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San Juan Unified School District Newcomer Support: Promising Practices

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August 2023

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This report, like all PACE publications, has been thoroughly reviewed for factual accuracy and research integrity. The authors assume full responsibility for the accuracy of the report contents.

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Executive Summary

This case study identifies promising practices for newcomer education implemented in San Juan Unified School District (SJUSD), one of 12 local educational agencies (LEAs) funded under the California Newcomer Education and Well-Being (CalNEW) project between 2018 and 2021. This report was developed through a partnership between the Policy Analysis for California Education (PACE) Newcomer Research-Practice-Policy Partnership and the Center for Equity for English Learners (CEEL) at Loyola Marymount University (LMU).

SJUSD is the fifth largest immigrant-enrolling district in the state, with 2,982 newcomer students who speak a wide variety of languages, including Spanish, Russian, Pashto, Arabic, Farsi, Ukrainian, and Turkish. The case study was conducted during a 2022 summer program for approximately 500 recently arrived immigrant students. Using interviews with 32 school and community leaders and educators, a review of 65 program documents, and observations of 15 classrooms using a tool focused on effective instructional practices for newcomer education, we identified four overarching themes that illustrate promising practices:

- **“How big can you make your village?”—building on community cultural wealth:** SJUSD recognized the need to listen first, then act; hire staff from the immigrant community; engage parents as leaders and partners; and expand its support through strong community-based partnerships.
- **“Match dollars to needs”—leveraging multiple and differentiated resources:** SJUSD implemented braided funding across funding sources to maximize the scope of programming and supports for newcomer students.
- **Developing educator capabilities to teach and support newcomer students:** Training was provided on establishing a welcoming environment, effectively teaching English language development (ELD), and learning other languages and cultures to enhance family communication.
- **Designing newcomer program and placement practices:** SJUSD developed specific data sets to monitor attendance, academic progress, course scheduling, and progress towards graduation. The district recognized the need to align resources as well as to sustain community engagement to support newcomers.

SJUSD’s support for newcomer students faced challenges resulting from societal conflicting ideologies about immigrants and the long-term sustainability of program and funding commitments. Addressing these challenges requires upholding assets-based narratives about immigrant students and communities as well as supportive local, state, and national newcomer education policies.

Introduction

This case study is the result of an initiative of the Policy Analysis for California Education (PACE) Newcomer Research-Practice-Policy Partnership and the Center for Equity for English Learners (CEEL) at Loyola Marymount University (LMU). The partnership seeks to identify promising practices in newcomer programs implemented by local educational agencies (LEAs) across the state, specifically those that are participating in the California Newcomer Education and Well-Being (CalNEW) project. This report focuses on the newcomer program implemented by the San Juan Unified School District (SJUSD) as part of larger newcomer education efforts in California.

Who Are California's Newcomers?

In California, *newcomer* is an umbrella term for foreign-born students who are recent arrivals in the United States. Newcomer students may include, but are not limited to, asylees, refugees, unaccompanied youth, undocumented youth, migratory students, and other immigrant children and youth identified by LEAs.

Newcomer students come from diverse countries and cultural backgrounds. These students enter school with differing levels of educational experiences and speak a variety of languages, which may or may not include English. As newcomer students enter a new education system, they may experience different academic, language, and social-emotional challenges than students born in the United States.

Decades of research on immigrant, refugee, and newcomer students indicate that newcomers benefit from safe and welcoming school environments as part of the “culture of reception” (Portés, 2011). Classrooms, schools, and communities that enact this culture also provide experience-based language development and linguistically and culturally relevant content education.

As of fall 2021, California had enrolled 145,037 immigrant students, representing approximately 14 percent of English Learners (ELs). Approximately 45 percent of immigrant students come from Mexico and Central America. The remainder immigrate from countries throughout the world (California Department of Education, 2022b). See Textbox 1 for the state's recommendations for supporting newcomers in California schools.

Textbox 1. How Can Educators Support Newcomers?

The California Department of Education advises educators on its website (2022b) to:

acknowledge the strengths and abilities newcomer students bring, as well as recognize and assist newcomer students as they navigate these challenges. It is important for LEAs to identify ways to support newcomer students and their families to ensure the students receive the appropriate services and resources to benefit their success. It is also essential to build partnerships with parents, local communities, and organizations to ensure that newcomer students experience a positive school climate.

Newcomer students are entitled under federal law to a free, accessible, and appropriate public education, regardless of home language or immigration status. Successful local programs serving newcomer students are based on sound educational theory, are implemented effectively with adequate resources, and are proven effective in overcoming language barriers.

California Newcomer Education and Well-Being Project (CalNEW). The California Department of Social Services administers funding for the CalNEW project through competitive grants to school districts that have a significant number of eligible students (see Textbox 2). The grants are intended to provide “linguistically and culturally responsive support services to socioeconomically disadvantaged newcomer students and their families using school sites as the services hub” (California Department of Social Services, n.d.). CalNEW grants assist school districts with planning, designing, and implementing supplementary instructional and social adjustment support services by fostering collaborative relationships between participating school districts, community-based organizations, and service providers. SJUSD has an established track record of service to newcomers and was awarded the grant in late 2018, as described by one program administrator:

Our dream was to draft an application that was larger than what we could get from CalNEW. We sent an inclusive application to support students, include social-emotional learning, and partner with community-based organizations to offer services we cannot offer.

Textbox 2. A Comprehensive Approach to Identifying and Supporting Diverse Newcomer Students

Which newcomers are eligible for CalNEW?

- refugees
- asylees
- Cuban and Haitian entrants
- Amerasians from Vietnam
- trafficking victims
- unaccompanied refugees
- Iraqi and Afghan children with special visa status
- unaccompanied, undocumented minors

SJUSD is the fifth largest immigrant-enrolling district in the state, with 2,868 immigrant students as of fall 2021 (California Department of Education, 2022e). Just over 30 percent of students in California who are ELs or reclassified fluent English proficient (RFEP) speak Spanish (California Department of Education, 2022d). The overall language profile for EL and RFEP students in SJUSD differs significantly from the state's, however. In San Juan, approximately 10 percent of all students enrolled are Spanish-speaking EL and RFEP students. The next most frequently spoken language is Russian, spoken by just over 3 percent of all students, followed by Pashto, Arabic, Farsi, Ukrainian, and Turkish. Students speaking these languages each represent less than 2 percent of total enrollment (California Department of Education, 2022c). In contrast to overall student enrollment, the summer newcomer program focuses on the most recently immigrated students, 50 percent of whom speak one of the two languages of Afghanistan: Dari (32 percent) or Pashto (25 percent). (See Appendix A for more details of the demographics of newcomers in the summer program.)

What We Know About Supporting Newcomers

Studies about newcomer students in the United States focus on four key areas: (a) establishing district- and school-level processes for receiving newcomer students, (b) identifying and meeting student and family needs, (c) attending to students' social-emotional needs, and (d) developing curricular and instructional approaches.

District- and school-level policies and processes. Most newcomers tend to concentrate in a small number of districts (Thompson et al., 2020), where specially designed programs are required to meet their diverse linguistic, cultural, and educational needs. These programs should

help immigrant and refugee families feel welcome and see themselves as contributors to their school community. Examples of innovative approaches include collaborative family engagement practices like story circles, living room conversations, and multilingual story sharing (Kandel-Cisco et al., 2020).

