of each session are now available on the [Refugee Student Support webpage!](#)

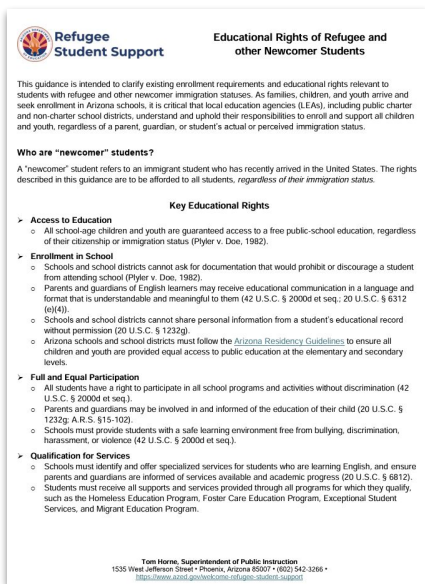
IMMIGRATION



Intersectionality of Newcomer Students



Key Educational Rights for Newcomer Students



[This resource can be found on the RSS website.](#)

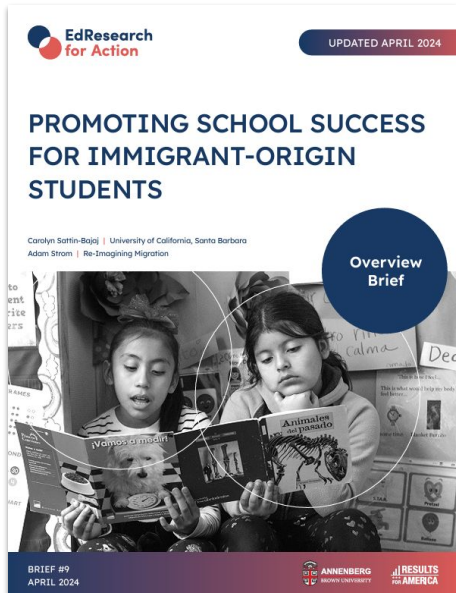
- Access to a **free, accessible, and appropriate public education**, regardless of citizenship or immigration status (Plyler v. Doe, 1982).
- **Enrollment** in school in accordance with all federal and state laws.
- Full and equal **participation** without discrimination.
- **Access to all services and programs** which the student qualifies for.
- **Translation and interpretation services** for parents and guardians to ensure awareness.

Educational Experiences of Refugee and Other Newcomer Students:

Challenges and Solutions

- Key Issues Impacting Refugee and Newcomer Student Achievement
- State and Local Data on Refugee and Other Newcomer Student Performance
- Evidence-Based Practices to Impact Refugee and Newcomer Student Achievement

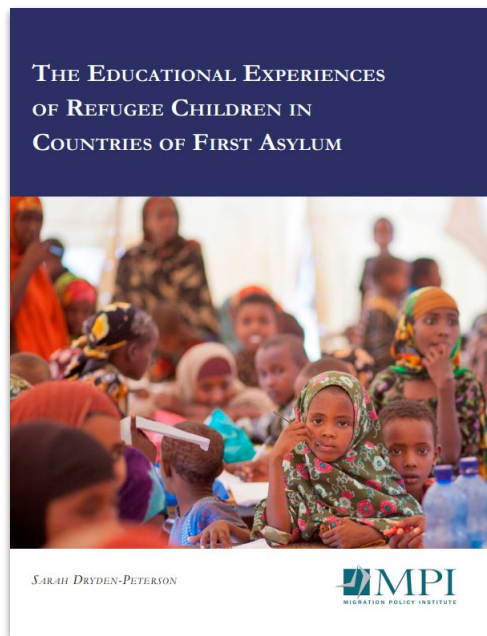
Key Issues Impacting Refugee and Newcomer Student Achievement



[Research analyzed by EdResearch for Action](#) shows that **refugee and other newcomer students** often experience the following **challenges** and **barriers** to **academic success**:

- Immigrant-origin students' performance in K-12 education has varied over time, with periods of both lower and higher performance compared to native-born peers. This variability is largely driven by factors such as **parental education, income, socio-economic status in home countries, country of origin, and school setting**.
- Differences in achievement between immigrant-origin and native-born students primarily result from **variations in family and school resources**, and this is compounded by issues like **interrupted schooling** and **language barriers**.
- Immigrant-origin students may experience **stressors related to immigration** status and immigration enforcement threats that can affect their **academic performance and overall well-being**.

