



# **Invoking the Village:** Enhancing Collaboration Between Schools and Community Agencies To Support Newcomers

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## INVOKING THE VILLAGE

The majority of our mental load and emotional labor as modern-day mothers comes from constantly and creatively trying to piece together some semblance of a village, stepping into roles meant to be filled by other village members, and unconsciously grieving this soul-crushing loss (which is hidden in plain site). We hugely underestimate the weight of villagelessness on mothers.

- Beth Barry @Revolutionfromhome

We are familiar with the African proverb that it takes a village to raise a child. And yet, this is more than a quaint proverb. It represents an archetype of collectivism (Hammond, 2015) that shapes many countries in the world, and is consistent with the way our brains are wired to live in community. In a village, we know each other, and we all contribute our gifts for the betterment of each person in the community.

North American culture, with our big cities, more often operates within an archetype of individualism (Hammond, 2015). This leaves us striving to do our best to prove ourselves, to demonstrate that we are independent and capable of creating the life we want on our own. This translates to many areas of life—to how we perceive families, teachers, students and workers. We expect the family unit to be self-sufficient—to meet all the needs of their children. We expect teachers to meet the needs of diverse students on their own. We expect students to show up in school, at grade level, ready to engage. We expect workers to always show up, to fulfill all expectations. We expect women to carry the burden of necessary care, with limited or no pay. And we expect leaders to be superheroes, all-knowing, all-seeing, and capable of maintaining order and routine for those in their care. In “normal” times, in limited circumstances, some of us have been able to maintain this façade, to the detriment of the whole.





This is also reflected in a systemic silo mentality. In government we separate policy and funding into Children's Services, Education, and Advanced Education, based on age. Health is separate from Community and Social Services, and Housing. Jobs, Economy and Innovation are enacted separately from Environment and Parks, and Infrastructure. We have policy and legislation that defines how we share and protect information—FOIPP and PIPA. In schools we separate learning by subject area into Math, Science, Social Studies and Language Arts. We teach and assess individual children on topics as if they were separate entities. These separations do not serve us when we are trying to educate and support human beings with diverse journeys, and unique expressions of intellectual, social, emotional and physical strengths and needs.

It is no wonder that in an individualistic culture with siloed systems that collaboration is difficult. As families and teachers, we have all been shaped by this expectation that we manage alone, that we face diverse needs and expectations with just our own limited resources. The system was designed to make it so. And yet, we have pockets of effective collaboration that show us what is possible when we open to each other and name our strengths and challenges. When we articulate them, we can dismantle barriers, imagine possibilities and find new ways of living and learning together. They say necessity is the mother of invention. Complexity and crisis can now be the mother of collaboration.

In the Edmonton Local Immigration Partnership (ELIP), people and agencies come together to share ideas, resources, and research to bring opportunities to fruition in our community. With representatives from different levels of government, various organizations and community agencies, we have been facing this pandemic as a community to make visible the challenges of newcomers, and to amplify the impact of support. At the Education Table hosted by ELIP, we have been exploring ways to weave a web of support around newcomer families, through services offered in the context of school.

The pandemic has challenged the perception that any of us can make it on our own. It has shown the cracks in a system that was designed to keep us separate, to protect information, to prioritize privacy over support. The separation from extended family, childcare, schools, personal care and support services has been devastating to so many. And while we have amplified our use of technology to operate virtually, we all long for the power of human touch, connection, and conversation: face to face, and heart to heart. We all see how much we need the gifts of the community: music, art, recreation, learning opportunities, support.

This is even more true for newcomer families, who face layers of barriers to participation and long-term integration into the community: language, poverty, limited space, trauma, limited knowledge of systems, just to name a few. Immigrants also bring riches of wisdom and strength from their languages, cultures, and ways of cultivating community. We have so much to learn from each other when we create space for conversation, shared experiences, and empathy.