Student and family needs. A comprehensive review of 46 empirical studies conducted between 2000 and 2017 found that students whose families struggled because of parents' difficult migration experiences, limited education, underemployment, and income needs often had reduced school attendance as they helped with family responsibilities or obtained employment (Oikonomidy et al., 2019). In contrast, families that had more positive migration experiences, fewer employment and economic concerns, and the ability to support their children's education had a positive impact on their children's attendance and academic progress (Suárez-Orozco & Suárez-Orozco, 2001).

Student social-emotional needs. Positive school experiences can address such social-emotional needs as psychological distress from the challenges of immigration and trauma experienced in newcomers' countries of origin as well as interrupted schooling. School environments are characterized by either a deficit-based perception of the newcomers or an assets-based orientation. Environments with deficit views, where peers and teachers view newcomers as "outsiders," negatively affect relationships and foster marginalization and discrimination. Assets-based environments recognize the strengths and abilities newcomers bring (California Department of Education, 2022b) and develop newcomers' sense of belonging with peers; these schools have teachers who care (Davies, 2008) and who speak the students' primary language (García & Bartlett, 2007). Such environments support the academic and social integration of newcomers as well as encourage positive encounters with peers and educators (Oikonomidoy et al., 2019). Using children's literature that highlights the experiences that others have had with migration and starting a new life in the United States also supports newcomer students' adjustment, happiness, and healing (Ward & Warren, 2020).

Curricular and instructional approaches. Instructional strategies that are culturally and linguistically sustaining can effectively support language and literacy as well as content knowledge development. Multiple studies show the benefit of an assets-based approach that connects new curricula to students' prior lives, culture, and language (Auslander, 2022; Croce, 2014; Dover & Rodríguez-Vails, 2018; Flores, 2022; Fránquiz & Salinas, 2013; Jaffee, 2018; Tretter et al., 2019). Building on students' primary languages and translanguaging—combining students' primary languages and English as needed for communication and learning in the classroom—are practices that allow students to demonstrate their depth of knowledge while they are learning English (García & Leiva, 2014; Garrison-Fletcher et al., 2022).

Case Study Approach

CEEL used an ethnographic case study approach to identify promising practices in the implementation of newcomer programs and services in the San Juan district. We sought to understand the experiences and perspectives of participants in their own context and setting (Cresswell & Guetterman, 2019). The following questions guided our case study:

- How has implementation of the CalNEW project supported newcomer programming?
- What are the perspectives of administrators, staff, teachers, and community-based organization leaders regarding the successes and challenges of developing and implementing newcomer programs in SJUSD?
- What are these leaders' and educators' recommendations for effective newcomer programs?

We traveled to SJUSD in summer 2022, visiting classrooms and interacting with educators and partners during before school and afterschool meetings. Appendix A describes the specific enrollment of newcomer students during this summer school session. Table 1 identifies the types and amount of data collected for this case study. Newcomer programs and services in San Juan were developed over multiple years and implemented during the school year and summer with funding from multiple sources. Our focus group and interview questions queried the interviewees' knowledge and role in San Juan's broader newcomer program and instruction beyond the summer school program.

Table 1. Data Collected for Case Study

Data type	N	Description
Focus group interviews	6	Thirty-two people representing staff, teachers, administrators, and community-based organization partners
Individual interviews	3	
Classroom observations	15	Summer school classes in middle and high school
Artifacts	65	Include student work; classroom instructional materials; program planning and placement documents provided by students, teachers, and administrators; and photographs of the school and classroom taken by CEEL researchers

To gather anecdotal data on the 15 classroom observations, we started with the Observation Protocol for Academic Literacies (OPAL), a tool created and validated by researchers (Lavadenz & Armas, 2012) that examines teacher practices and classroom interactions from sociocultural and language-acquisition perspectives. We expanded the use of this tool to represent overall systemic conditions for newcomer program policy and practices. We aligned the research-based indicators for effective newcomer programs with the four OPAL domains:

(a) rigorous and relevant curriculum, (b) connections, (c) comprehensibility, and (d) interactions. We then developed the Newcomer Program Features and Criteria Resource (Appendix B), which we used to gather documentation of anecdotal evidence of teacher knowledge and application of research-based instructional practices for newcomers during the summer school session.

Our team used grounded theory (Corbin & Strauss, 2008) and the constant comparative method (Charmaz, 2014; Hutchinson, 2001) and created analytic memos (Saldaña, 2016) to develop interrelated categories/themes, to interpret and conceptualize the data, and to identify the promising practices and other learnings from our sources.

Promising Practices in San Juan Unified School District's Newcomer Program: Systemwide Supports for Newcomer Students

"Not done in a year or two."

SJUSD has a tradition of policies and practices designed to ensure that newcomer students are welcomed and supported in an inclusive manner, as expressed by a program leader: "It's taken 3–4 years to complete the [curriculum] package, and now we're improving the package and bringing a lot of new parts to the program. It's not done in a year or two."

As part of the district's strategic plan and through school and district communications, district leaders and teachers take a proactive stance to informing families about their rights and resources. Leaders and teachers have created and implemented local policies to reflect their commitment to meeting the needs of immigrant students. The district applied for CalNEW funding to amplify what had already begun. As one administrator reflected on the application process, she described the overarching goal:

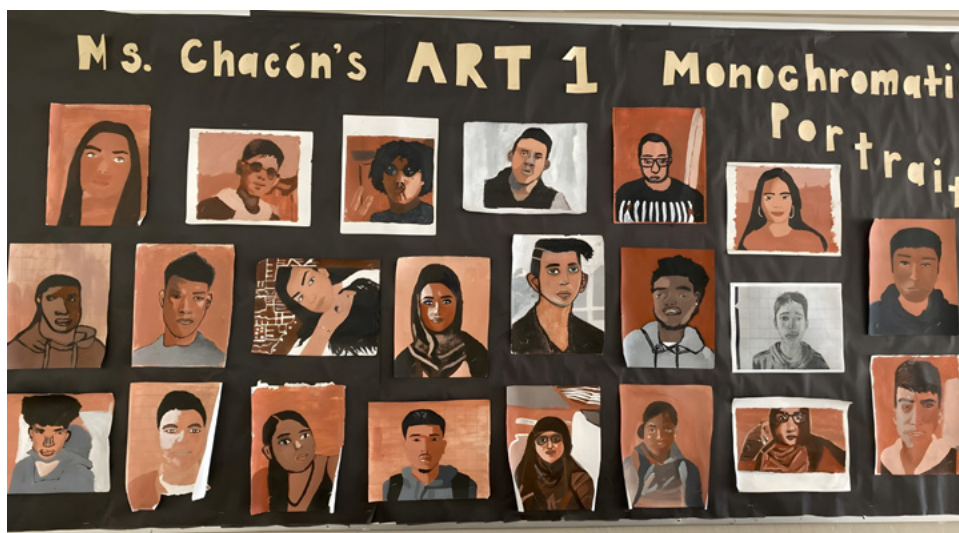
Our dream was to be honest. Our plan was to draft an application that was larger than what we could get from CalNEW. We sent an inclusive application to support students, to include social-emotional learning, and to partner with CBOs [community-based organizations] to offer services we cannot offer [on our own].

In this section, we identify four major themes of promising practices for newcomer education in the district and describe the key elements of those themes, illustrated by the voices of our participants and sample artifacts from our visit. To develop the four themes, we coded data and then created memos to generate story lines for the report.