Key Issues Impacting Refugee and Newcomer Student Achievement



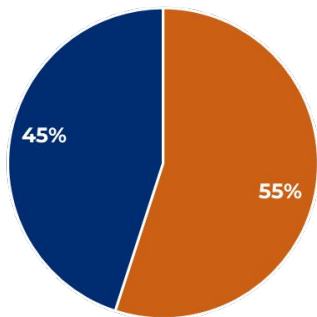
Research conducted by the Migration Policy Institute analyzed the **educational experiences** of **refugee children before their arrival in the U.S.**, finding that these experiences have “considerable implications” for their academic success in the U.S.. Common experiences found were:

- Frequent **disruptions** and **limited access to schooling**;
- **Little to no access** to instructional content taught in a **language** they understand, or to **language learning** supports;
- Education of **low** and **uneven quality**; and
- **Discriminatory** curriculum, hostility, and bullying due to their nationality.

State and Local Data on Refugee and Other Newcomer Student Performance

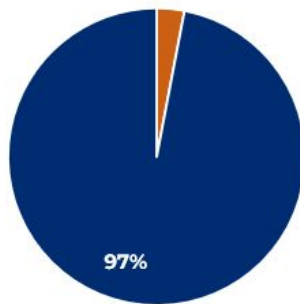
Tracking the academic achievement of refugee and other newcomer students in **Arizona is difficult**, as the data is not collected or readily available. However, data available on common **overlapping identities** helps to understand the **academic achievement** of these students.

Immigrant



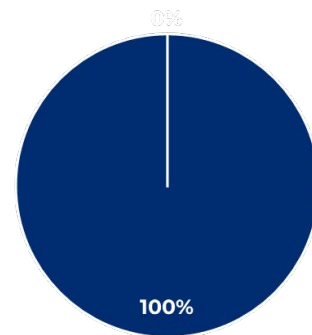
■ Refugee & Immigrant ■ Refugee Only

Students with Disabilities



■ Refugee & Disabled ■ Refugee Only

Gifted

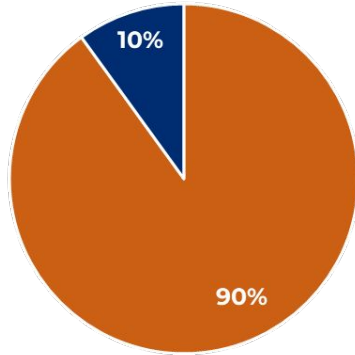


■ Refugee & Gifted ■ Refugee Only



English Learner Student Performance

English Learners



■ Refugee & English Learner ■ Refugee Only

- In school year 24-25, 53 LEAs reported refugee student enrollment, with **90%** also identified as **English learners**.
- **English Learners** in Arizona showed...
 - **16%** proficiency in ELA in the 3rd grade, and **6%** proficiency in ELA in the 11th grade.
 - **25%** proficiency in Math in the 3rd grade, and **7%** proficiency in Math in the 7th grade.
 - A 4-year graduation rate of **67%**, compared to 79% of all students in Arizona.
 - A dropout rate of **4%**, compared to 5% of all students in Arizona.



Check-In

What **obstacles** have you noticed in your school community that cause **barriers for student success**?

What do you think are the **root causes** of these barriers?

Share your
answers in
the chat!