Schools are an essential site of welcome, education, and integration. Within them we have the power to heal and support, to educate and empower, to nurture bright futures for all. We can only create equitable outcomes, when we have a continuum of supports available to students with diverse needs. This work is too big for individual teachers, schools, or agencies to do on their own. This report is an invitation to educators and community agencies to share their contributions, identify challenges, dismantle barriers, and work together at every level of the system to create a community that enhances life for everyone.

Respectfully,

Dr. Kathy Toogood  
Educator, researcher, community member

*If you have come to help me,  
you are wasting your time,  
but if you have come because your  
liberation is bound up with mine,  
then let us work together.*

- Lila Watson, Indigenous Australian Artist,  
activist, and academic

## BACKGROUND

*"To those fleeing persecution, terror & war, Canadians will welcome you, regardless of your faith. Diversity is our strength #WelcomeToCanada" Justin Trudeau 28.01.2017 twitter.com (Ghosh, et al., 2019)*

In November of 2015, Trudeau opened our borders to the most vulnerable people fleeing the war in Syria. Canada and Edmonton welcomed refugees in higher numbers than we had seen in recent memory. With open hearts and long hours, settlement practitioners worked with families one on one to get them settled. Both the number of refugee families and the level of need stretched the capacity of our systems for welcoming newcomers. The Edmonton Chamber of Voluntary Organizations (ECVO) completed a report in 2019 titled Lessons from the Influx: How Edmonton Welcomed refugees From Syria and What We Are Learning as They Strive to Put Down Roots. This report identified areas ripe for systemic change and named the many challenges including education. Within each category, promising practices and priorities for change were identified, including a need for schools with many newcomer students to collaborate with surrounding settlement agencies to provide holistic support to them and their families. This was especially important as schools experienced a significant increase in the number of refugee students who had experienced significant trauma and disruption.

COVID-19 has brought another opportunity for deep learning. On March 15, 2020, schools were closed, forcing education into emergency remote learning. Teachers and students around the world were forced to adjust their learning practice significantly in a short time. Anyone who could, started working from home, and non-essential services closed. In that time, we discovered that the work of settlement practitioners was indeed essential to the well-being of newcomer families.





There was a steep learning curve as agencies re-focused their efforts on food security, and ensuring families were informed of health-related information. The Edmonton Local Immigration Partnership (ELIP) invited representatives from many agencies to gather and share what they were doing and consider possibilities for inter-agency coordination. From that larger group, other smaller groups formed to address specific issues, such as education, technology, COVID response, among others.

This project was born out of conversation at the (ELIP) Education Table. Starting in May 2020, people gathered from the Edmonton Public and Edmonton Catholic School Divisions, alongside staff from immigrant serving agencies to identify the unique challenges presented by COVID, to share the emergent work that their organizations were doing in response, and to identify opportunities for collaboration. In addition to responding to the emerging needs, the participants at the Education Table decided to conduct exploratory research as a means of imagining a way forward to better outcomes for newcomer students and families through enhanced collaboration.

We began with a qualitative approach to the research, engaging community partners in focus group conversations. School board employees were not able to participate without a full ethics review and approval conducted by the school division, which can take some time.

Four two-hour focus group conversations were held between February 23 and March 2, 2021. Overall, there were 35 participants, representing the following nine agencies in the Edmonton area:

- ASSIST Community Services
- Boys & Girls Clubs Big Brothers Big Sisters of Edmonton & area (BGCBIGS)
- Edmonton Immigrant Services Association (EISA)
- Edmonton Mennonite Centre for Newcomers (EMCN)
- EmployAbilities
- Francophonie Albertaine Plurielle (FRAP)
- Multicultural Family Resource Society (MFRS)
- Multicultural Health Brokers (MCHB)
- Somali Canadian Women & Children Association (SCWCA)

## LITERATURE REVIEW

The focus group participants work in many roles in community agencies: settlement counselors or practitioners, cultural brokers, advisors, as well as managers, and program directors. The contributions and stories of specific participants will remain anonymous. The research participants will be referred to as community partners throughout this report.

This report contains a review of the literature, the results of the focus group conversations, and a vision of a preferred future. The appendices also provide context about the two school divisions and relevant educational policy. The insight gathered is intended to be used by educators and community agencies to build a shared understanding of the immigrant experience, and to explore possibilities for deeper partnership and collaboration in service of newcomers.