“How Big Can You Make Your Village?” Building on Community Cultural Wealth

Beginning with the main office at key receiving middle and high school campuses, SJUSD prioritizes the staffing of community liaisons, bilingual instructional aides, student tutors, and student ambassadors who welcome families and visitors to the school site (see Figure 1 for an example of welcoming art). These staff members are selected based on their leadership within their immigrant community and serve as mediators for immigrant families. They focus on listening to families’ needs and concerns, bridging the differences in school operations in the United States compared to their native countries, ensuring that immigrant families have access to staff who speak their language, and supporting the transition and programming for students in their new schools.

Figure 1. Monochromatic Identity Portraits Wall Mural Welcomes and Celebrates Students’ Identities Through an Arts-Integrated Bulletin Board



Listen first, then act. As one administrator observed, listening to parents and students describe their experiences as well as finding out what they need is a key step in developing programs, resources, activities, and services in the San Juan communities that are receiving new families and students. Another administrator emphasized this through his reflections on listening circles with students:

We wanted to hear what is it like from them. What it is like being a student here? Some of the things we thought we needed to do weren't what we heard from the kids, and we had to pay attention to what they said they needed. We need to shift our thinking to ensure we're responding to what we hear from the kids.

Teachers receive specific training on how to engage in listening circles with bilingual assistants; as one teacher reflected: “Culturally relevant—now, it is not to assimilate: ‘We’re going to learn how to introduce yourself for the first day of school to make new friends’—before, [it was]: ‘Here’s the test and focus on the test.’”

Teachers and staff from and for the community: “If I’m here, you can be anywhere.”

Particularly in the schools in San Juan that receive the majority of newcomers, acting on listening sessions with parents and students results in the implementation of specific resources and services. One program leader observed: “We realized the families are coming and leaving their kids and waiting for school to end. So, why don’t we have a parent workshop?”

Community liaisons from each of the immigrant/refugee groups begin to support families when they come to enroll their children, as described by one liaison: “We welcome them with their own language.” Another liaison shared: “Our staff helps them, provides supplies, leaves them with information to feel ready.” Another reflected: “Parents know they have this team, and they feel more confident. They come to us, and we are able to help them advocate for their students and themselves.”

Investing in and hiring more school community resource assistants (SCRAs) have built families’ trust and confidence in the school system. One district leader noted:

SJUSD has hugely expanded the staffing. I am supervising a staff of 17—Russian, Ukrainian, Farsi, Spanish, and Arabic. They are a bridge as cultural experts between community and district to support. ... They are in a position to navigate community resources. In addition, they are assigned to specific tasks where they are our cultural brokers for specific programs.

One of the teachers shared how this commitment is not just for the short term:

I was a bilingual assistant and became a teacher. I still track [my former newcomer students] and have contact with them, and I’m really proud of them because they spend a lot of effort. [Some] had to find a different profession other than college, but as long as they learned English ... [they] can mix in the community.

Parents as leaders and partners. Multicultural staff, some of whom are newcomers themselves, are committed to supporting newcomer families so that their children can understand and thrive in the U.S. education system. District, site, and community leaders see this as a strength while also holding themselves accountable to higher levels of implementation. One Arabic-speaking SCRA described his growth as a parent and expressed appreciation for the opportunities the district provided for him to become a leader in the community: “We support families by making a space for parents to take an active part in their children’s growth and homework and study and also in their behavior.”

He attributed his success in advocating for parent leadership to his own experience as a newcomer parent where he was faced with navigating the education system along with cultural differences in interactions, expectations, and communication:

That was a real story and my experience when I came to the U.S. I didn't know how to manage my children. I attended parent workshop[s], and then I [found] my way, and this is my fifth year in the U.S.

Community-based partnerships. Outreach to community-based staff and organizations is one of the most promising practices in San Juan. Long-standing relationships between school/district staff and community organizations contributes to more formal partnerships we learned about. One site administrator described how the district provides leadership opportunities for parents to bring additional resources to schools, building on the community's and parents' funds of knowledge in soccer and arts:

We partnered with World Relief, a grassroots effort at our school. We had a couple of parents who worked for World Relief and were blessed to have them at our site. Together we decided we can make a difference.

This effort led to an expanded partnership that includes collaboration between World Relief and SJUSD's project-based learning initiative. The initiative focuses on supporting postsecondary readiness by developing job interview, public speaking, and other professional skills. District, site, and community leaders described prioritizing social-emotional learning (SEL) and trauma-informed education through partnerships with the Sacramento Youth Center as well as with community gardening, where the goal is to bring recent immigrant and established communities together to create connections.

"Match Dollars to Needs": Leveraging Multiple and Differentiated Resources

San Juan's commitment to providing services to immigrant students is visible in its commitment to, as an administrator stated, "match dollars to needs." This is done through braided funding of many budget sources, weaving a comprehensive program that includes summer school, the Saturday Academy, SEL mentorships and trauma-informed education, LEGO® robotics, basketball and soccer programs, mentorships, external vendors that offer tutoring for students after school, and "Know Your Rights" workshops regarding immigration for parents.

Braided funding for sustainability and reach. Site and district leaders described how through strategic budget planning, resources are allocated across funding sources. These funds are used to maximize the scope of programming and services for newcomer students. A district administrator shared one example of how intentional considerations to expand services and ensure that resources are used appropriately:

Because we have so much ELO [Expanded Learning Opportunities] funding, there is no reason to use CalNEW [for beyond-school learning]. ... [We] use ELO instead of the grant. Let's add parent involvement—use Title I funds. Use CalNEW for soccer, for items we cannot use other funds for, such as cool water bottles and [soccer] team T-shirts. They were excited about the Language Initiative program. We used Title II funds, not CalNEW, but it supports it.

Differentiated site- and district-level funding to support innovation and expansion.

Site-level leaders described a similar commitment to prioritize and differentiate resources at the school level to align to the district's approach to address student needs. One administrator explained: "My SPSA [School Plan for Student Achievement] is being very strategic and designated funds to meet the students' needs."

This administrator also spoke about her commitment to engage her English Learner Advisory Committee in decision-making processes. She described the communication, responsiveness, and support for innovation between the district and site level:

I reached out to district and asked: How do we support this and how do we grow this? The district funded a Welcome Club because it was about welcoming families in the community. We didn't have parents in one culture over here and others over here—it is being part of each other. It took off and [the] district continued to sponsor our funding.

The Welcome Club innovation at this school site became district policy and provided a model for expansion at other sites.

Developing Educator Capabilities to Teach and Support Newcomer Students

We identified four ways in which SJUSD supported educators' capabilities to teach and support their newcomer students. In this section, we highlight newcomer-specific pedagogies in "snapshots" of summer school classrooms, interspersing these with student artifacts collected during our visit as well as with key insights from teachers. The classroom snapshots, created from our anecdotal notes, identify which of the newcomer and EL research-based practices were most evident during our observations (see Appendix B). It is important to note that these pedagogies reflect both recent and ongoing district approaches to provide professional learning opportunities specifically focused on supporting newcomer students and ELs in general. The snapshots illustrate how newcomer-specific policies and practices are being implemented as part of the staff members' professional learning experiences; these policies and practices are also identified in this section.

Newcomer pedagogies in summer school and beyond. Using the observations, interviews, and classroom artifacts, we were able to identify how teachers enacted specific newcomer pedagogies. Classroom Snapshot 1 for Ms. Flamenco (a pseudonym) identifies the newcomer practice indicators, including problem-solving and critical thinking; access to materials, technology, and resources; high expectations, curriculum, and teaching; access to content in the primary language; and facilitation of transfer of skills from the primary language (see Appendix B).