Evidence-Based Practices to Impact Refugee and Newcomer Student Achievement

Throughout today's session, we will cover a variety of **evidence-based practices** that **positively impact** the **academic achievement** of refugee and other newcomer students. These practices are sourced from a variety of resources, such as:

- [*Promoting School Success for Immigrant-Origin Students*](#), EdResearch for Action
- [*The Educational Experiences of Refugee Children in Countries of First Asylum*](#), Migration Policy Institute
- [*Understanding Refugee Trauma: For School Personnel*](#), The National Child Traumatic Stress Network
- [*Child Trauma Toolkit for Educators*](#), The National Child Traumatic Stress Network
- [*Do trauma-informed school practices lead to improved mental health and academic outcomes in children?*](#), Switchboard
- [*Five Early Ways to Respond to Newcomer Youth Mental and Behavioral Health Concerns*](#), Switchboard



High-Leverage Solutions:

Ensuring Required Educational Services & Supports

- Evidence-Based Practices to Impact Refugee and Newcomer Student Achievement
 - Internal Data Tracking
 - Organization of Funding Support
 - English Language Acquisition and SEI Models
 - Ensuring Support for English Learner Students with Disabilities

Evidence-Based Practices to Impact Refugee and Newcomer Student Achievement

Which district-, school- and classroom-level policies and practices can promote healthy development, achievement, and well-being among immigrant-origin students?

- **Accessible communications** in multiple languages and formats can bolster home-school connections and improve student engagement.
- **Programs** aimed at **engaging immigrant-origin families** can foster collaboration, cultural understanding, and educational success within the school community.
- **Formal programs and after-school supports** have been shown to improve academic performance for immigrant youth.
- **Strong teacher-student relationships** can contribute to students' school persistence, sense of belonging, and educational aspirations.



Internal Data Tracking to Plan Effectively

Districts and schools should collect and maintain data to effectively support students.

- Utilize monthly reports of enrollment data to:
 - Track enrollment trends,
 - Ensure awareness of new arrivals and students who have withdrawn, and
 - Gain awareness of enrollment at each school, spoken languages, and countries of origin.
- Data tracking helps with planning purposes to determine and plan where and how to provide additional support.
- Accurate identification allows for collaboration with organizations eager to support refugee students and families.



Organization of Funding to Support Refugee and Other Newcomer Students

A variety of funding sources exist and can impact the educational experiences of refugee and other newcomer students and their families.

- Administrative Costs
- M&O Budget
- ESEA Consolidated Grant (*Consider your Integrated Action Plans (IAP) and Stakeholders!*)
 - Title I - Supplemental Instruction for Low-Income Families
 - Title II - Supporting Effective Instruction (Teacher Training)
 - Title III - English Language Acquisition
 - Emergency Immigrant Education Program Targeted Subgrants



English Language Acquisition and SEI Models

Consider your district and school community when determining what Structured English Immersion (SEI) Model would most effectively serve your students:

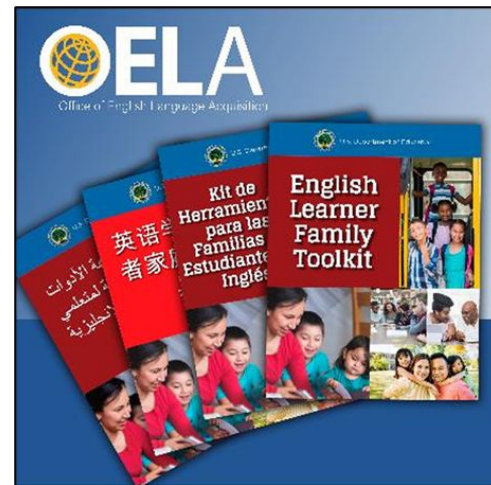
- Pull-Out SEI Model
- Two-Hour SEI Model
- Newcomer SEI Model
- 50-50 Dual-Language Immersion (DLI) SEI Model

Utilize the [SEI Model Implementation Guide from OELAS](#) to learn more about the differences between each model, and how to determine which model best fits the needs and goals of your district and schools.