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This literature review highlights the critical role that schools play in the healthy psychosocial integration of newcomers. The role of collaboration between schools and community agencies is described, as it supports the wellbeing and integration of refugee students and families. While several of the research studies refer specifically to supporting students with refugee background, as defined by Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada (IRCC), we will apply the principles to a broader category of newcomers who have come to Canada through various immigration pathways.

### **Challenges and Opportunities**

The Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD, 2018) identifies the impact of increased migration on countries and classrooms around the world, contributing significant social, cultural and linguistic diversity. This diversity brings both challenges and opportunities. As an increasing percentage of migrants are children, the OECD (2018) notes that schools play a significant role in fostering well-being and healthy integration for children and their families. Not only do schools provide a setting for language acquisition and skill development that influence future vocational possibilities, they can also be a place for improving social and emotional well-being when proper supports are provided.

The OECD (2018) defines resilience as “an individual's ability to overcome adversity and display positive adjustment” (p. 31). They define vulnerability as the likelihood that adversity will lead to either positive adjustment or negative outcomes. This OECD report (2018) identifies the complex mix of personality characteristics, and institutional and environmental resources that moderate the effects of challenges and barriers that stress newcomers. They identify risk and protective factors on multiple levels—individual, family, school, and system—that influence outcomes (pp. 35, 36). In taking this approach, they seek to replace a typical deficit model of approaching immigrants, with a resource model, in which newcomers are viewed as full community members with strengths, and great potential to be contributors to the economic, social and cultural life of their community.

While recognizing the many types of barriers that newcomers face is important, it is also critical to identify the strengths that newcomers bring to their learning. In just one example, Brown (2016) tells her story of supporting Haitian immigrants to the United States in her English and English as a Second Language (ESL) classes. She prioritized getting to know her students and used that knowledge in planning her lessons. She recognized their strength as storytellers and created space for them to share their narratives, deepening the shared understanding of the culture in the school. They took on a social justice letter writing project, corresponding with family members at Guantanamo. It was also through listening to their stories, that she deepened her understanding of the conflict they were experiencing with their African American peers. The Haitian students declared their love of music and drumming specifically. By sharing their music on the school campus, they were able to build bridges to the broader community. In both cases, her responsiveness to her students, and recognition of their strengths and interests led to deeper engagement and learning, and even having students receive awards for their writing. Providing support for challenges alongside opportunity to discover and develop strengths created a context that increased resilience and student success.

### **Layers of Challenges**

Refugee children and families face many challenges in their settlement journey (ECVO, 2019; Stewart 2011). In the ECVO (2019) report, *Lessons from the Influx*, eight settlement challenges that the Syrians faced were identified:

- Poverty
- Language Training
- Employment
- Housing
- Health
- Mental health
- Family Discord, and
- Education

Stewart (2011) created a model to describe the various layers of challenges that refugee children faced in her research. At the centre of her model was the individual child, with their human capacity, hope and resilience to help them navigate the challenges. First their basic needs for food, shelter, clothing, safety, belonging, and power had to be met. Once those needs were met, Stewart (2011) identified four intermediary categories to traverse: basic communication, cultural adjustment, acclimatization, and support connection. Once these needs are met, there are broader long term challenges that students face. These can be educational, economic, psychosocial and environmental in nature. Stewart (2011) noted the importance of community partners in navigating these various levels of challenges.

Similar to the OECD (2018) report, Stewart (2011) lays the challenges alongside the individual students' capacity for learning and resilience, highlighting risk and protective factors. It is critical that education be seen in the context of these broader challenges, and that refugee children and families receive the supports they need for successful integration and flourishing.