Classroom Snapshot 1. Ms. Flamenco, High School

Newcomer indicators:

- foundation for new learning (cultural backgrounds, linguistic resources, and prior knowledge)
- assets-oriented approach to instruction
- use of visually rich supports
- emphasis on reflection and discussion activities

The room fills with the hum of conversation as Ms. Flamenco monitors her high school newcomers' small-group work, inviting them to describe classroom objects by adapting language choices to generate oral and written descriptions. Bilingual aides and electronic devices (iPads and cell phones) provide primary language support in Spanish, Farsi, and Pashto to respond to students' linguistic, social-emotional, and academic needs. Affirmation of students' language and cultural assets line the classroom walls, with evidence of students' work in both English and their home language(s), including charts with greetings in different languages: "How I say hello" and "How I say goodbye." Ms. Flamenco also uses picture cards, student learning logs, district-adopted curricular materials for newcomers, phonics manipulatives, and teacher- and student-generated posters to support access to and use of general and academic vocabulary in context. Leaning into the partner-group conversations, Ms. Flamenco prompts connections to prior learning: "Remember when we learned descriptive words for cultural items you shared? What were some examples from the different masks we saw?" Students reference their learning logs and classroom resources to recall learned vocabulary and approximate responses to generate descriptions: "Much—white, black, red ... large and small for face." Supporting student reflection and growth, Ms. Flamenco asks students to think about how to produce sentences to describe these cultural items to others. With a smile on her face, a student replies: "Yes, we have this my country. It is small for face and red, white, black." Ms. Flamenco returns the smile and adds a nod of approval.

Newcomer students’ English language development: “It’s not just about teaching them nouns.” To build on teachers’ knowledge and assessment of students’ language and learning needs, site- and districtwide professional development includes training like Project GLAD (Guided Language Acquisition Design) strategies. One teacher reflected on how her participation in the summer experience supports her own professional learning and practice with newcomer students: “If I went back to a regular class, I talked too much: I learned in my ELD [English language development] class to chunk, looping back and weaving. I’d be a much stronger regular English teacher.”

Another teacher, Mr. Arabedi (a pseudonym), applies strategies learned through EL-focused professional learning to adapt the summer school curriculum for building oral language, reading, and writing abilities based on the linguistic and cultural strengths and needs of his students (see Classroom Snapshot 2).

Classroom Snapshot 2. Mr. Arabedi, Middle School

Newcomer focus areas:

- culturally sustaining pedagogy and specialized texts
- use of native language
- activation of a schema and students’ prior knowledge
- visualization and contextualization of vocabulary
- personal reflection and discussion activities

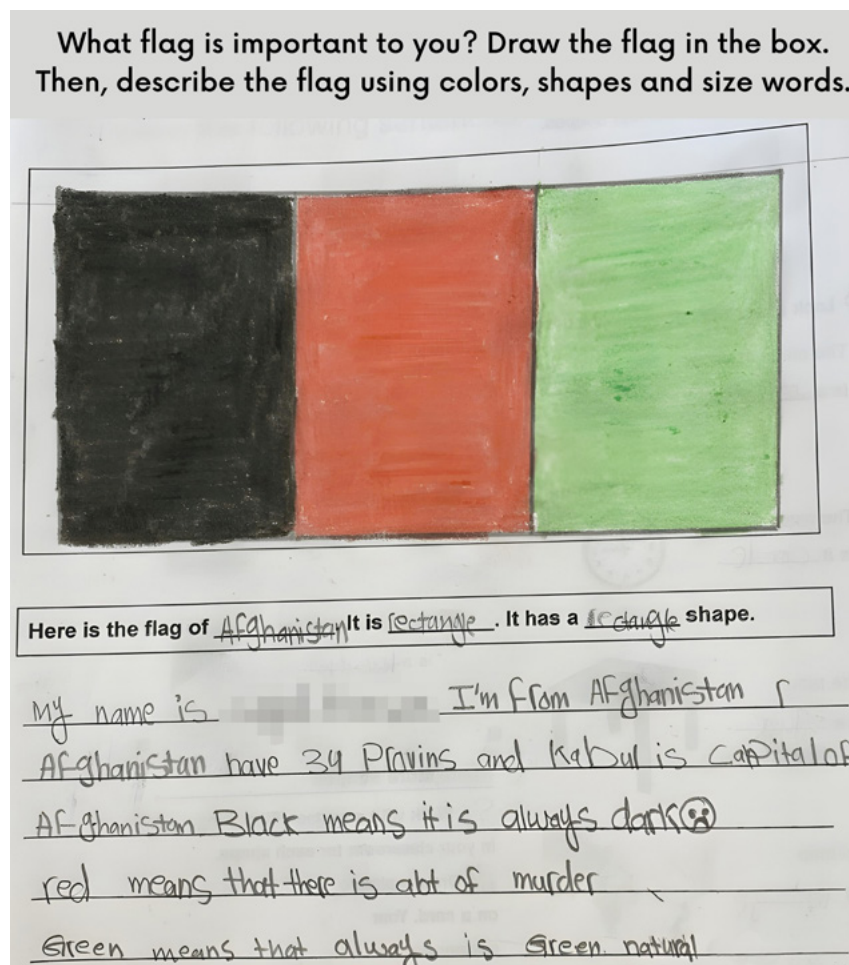
Mr. Arabedi, a former newcomer student and teacher’s assistant, now a teacher, uses the Storyboard program in Google Classroom for an adaptation of the district-adopted newcomer curriculum. Students enter the classroom and are reminded to continue to work in pairs to develop the dialogue for the characters in the four-part storyboard that they have been working on for the past week. They are seated with language-alike partners and can plan their storyboards in their first languages. After they log in to their laptops with their partners, the teacher calls students up individually to give them feedback and encourage edits for the writing process of the storyboard. The individual student’s storyboard is projected for the entire class to see while the rest of the class listens and continues working. Students read their storyboards out loud, with the teacher’s help when needed; this encourages English oral language development connected to students’ individual work. Mr. Arabedi makes recommendations for each student’s plot, sequence, characters, dialogue, vocabulary, and grammatical edits but always begins the feedback with a positive comment. For example, to one student Mr. Arabedi says: “I love the way you created your storyboard, though it might be hard to find a real bear of this size in a

store in California! Do you think you can revise?" In another feedback exchange, he states: "Looks like she loves her dog! Does the store allow dogs to be off leash? Do you think you can go back and add a leash?" Mr. Arabedi provides feedback to another student: "So you're at the grocery store. Love the way that you use full sentences in the first scene! Can you use uppercase letters for the names of your characters?" As a student reads their storyboard scene out loud—"I want to buy a T-shirt for my brother"—Mr. Arabedi asks: "How do you ask the salesperson about where to find the sizes?" The student responds: "I go to ask her where the items are?" These exchanges are brief, no more than 5 minutes with each of the 15 newcomer students in his summer school class over the course of the feedback cycles. As the class session draws to a close, Mr. Arabedi reminds his class: "Great work! We'll continue tomorrow and will post your final storyboards on Friday."

Welcoming classroom and school environments to support newcomers' social-emotional needs. Staff who worked with newcomers recognized that the transition to education in the United States extended beyond academics. One program lead shared: "There are ... so many layers of socioemotional needs, plus restorative practices to support newcomers. ... We need to really build community and welcome them into our community."