Translation and Interpretation

- **LEAs are responsible for providing translation and interpretation services for parents and guardians of students** when necessary.
- According to the [U.S. Department of Justice and the U.S. Department of Education](#), “Schools must communicate information to limited English proficient parents in a language they can understand about any program, service, or activity that is called to the attention of parents who are proficient in English.”
- This guidance is in accordance with Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, the Equal Educational Opportunities Act of 1974, as well as the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA).



Resources available at
[ncela.ed.gov/educator
-support/toolkits](https://ncela.ed.gov/educator-support/toolkits)

Ensuring Support for English Learner Students with Disabilities

- Schools must provide **students who are ELs** and also have **disabilities** with **both the EL services and disability-related services** to which they are entitled under federal law.
- Requirements under the federal civil rights laws include, but are not limited to:
 - the **accurate and timely identification** of students who are **ELs**,
 - **accurate and timely identification and evaluation** of students with **disabilities**, and
 - **provision of appropriate services** for students who are **ELs and also have disabilities**.
- To **avoid improperly identifying** students who are ELs as having a disability because of their limited English proficiency, schools must:
 - **evaluate students** who are ELs for a disability in an **appropriate language** based on the student's needs and language skills
 - ensure students with disabilities receive appropriate **disability-related services** when schools **evaluate their English language proficiency**
 - draw upon **information from a variety of sources**, including the **social or cultural background** of the student and **recommendations from teachers**, and ensure that the placement decision is made by a group of **persons knowledgeable** about the student.

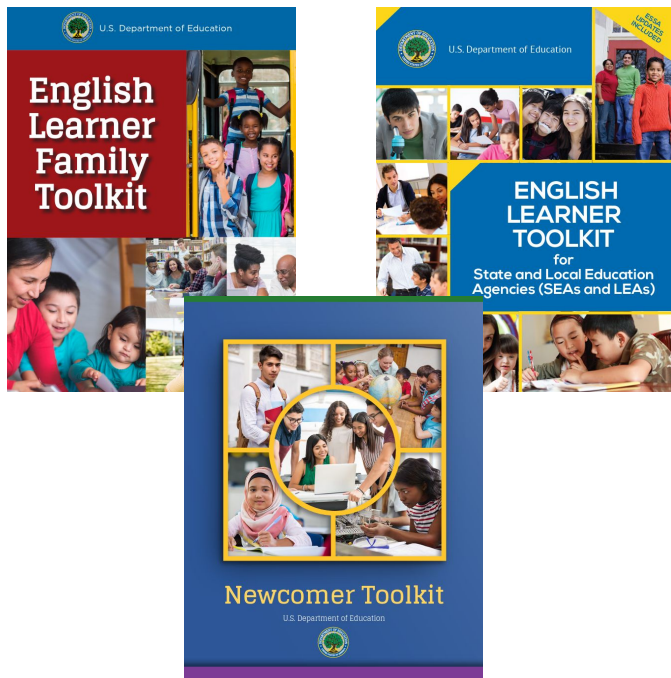


Ensuring Support for English Learner Students with Disabilities

- Distinguishing between learning difficulties tied to English proficiency versus cognitive disability can be difficult. Practices to make the right assessment are:
 - **Peer-to-Peer Comparisons:** Assess the child's academic growth in light of similarly situated students' progress. Peer-to-peer comparisons can help staff zero in on whether a student's classroom difficulty is attributable to limited English proficiency, unfamiliar surroundings, or cultural adjustment -- as opposed to a disability.
 - **Rely on Parent Input:** Collect as much information as possible about newly enrolled EL students' academic history, especially if their classroom growth is stalling. Conversations with parents will provide some of the most direct insight about students' past learning challenges and signs of a potential disability.
 - **Ensure Title III and SPED Collaboration:** Ensuring open lines of communication between both teams and with teachers allows for the most holistic evaluation of a student's needs.



Resources for English Learners and Newcomer Students



The U.S. Department of Education's Office of English Language Acquisition has created three toolkits designed to promote high-quality educational experience for ELs and their families. These toolkits are designed for use by school leaders, educators, and families. Toolkits available include:

- Family Toolkit (available in multiple languages)
- English Learner Toolkit
- Newcomer Toolkit

Additional resources from the Arizona Department of Education's Office of English Language Acquisition Services can be found on their website.