Figure 2 reveals how one Afghan student associates the color of the nation's flag with the events and impact of war. This artifact represents how classroom contexts can be safe spaces where students can feel comfortable connecting assignments to life experiences and can express and discuss associations with traumatic experiences. A teacher noted:

[I used to teach] ... on the Eastside and worked both programs—the difference is the amount of support here in San Juan is amazing. ... You have multiple people able to do multiple things and the students feel really good about it ... happy to be part of it ... I can see the success. ... I was a newcomer ... so [I] go back to what [I] needed: What should I have learned to learn the American culture and the high school culture?

Figure 2. Afghan Student's Flag Description and Association With War

Classroom Snapshot 3 provides examples of the approach by one teacher, Mr. Smith (a pseudonym), to greeting students. His interactions with the students show how newcomer contexts and instructional practices can create a sense of belonging through personal and caring interactions, primary language support and resources, and the integration of academic and social learning opportunities that respect and value students' cultural and linguistic backgrounds.

Classroom Snapshot 3. Mr. Smith, High School

Newcomer focus areas:

- genuine and positive teacher–student interactions
- sense of welcome and belonging
- primary language support and cross-cultural understanding

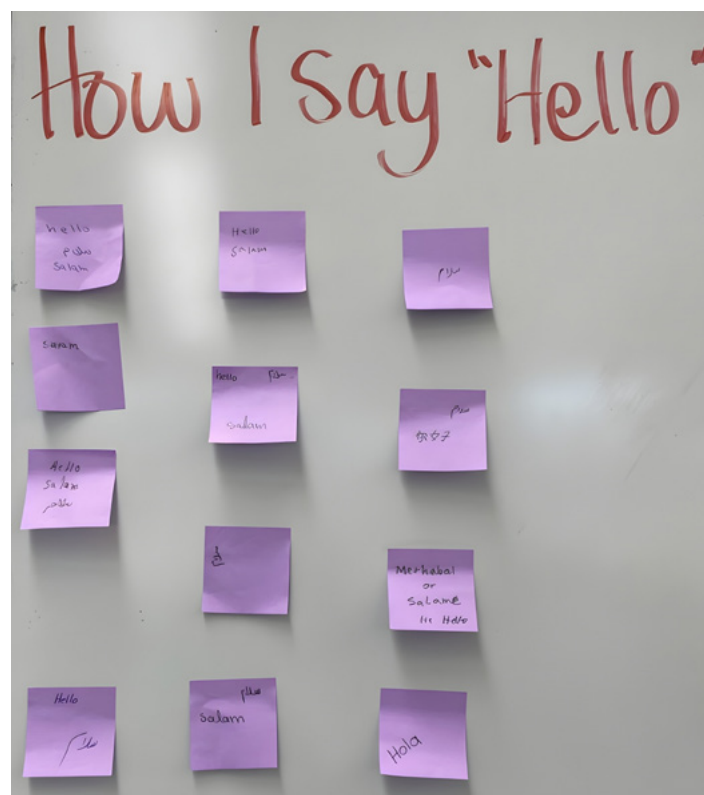
It is recess for the students, but Mr. Smith is in his classroom, reviewing his plans for the day. His high school newcomer students have all recently arrived in the United States, within just a few months. They are very diverse, coming primarily from Afghanistan, Russia, Ukraine, Mexico, and Guatemala. All are beginning ELs, although their experiences vary from limited or interrupted prior schooling to having already completed advanced math and science high school classes. As the clock ticks closer to the start of class, Mr. Smith gets up from his desk and goes outside the classroom, where he greets each student by name. The students greet him in return and walk to their desks to continue their work on a Microsoft PowerPoint presentation about their life in their native country and their transition and hopes for the future in the United States. Students are seated by language groups, conversing animatedly in their primary languages with one another and a bilingual high school tutor who also speaks their native language. They are all focused on developing their PowerPoints. Mr. Smith rotates to each group, checking to see if they have any questions and encouraging them to provide detailed information about themselves. He notices that one student lists his family members by their roles—that is, mother, father, brother, aunt, grandfather. He encourages the student to list them by name and then listens intently as the student explains that in his country it is not safe to publish names of people. Hearing that, Mr. Smith nods agreement and understanding. As Mr. Smith continues his group visits, he appears to enjoy the interactions with the students, who are very engaged in their projects and listen to and talk with the teacher. The last class of the day goes by quickly. Students are focused on their work, none need to be redirected, and as class ends, they smile and wave to the teacher, who waves back and responds: “See you tomorrow!”

Multilingual professional learning. We learned from teachers, community liaisons, and administrators that SJUSD’s professional learning programming includes language-learning courses and sessions focused on diverse newcomers’ home languages: “To better understand refugee students and families from Afghanistan, for example, language courses were offered in Farsi, Dari, Pashto, and Hindi.” This provides opportunities to develop greater awareness about the basics of newcomer students’ primary languages; as one leader observed: “Some teachers became pretty savvy in educational language so that kids—basic things you needed them to do to explain in their language, Dari—help make sense of learning in another language.”

Through this process, not only did teachers learn some basic communication, but they also became more empathetic as their students developed their own cross-linguistic awareness. One teacher reflected: “In 8 weeks of training, twice a week, we learned Dari. It helps me talk to my students and understand things they are saying.”

This awareness was evidenced in SJUSD’s summer program classrooms, which reflected and celebrated the diversity and richness of the languages represented in the classrooms. Figure 3 shows a classroom bulletin board representing an assets-based approach to learning the new language. Putting into practice the learning of students’ languages, one teacher stated: “All the languages they speak, I tell them it’s an asset.”

Figure 3. Assets-Based Affirmation of Multilingualism



Culture-specific professional learning. Realizing that most certificated and classified staff need to build culture-specific understanding of new Ukrainian, Afghan, and Indian immigrant and refugee students, the district central office team created a plan:

We realized that a lot of our staff members are not experts in dealing with refugees. So, we came up with cultural presentations ... to gain an understanding of the background of the newcomers, what challenges have they gone through, what strategies are effective, and what recommendations our district staff should consider for serving them ... —district offerings— ... to understand culture, religion, language skills to have communication on [a] basic level.

Designing Newcomer Program and Placement Practices

SJUSD's middle and high school ELD placement guides are provided in Appendixes C and D, respectively. The district's initial assessment and placement policies have evolved over the years. Secondary schools determine how many sections of ELD to offer in the school master schedule and monitor student progress. Teachers play a role in moving students more quickly through ELD levels if needed, particularly when students have not experienced interrupted schooling because of conditions in their home countries. A district lead described the expectation for all to be involved in data and progress monitoring: "It has to be a systematic program. The kids have to be part of that site. They are students of the main teachers, not just the ELD teacher."

Data systems. SJUSD uses its student information software to monitor student attendance, academic progress, course scheduling, and progress towards graduation from high school. One lead explained: "We can have data-driven conversations—doing that deeper dive into the ELPAC [English Language Proficiency Assessments for California]."

This use of data has helped the district realize the importance of a cohesive approach to its newcomer program and students: "When CalNEW came, the first reaction was 'It's a silver bullet.' But we have to have a systematic approach from enrollment to graduation, districtwide. We need to make it a districtwide community effort, start infusing it into everything."

Articulation and coherence. District leaders and teachers described the commitment to creating and implementing newcomer pathways that provide articulated opportunities for newcomer students to develop skills and knowledge for career and college readiness. The district recognizes the need to align resources, systems of support, and community engagement to accelerate and specialize learning experiences for newcomer students. One program lead stated: "The district had a lot of support for ELs prior to 2016, and the need has been really broadcasted and community was outreached. ... This is not just a community-based program, but a districtwide program to be embraced by all positions." Another administrator commented: "My role is to help staff understand [newcomers] and to see how we fit CalNEW into our system of support."