Resources for Students with Disabilities



- [Encircle Families](#): “Encircle Families helps parents and caregivers of children with disabilities so their whole family can thrive.”
 - [Refugee and Asylee Mentorship Program](#): “(RAMP) provides culturally responsive support, ensuring families have the information and tools they need to understand their child’s needs, collaborate with professionals, and advocate effectively for their child’s education and health care. RAMP also helps decrease social isolation by fostering meaningful parent-to-parent connections, offering guidance, encouragement, and a supportive community.”
- [Arizona Department of Education Exceptional Student Services \(ESS\) webpage](#)
 - [ESS Contact Us webpage](#)



Check-In

What **practices are working well** in your district or schools to **positively impact** refugee and other newcomer students?

What would you **revise or enhance** to improve impact?

Share your
answers in
the chat!



High-Leverage Solutions:

Understanding and Addressing Trauma

- Indicators of Stress and Distress Over Time
- Adverse Childhood Experiences
- The Impact of Trauma
- Distinguishing Between Trauma and ADHD
- Mandated Reporting and Refugee Families

Indicators of Stress and Distress Over

Cognitive / Emotional	Physical	Behavioral
• Inability to concentrate • Excitability or depression • Nervous tension • Emotional instability • Feelings of detachment, weakness • Feelings of being hunted • Panic attacks	• Excessive sweating • Hyperventilation • Tachycardia • Dry mouth • Dizziness • Extreme tiredness • Frequent urge to urinate • Gastro-intestinal complaints (pain, diarrhea, vomiting) • Generalized body pains • Migraine • Menstrual problems • Musculoskeletal problems • Skin problems • Sleeping problems	• Impulsiveness • Urge to cry or run away • Aggressiveness • Startle responses • Shaking or 'tics' • Giggling or unstoppable laughing • Abnormal agitation • Lack of appetite or excessive eating • Increased substance abuse (smoking, drinking, drugs)

Adverse Childhood Experiences:

Traumatic events that can have negative, lasting effects on health and wellbeing.

Abuse

- Emotional abuse
- Physical abuse
- Sexual abuse

Household Challenges

- Domestic violence
- Substance abuse
- Mental illness
- Parental separation/divorce
- Incarcerated parent

Neglect

- Emotional
- Physical

“Adverse childhood experiences are the single greatest unaddressed public health threat facing our nation today”.