Not Without Its Challenges: Supporting Newcomer Students and Families in Contested Times

SJUSD's newcomer programs and services reflect the development of a systemwide approach for welcoming, supporting, and educating newcomer students within a national and local context that can reflect opposing views of society's responsibilities toward immigrants. Making these strides has presented challenges for the district, some of which have been addressed while others—such as conflicting ideologies, curricular and instructional needs, and a comprehensive ELD program design—are ongoing. Our participants identified several key challenge areas.

Grappling With Conflicting Ideologies

Although SJUSD has developed a comprehensive system for welcoming immigrant families and supporting newcomer students' learning with a mixture of multilingual in-person and online resources, the district still resides within broader sociopolitical contexts and beliefs about immigration—as do we. As part of this larger educational–political ecosystem, SJUSD faces challenges posed by some community members' anti-immigrant beliefs that question newcomer students' rights to have specialized support provided by the district. This has led to some tensions and lack of civil discourse at Board of Education meetings, and sometimes there have been misunderstandings among staff regarding the purpose of differentiated funding that is vital to meeting newcomers' needs. An administrator noted the challenge: "Some felt we were putting all the resources in one pot and not the others."

The fundamental issue is the distinction between the words *equality* and *equity* (Humphrey et al., 2017). Some believe that fairness is determined by an equal distribution of funds, while others believe that fairness requires differentiated funding to meet diverse needs. The district has addressed this challenge by developing cultural understanding and language learning among staff and, at times, altering funding and program participation criteria. One example was a soccer program initially designed for newcomer students but which soon after opened to other student groups because of community criticism that the program did not provide equal access to all. Two positive outcomes resulted from opening the soccer program to all interested students: (a) the negotiated compromise expanded interactions between newcomer and non-newcomer students, and (b) these interactions provided an opportunity for newcomers to expand their ELD in an authentic and enjoyable pastime with native English speakers. Despite the ongoing national and regional anti-immigrant discourse, SJUSD's problem-solving approach to meeting newcomers' needs remains a priority even in ideologically contested spaces.

Ongoing Curricular Needs and Instructional Supports for Newcomer Students

Newcomer programs at SJUSD benefit greatly both from additional funds received from CalNEW and the district's commitment to access a variety of funding sources to implement a comprehensive, whole-child program. This allows the district to offer support through new curricula for the summer school program as well as professional learning on instructional strategies throughout the academic year. Despite recent state and federal one-time allocations, district funding stability and sustainability remained a challenge at the time of the interviews due to uncertainty about future state and grant funding. It appears that the current newcomer summer school is scaled down, resulting in the lack of sufficient technology to support implementation of new curricula, reduced enrollment with an emphasis on eligible students with the greatest language needs, and lack of credit-bearing summer school courses for high school newcomers who are most at risk of not earning sufficient credits to graduate. Since our visit to San Juan, however, the district has received a new award from CalNew.

Building a Comprehensive ELD Program Design

The staff and teachers we interviewed are committed to meeting the needs of newcomers and excited about implementing the newcomer curriculum provided in the 2022 summer program. At the same time, SJUSD acknowledges that it needs to update its English Learner Master Plan and to ensure students have access to high-quality curricula, course-placement decisions that are based on English as well as academic proficiencies, and before school and/or afterschool classes. An administrator expressed a sense of urgency, noting newcomers' need "to be really accelerated."

Administrators are aware of the need to ensure that students have access to the full range of course offerings, including electives, career tech courses, and advanced academic courses at the secondary level. They also know there is a need for professional learning on culturally and linguistically sustaining teaching strategies for both designated ELD and integrated ELD for content area teachers.

Implications for Building Effective Systems to Support Newcomer Students

“I have a lot of empathy for them—love and empathy—and they feel it, and they respond to that. It’s nice for them to have a teacher that looks like them and identifies with them.”

SJUSD’s staff, teachers, administrator, school board, and community partners all expressed deep personal and collective commitments to meeting the needs of immigrant and refugee students and families in their community. These are not just words; their beliefs lead to purposeful action. From the insights we gained, we identified the following implications for policy and practices to support newcomer success.

Sustain Newcomer Program Commitments

Newcomer students need sustained, long-term support to develop their linguistic and academic abilities so that they can progress academically and graduate from high school ready for college and career. Newcomer-specific programs and pedagogies are vital to ensuring that teachers are equipped to provide meaningful, rigorous language and content instruction. Pressure from competing interests in the community and district could derail the long-term commitment to support newcomer students. Sustaining commitments to students and families requires that educators listen, plan, and act strategically to respond to potential competing demands.

Uphold Assets-Based Narratives About Immigrant/Refugee Students and Communities

Changing deficit-based language and perceptions about immigrant and refugee students and communities requires altering the narrative to uplift the assets, resources, and contributions that these families make to our nation. Narrative change includes communicating these families’ successful transitions to U.S. society and schools as well as the linguistic, academic, active participation, and resilience of immigrant communities.

Strengthen Local, State, and National Newcomer Education Policy Coherence

The United States’s current and historic geopolitical and sociopolitical trajectories are factors that highly impact the migration and immigration patterns of families, children, and youth who enter our education systems as newcomers (Oikonomidy et al., 2019). At each of the three policy levels—local, state, and federal—rapid responsiveness and sustained funding are required to implement and sustain high-quality programs that lead to the success of newcomer students (Sugarman, 2017). At the state level, programs such as CalNew have the potential to

encourage more coherent and aligned education and social services policies to: (1) develop consistent definitions of newcomer students in order to identify and provide targeted supports; (2) leverage multiple funding sources, including Federal Title 3, Refugee School Impact Grants, and California's Local Control Funding Formula and Local Control and Accountability Plan to inform strategic resource allocations for newcomer student programs and services in order to, (3) design community-responsive and contextualized newcomer support systems that are clearly articulated and implemented. Thus, collective attention and action by policymakers and practitioners are needed to ensure the educational programming and services that newcomer students deserve to succeed in their new communities.

Conclusion

This case study is highly contextualized and locally situated, yet it reveals promising local policies and shows how those policies, when interpreted and actualized, build on the cultural wealth of newcomer communities. The voices from the participants reflect the assets-based perspectives that counter deficit-oriented narratives about diverse newcomer students in the San Juan Unified School District. Discernments about the use of diverse and differentiated funds to match dollars to newcomer students' needs contributed to focused professional learning for staff and families as well as to leveraging key partnerships with key community-based organizations. While the district acknowledges the challenges of societal conflicting ideologies about newcomers, the enduring commitments to building comprehensive language, academic, and well-being programs for multiple student typologies are valuable lessons learned and demonstrate the need for highly contextualized responses and applications across newcomer communities across the state.