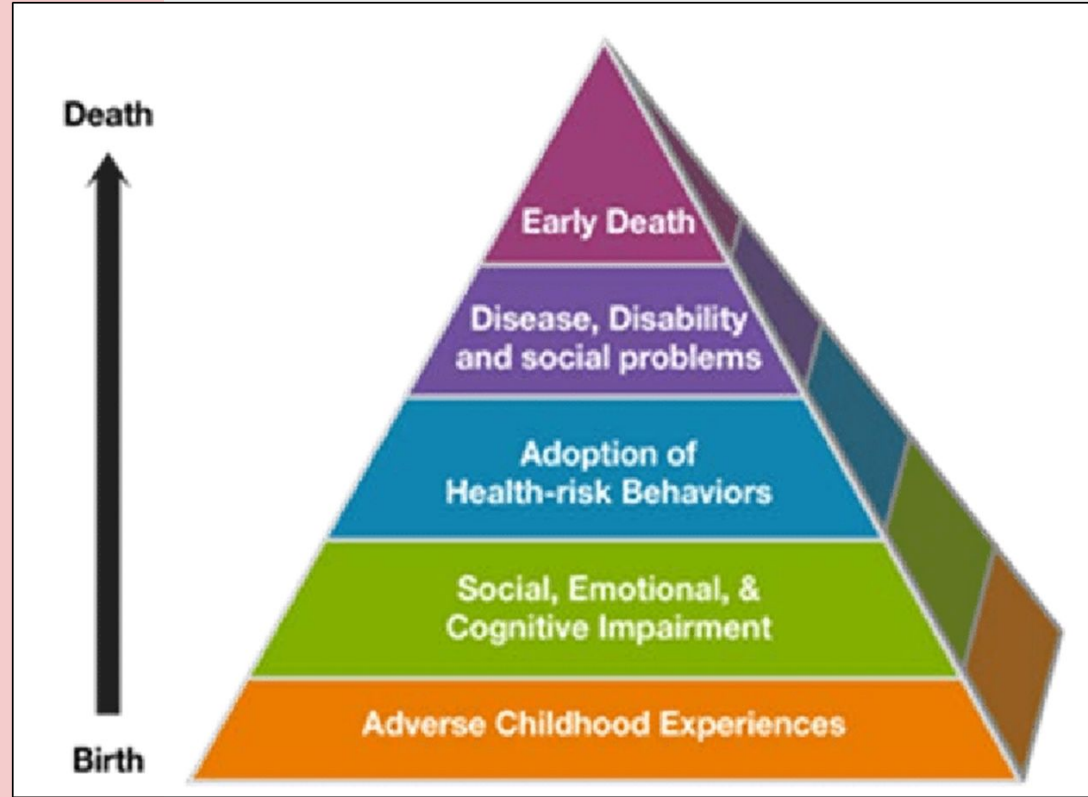
Dr. Robert Block, the former president of the American Academy of Pediatrics.

67% of the population have at least one ACE.

1/8 of the population have more than 4 ACEs.

The Impact of Trauma

- Impaired sleep
- Inability to relax
- Chronic fatigue
- Fear of taking risks
- Lack of confidence
- Decreased personal agency
- Sensory overload
- Challenges learning new information
- Self-doubt
- Limited access to creativity
- Loss of sense of purpose
- Perfectionism
- Struggles to change behaviors



Distinguishing Between Trauma and ADHD

TRAUMA

- Feelings of fear, helplessness, uncertainty, vulnerability
- Increased arousal, edginess and agitation
- Avoidance of reminders of trauma
- Irritability, quick to anger
- Feeling of guilt or shame
- Dissociation, feeling of unreality or being “outside of one’s body”
- Continually feeling on alert for threat or danger
- Unusually reckless, aggressive or self-destructive behavior

OVERLAP

- Difficulty concentrating and learning in school
- Easily distracted
- Often does not seem to listen
- Disorganization
- Hyperactive
- Restless
- Difficulty sleeping

ADHD

- Difficulty sustaining attention
- Struggle to follow instructions
- Difficulty with organization
- Fidgeting or squirming
- Difficulty waiting or taking turns
- Talking excessively
- Losing things necessary for tasks or activities
- Interrupting or intruding upon others

Mandated Reporting and Refugee Families

Arizona law **requires** certain persons who suspect that a child has received **non-accidental injury** or has been **neglected** to **report their concerns to DCS** or local law enforcement ([ARS §13-3620.A](#)).

Consider the following when you feel that a report may be necessary for a refugee student:

- **Seek** potentially relevant **context and information** about the student and family when possible.
- **Connect** with other support staff or case managers who know the student and family to **learn more** about the situation.
- **Include** as much information and context as possible about the student in the **report**.
- Upon receipt of a report, DCS staff will work to support the student and family with connection to resources, including supports for refugees **if** they are aware of the family's eligibility.





Check-In

Does this information **resonate** with you and the work you do with refugee and other newcomer students and families? Have you **noticed signs or impact of trauma** when working with them?

Have you had **formal training** on supporting individuals who have experienced trauma?

**Share your
answers in
the pop-up
poll!**



Resources for Social Wellness

- [AZACES Consortium](#): “Building stronger communities with training and services specially designed to understand the impacts of adversity and strategies to build resilience.”
 - [AZACES Resources](#)
 - [AZACES Classroom Strategies](#)
- [The National Child Traumatic Stress Network \(NCTSN\)](#): “Our mission is to raise the standard of care and improve access to services for traumatized children, their families and communities throughout the United States.”
 - [NCTSN Resources on Child Refugee Trauma](#)
 - [Understanding Trauma for School Personnel](#)
 - [Child Trauma Toolkit for Educators](#)
- [Harvard Graduate School of Education: Migration, Separation, and Trauma, What Educators Should Know](#)
- [Switchboard Evidence Summary: Do trauma-informed school practices lead to improved mental health and academic outcomes in children?](#)

High-Leverage Solutions:

Supporting Refugee Students and Families Through Partnership

- Collaboration with Resettlement Agencies
- Establishing a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU)
- Impact and Considerations for LEAs



Check-In

Have you had any experience collaborating with resettlement agencies? Are you currently collaborating with any other organizations to provide support for your refugee and newcomer families?

**Share your
answers in
the chat!**



Supportive Climate

Values students' primary languages and cultures

Making high expectations concrete

Making the education of English learners a priority

Enacting policies and programs that promote positive intergroup relations such as conflict resolution, community building, anti-prejudice programs and curriculum about racism and exclusion

Values diversity and inclusion

Support Services

Addressing war trauma

Orientation to new culture and school system

Community partnerships and referrals

After school clubs

Tutoring

ELL parent nights

English for parents or parenting classes



Responsive Schools

Build capacity to deliver sustained professional development

Create data systems and processes to support ongoing analysis of immigrant student achievement

Recognize the importance of learning about immigrants' cultures, experiences, and needs

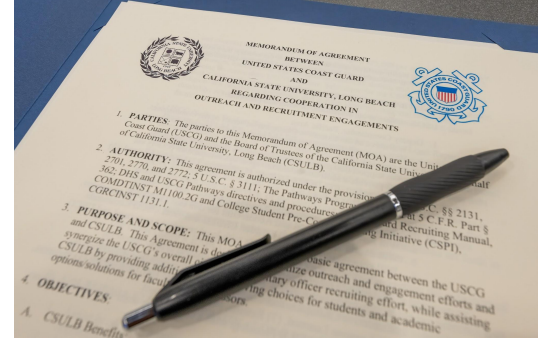
Structures that support optimal teaching and learning for immigrants: such as teacher collaboration, reflection, data discussions, and inquiry

Allow for parents and advocates to come together

What is a MOU?

A MOU or Memorandum of Understanding is a nonbinding agreement that states each party's intentions to take action, conduct a business transaction, or form a new partnership. It's similar to a written handshake that spells out what each party agrees to do.

A MOU allows resettlement agencies with a RSIG grant funding to provide services to refugee students that are ORR eligible



What does collaboration mean?

Collaboration refers to the ongoing process of working together towards shared goals, and can be done while waiting for a MOU or as a general alternative option.

A MOU can take weeks or months to be signed. In the meantime, agencies can collaborate with school districts and provide different services. The collaboration aims to enhance the relationship between the school district, the community, and the agency.

Some services IRC can offer to your school district:



- Professional development
- Table at your event
- Identify ORR eligible students
- School registration process
- Provide support or answer question about eligibility
- Participate in our monthly school meeting
- (Limited participation at school events)

Impact and Considerations for LEAs

Newcomer students and their families have a variety of complex needs. To provide **support** and ensure a **successful educational experience**, LEAs should:

- **Develop awareness** of newcomers in the community,
- **Prepare** for and **involve** newly-arriving families,
- Ensure student **access** to **educational services**, and
- **Collaborate** with resettlement agencies and other community organizations that serve newcomers.

Closing and Next Steps

- Refugee School Impact Grant (RSIG)
- Monthly Refugee School Meetings
- Get Connected!
- Questions?

Refugee School Impact Grant (RSIG)

International Rescue Committee (IRC) and Lutheran Social Services (LSS) are eager to serve students and families as well as district and school staff with RSIG programming.