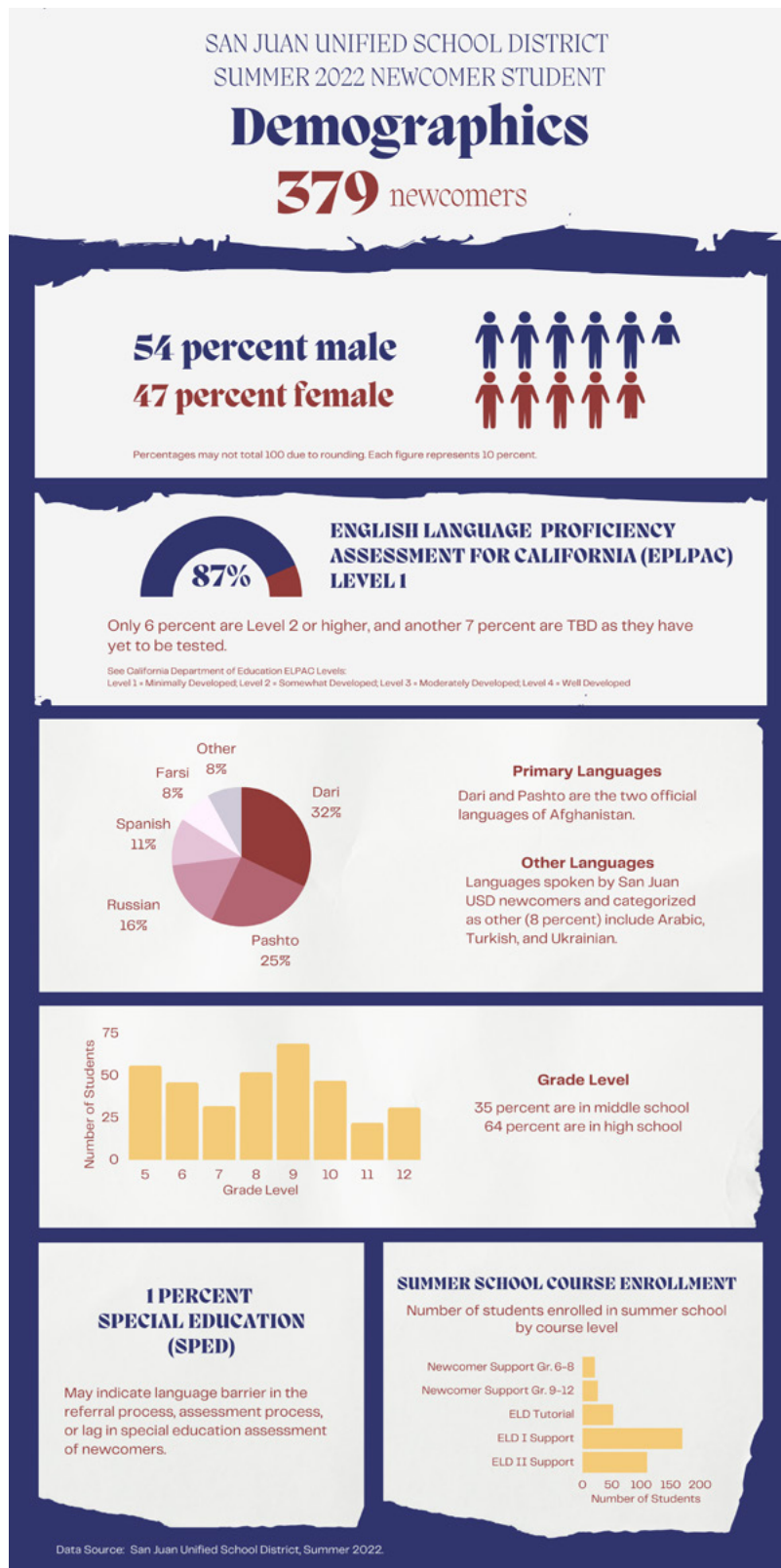
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Appendix A: San Juan Newcomer Summer School 2022 Demographics



Appendix B: Newcomer Program Features and Criteria Resource

The Newcomer Program Features and Criteria resource was developed by the Center for Equity for English Learners (CEEL) to provide education leaders and practitioners with a research-based set of systemic conditions and educational practice features and criteria to guide policy and practice in support of newcomer students. The Educational Practices section is aligned with CEEL's English learner, research-based Observation Protocol for Academic Literacies (OPAL; Lavadenz & Armas, 2012).

Systemic Conditions for Newcomer Program Policy and Practice

Contextual factors of development and implementation

- Leader's ideals to best serve newcomers
- Organizational capacity and resource constraints
- Educators' perceptions and capacity to address newcomers' strengths and needs

Policy and practice implications

- Sufficient financial and human resources
- District-school joint problem-solving (e.g., classroom visits and teacher input)
- Differentiated resources and support to maximize opportunity and excellence

Source: Umansky et al., 2020.

Educational Practices Organized by OPAL® EL Research-Based Domains

OPAL Domain 1: Rigorous and relevant curriculum. A rigorous and relevant curriculum is cognitively complex, relevant, and challenging. It enables educators to value and capitalize on students' linguistic and cultural backgrounds.

Description of OPAL indicators:

- 1.1 Emphasizes problem-solving and critical thinking
- 1.2 Provides access to materials, technology, and resources
- 1.3 Establishes high expectations
- 1.4 Organizes curriculum and teaching
- 1.5 Provides access to content in primary language
- 1.6 Facilitates transfer of skills from primary language

Newcomer focus: Identify, affirm, and address students' different educational backgrounds and literacy skills, their countries of origin, and their first languages.

Newcomer educational practice features and criteria:

- Promote culturally and linguistically relevant teaching
- Engage students in seeing and experiencing complete texts
- Use culturally sustaining pedagogy and specialized texts (e.g., journey and new life narratives)
- Provide access to literacy material for adolescents and access to content-area instruction
- Focus on content-literacy and integrated instruction
- Make visible transnational frameworks and intergenerational differences
- Use transnational literacies to help students achieve personal and academic goals
- Use native language for instruction and support
- Value linguistic attributes and facilitate translanguaging for participation, elaboration, and questioning

Sources. Dover & Rodríguez-Vails, 2018; García & Leiva, 2014; Jaffee, 2018; National Academies of Science, Engineering, and Medicine, 2018; Oikonomidou et al., 2019; Short & Boyson, 2012; Skerrett, 2012; Tretter et al., 2019; Ward & Warren, 2020.

OPAL Domain 2: Connections. Bridging connections with students' prior knowledge is the ability to link content to students' lives, histories, and realities to create change.

Description of OPAL indicators:

- 2.1 Relates instructional concepts to students' realities
- 2.2 Helps students make connections
- 2.3 Makes learning relevant and meaningful

Newcomer focus: Recognize, value, and highlight students' cultural attributes to make connections.

Newcomer educational practice features and criteria:

- Include multilevel connections focused on community, self, disciplinary language and texts, and cross-cultural and community-based participatory citizenship/action
- Pair texts depicting universal experience with the unique experiences of refugees, to share their histories
- Establish foundations for new learning that include cultural backgrounds, linguistic resources, and prior knowledge
- Facilitate collaborative family engagement through story circles, living room conversations, and multilingual story sharing.
- Maintain connection with home countries and identities via social networking

Sources. Jaffee, 2016; Kandel-Cisco et al., 2020; National Center for English Language Acquisition, 2017; Oikonomidou et al., 2019; Ward & Warren, 2020.

OPAL Domain 3: Comprehensibility. Comprehensibility is the attainment of maximum student understanding in order to provide access to content for all students.

Description of OPAL indicators:

- 3.1 Scaffolds instruction
- 3.2 Amplifies student input
- 3.3 Explains key terms
- 3.4 Provides feedback and checks for comprehension
- 3.5 Uses informal assessments

Newcomer focus: Develop entry and exit criteria for newcomers, and examine the role of academic English and the time requirement for its acquisition.