Phoenix: Claudia Shepherd at Claudia.Shepherd@rescue.org

Tucson: Michelle Buttrum at Michelle.Buttrum@rescue.org



Phoenix: Francisca Gil at FGil@lss-sw.org

Tucson: Daniel Zizovic at dzizovic@lss-sw.org

Monthly Refugee School Meetings

Phoenix-Area Monthly Meetings

Join to learn more about upcoming arrivals, available resources and programs, and professional learning related to refugee students!

Reach out to Claudia Shepherd to join monthly meetings!

*Claudia Shepherd at
Claudia.Shepherd@rescue.org*

Tucson-Area Monthly Meetings

Join to learn more about upcoming arrivals, available resources and programs, and professional learning related to refugee students!

Reach out to Aidan Lewis or Marisa Pena to join monthly meetings!

Aiden Lewis at Aidan.Lewis@tusd1.org

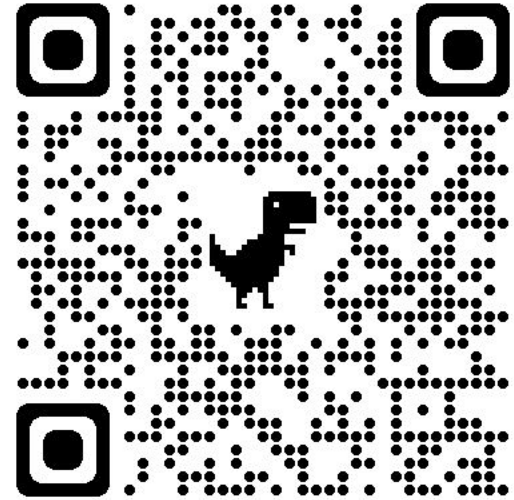
*Marisa Pena at
RefugeeStudentSupport@azed.gov*



Contacts and Resources

Contact Marisa at ADE
Refugee Student Support at
RefugeeStudentSupport@azed.gov

Contact Claudia at the IRC at
Claudia.Shepherd@rescue.org or
(602)214-3635



Visit the ADE Refugee Student
Support website for resources and
upcoming learning opportunities!



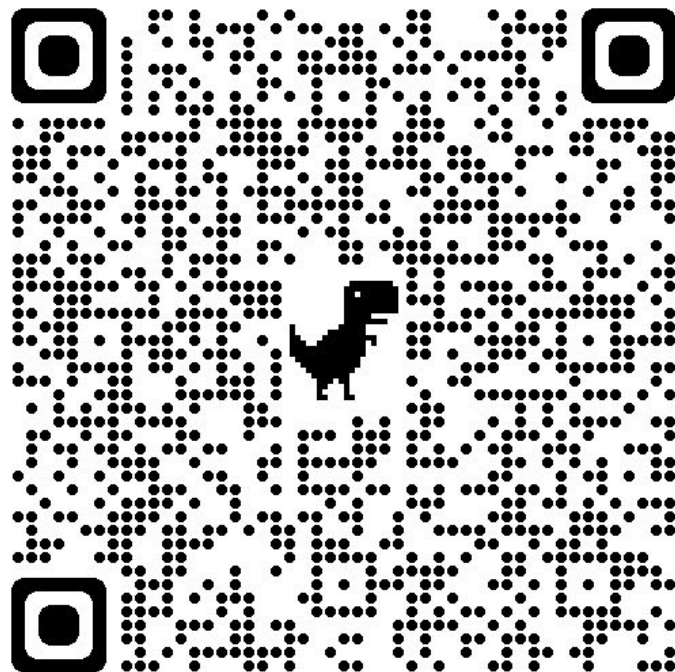
Sign-Up for the Refugee Student Support Mailing List!

Interested in receiving updates on **resources** and **opportunities** available through ADE Refugee Student Support and partnering organizations?

Sign-up for our mailing list by scanning the QR code or by visiting our website at

[www.azed.gov/
welcome-refugee-student-support](http://www.azed.gov/welcome-refugee-student-support)

and clicking the sign-up link at the bottom of the home page!





Questions?

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