Newcomer educational practice features and criteria:

- Activate student schema and prior knowledge
- Help students visualize history, contextualize historical content with vocabulary instruction, and use two-tier vocabulary
- Include visually rich supports
- Incorporate personal reflection and discussion activities

Sources. Jaffee, 2018; National Center for English Language Acquisition, 2017; Short & Boyson, 2012; Suárez-Orozco et al., 2010; Tretter et al., 2019; Walqui & van Lier, 2010.

OPAL Domain 4: Interactions. Interactions are varied participation structures that facilitate access to the curriculum through maximum engagement and leadership opportunities.

Description of OPAL indicators:

- 4.1 Facilitates student autonomy
- 4.2 Modifies procedures to support learning
- 4.3 Communicates subject matter knowledge
- 4.4 Uses flexible groupings

Newcomer focus: Facilitate newcomers' adaptation to remain active and engaged in their learning.

Newcomer educational practice features and criteria:

- Focus on an assets-oriented approach to instruction; bolster newcomer student agency to counter the prevailing deficit-based narratives
- Consider the five principles of social studies pedagogy for Latinx newcomer youth: (a) community, (b) success, (c) cross-cultural connections, (d) development of a language of social studies, and (e) community-based participatory citizenship
- Promote culturally and linguistically relevant citizenship education and active and engaged citizenship
- Focus on social-emotional well-being

Sources. Jaffee, 2016; Oikonomidou et al., 2019; Suárez-Orozco et al., 2010.

Appendix C: San Juan Unified School District Middle School English Language Development (ELD) Placement Guides

Middle School English Learner ELD Placement Guidelines					
	Years in U.S.	ELPAC level	Placement	Core ELA materials	ELD materials
Students who take ELD 6-8B Block with success should go directly to ELD II block.	1–5 years or less	ELPAC Initial Novice or Summative Level 1	ELD 6-8 (B) and ELD Newcomer 6-8 support (211135 and 211136) CORE ELA/ELD BLOCK	Amplify ELA/ELD	Inside Fundamentals (one semester max. if necessary) Inside Level A: (recommended) Inside Placement Test; Inside Reading Level Gains Tests Interventions: Inside Phonics; Inside the USA
	1+ Years	ELPAC Summative Level 1–2	ELD II and ELD II Support (211130 and 211134) CORE ELA/ELD BLOCK	Amplify ELA/ELD	Inside Level A: Inside Placement Test; Inside Reading Level Gains Test Interventions: Inside Phonics; Inside Fundamentals
EL students who have been in a U.S. school for 2 years or more should begin in ELD English III regardless of ELPAC Level.					
Students with successful course completion progress to the next course.	2+ Years	ELPAC Initial Intermediate or Summative Level 1–3	ELD English III (204110)	Amplify ELA/ELD	Inside Level B: Inside Placement Test Inside; Reading Level Gains Tests
	3+ Years	ELPAC Summative Level 1–4	ELD English 6/7/8 (I) (211132)	Amplify ELA/ELD	Inside Level C: Inside Placement Test Inside; Reading Level Gains Test
	4+ Years	ELPAC Level 1–4	ELD Direct Study (211500)	Amplify ELA/ELD	English 3D Course B: Curriculum Embedded Assessment

- **Only ELPAC 1 students, or students reading at first and second grade levels should have core replacement.**
- Ensure EL students are fluidly moved to the next level of classes as soon as they have **satisfactorily met formative benchmark assessments** (Reading Gains and Unit assessments). Do not allow the restrictions of a master schedule to prevent this move. (That is, do not wait until the end of the semester or the end of the year to move a student who clearly is not being challenged.)
- Students who successfully complete the SEI program will be placed in grade-level ELA class and continue in ELD for one period.
- The IEP will govern placement for students who are English Learners and receive Special Ed. Services.
- ELD is the only time of day students are homogeneously grouped. All other parts of the day, EL students should be heterogeneously placed.
- A student’s ELD course should be determined by various data sources and all possibilities cannot be covered in a single chart.
- If the site has concerns about any placement, notify the Office of Student Learning Assistance team.

Appendix D: San Juan Unified School District High School English Language Development Placement Guides

High School English Learner ELD Placement Guidelines					
	Years in U.S.	ELPAC level	Placement	ELA materials	ELD materials
Students who take NC block with success should go directly to Transition II.	Less than 1 year	ELPAC Initial Novices or Summative Level 1	ELD Newcomer and ELD Newcomer Support (315880 and 315865) CORE ELD BLOCK	Houghton Mifflin Harcourt 2016 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> California Collections Textbook California Collections Language Workshop 	Edge Fundamentals (one semester max. if necessary) Edge A: (recommended): Edge Placement Test; Edge Reading Gains Tests Interventions: Inside Phonics; Inside the USA
		ELPAC Summative Level 1	English Transition I and ELD I Support (315881 and 315866) CORE ELD BLOCK	Houghton Mifflin Harcourt 2016 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> California Collections Textbook California Collections Language Workshop 	Edge Level A: Edge Placement Test; Edge Reading Level Gains Tests Intervention: Inside Phonics
Students with successful course completion "C" or better should not repeat course.	Less than 2 years	ELPAC Initial Intermediate or Summative Level 1–2	English Transition II and ELD II Support (315882 and 315867) CORE ELD BLOCK	Houghton Mifflin Harcourt 2016 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> California Collections Textbook California Collections Language Workshop 	Edge Level B: Edge Placement Test; Edge Reading Level Gains Tests
	EL students who have been in a U.S. school for 2 years or more should begin in ELD English III regardless of ELPAC Level.				
	2+ Years	ELPAC Summative Level 1–4	English Transition III (315883) <i>(Can be taken once to meet A–G, repeated for elective credit if student is not reclassified.)</i>		Edge Level C: Edge Placement Test; Edge Reading Level Gains Test or English 3D Course C; English 3D curriculum embedded assessments

- **Ensure EL students are fluidly moved to the next level of classes as soon as they have satisfactorily met formative and benchmark assessments (Reading Gains Tests/ Unit assessments). Do not allow the restrictions of a master schedule to prevent this move. (That is, do not wait until the end of the semester or the end of the year to move a student who clearly is not being challenged. It may be necessary for students to skip classes based on individual student progress.**
- Students who successfully complete the SEI program will be placed in their grade level ELA class and continue in ELD.
- The IEP will govern placement for students who are EL and receive Special Ed. Services.
- ELD is the only time of day students are homogeneously grouped. All other parts of the day, EL students should be heterogeneously placed.
- A student's ELD course should be determined by various data sources and all possibilities cannot be covered in a single chart. When analyzing conflicting test data, individual cases must be examined.
- If the site has concerns about any placement, notify the Office of Student Learning Assistance team.

Author Biographies

Magaly Lavadenz is a scholar–activist whose research and publications address the intersections and impacts of policies and practices for culturally and linguistically diverse school communities. She holds an endowed chair and is founding executive director at the Center for Equity for English Learners at the School of Education at Loyola Marymount University.

Linda Kaminski is the director of research and policy at the Center for Equity for English Learners as well as affiliate faculty at the School of Education at Loyola Marymount University. Her research addresses equity-based leadership and the impact of programs and policies on curriculum, instruction, and accountability on culturally and linguistically diverse students, teachers, and administrators.

Elvira G. Armas is the director of programs and partnerships at the Center for Equity for English Learners as well as affiliate faculty at the School of Education at Loyola Marymount University. She collaborates with educators to support leadership, curriculum development, integrated standards-based instruction, assessment, and family–community engagement in culturally and linguistically diverse settings.

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