### **Support for Teachers**

A Canadian study (Gagne, et al., 2018) of Syrian refugee youth found there were several important factors that impacted the academic and social integration of Syrian students, including the nature of their sponsorship, their housing situation, their age, the size of their family, their proficiency in English as well as the nature of their migration journey. Beyond the experiences of the individual family, the preparedness of the teachers, the number of refugees enrolled in the school, as well as the number of supports available in the school were significant. One theme that emerged from the research was the lack of teacher preparation and support for teachers as they worked with refugee students who had experienced significant trauma. (Gagne, et al., 2018; Stewart, J., 2017)

### **Settlement Workers in Schools**

Teachers mentioned the positive impact of settlement workers in the integration of students (Gagne, et al., 2018). The settlement workers were viewed as advocates for the students, helping them navigate their pathway in school. The Settlement Workers in School (SWIS) program provided essential support to students, families and teachers by:

- proactively contacting newcomer parents and students to support them with their settlement needs
- referring families to more specialized community resources as needed
- providing group information sessions for newcomer youth and parents, often in partnership with school staff
- orienting school staff to the settlement needs of newcomers, and
- hosting a Newcomer Orientation Week (NOW) (Gagne, et al., 2018, p. 62, 63)

There was strong agreement among the educators in the study that the settlement workers played a central role in the integration of the Syrian youth, as they struggled to meet the individual needs of Syrian youth, especially when there was a language barrier.

These findings are echoed by Yohani, et al. (2019) who also found the role of cultural brokering to be critical to the psychosocial adaptation of the Syrian families they worked with. The brokers played a significant role in helping families navigate changes in family relationships, and the myriad systems they interacted with in their journey to integration, including health, social services, and education. The authors noted that refugee mental health challenges, as a result of pre-migration, trans-migration and post-migration trauma, can be a barrier to psychosocial adaptation. Ongoing experiences of discrimination in the form of microaggressions, can also prevent families from experiencing safety, security and a sense of belonging. Cultural brokers found that families were sometimes re-traumatized by insensitive treatment by service providers, such as police, medical officers and social service workers who were more focused on enforcing the rules than supporting the wellbeing of the families. This points to the need for intercultural training for all people who will be interacting with newcomers.



### **Policy Foundations Impact Practice**

Ghosh, et al. (2019) examined the policy foundations of Canada as an inclusive society. The researchers recognized that because education is under provincial jurisdiction, the structure of the education system varies from province to province. Excellence in schools can be supported at the provincial ministry level by adequate funding, policy, and resources. The Manitoba Ministry of Education website contains many helpful resources for teachers and schools. Ghosh, et al. (2019) described an exemplary school in Winnipeg, Manitoba where social inclusion and intercultural understanding were prioritized and practiced. The principal of the school, a former Vietnamese refugee himself, lead the efforts to make students feel safe and supported. Recognizing the trauma that students have experienced, they prioritized creating safe and caring spaces so children could be ready to learn. All staff showed up with compassion and care in their daily interactions, and teachers stay with the same group of students for three years. While there are many approaches to creating a trauma sensitive school, the authors identified five ways of knowing. The teacher must know themselves, the students, the community, the signs of trauma, and who can help. As we have seen in the research of Gagne et al., (2019) these are all things that settlement workers can play a significant role in.

### **Complementary Programs**

Sometimes supports for refugee students are programmed in out of school time by community partners. Ferfolja & Vickers (2010) described a program in Sydney, Australia in which pre-service teachers and a community liaison officer provided tutoring in literacy and numeracy to high school refugee students. This program supplemented the classroom education that the students were receiving. Results showed that students improved their writing, confidence, social knowledge and capital by participating in the program. This kind of additional support is especially helpful for high school students who have so much to catch up on and limited time before they age out of the system (ECVO, 2018).

### **Spaces for Support of Psychosocial Well-being**

Stewart (2017) shared initial findings from a study in Manitoba that highlights the importance of creating spaces and places that support the psychosocial well-being and integration of refugee youth. Research affirms the importance of transitional spaces where the lived experience of refugee youth is validated, and where they have time and support to explore pre-migration, trans-migration and post-migration experiences. These spaces can exist both in intermediary spaces, such as out of school programs, run by community organizations, as well as within schools. Children need to feel safe in order to learn. Stewart's (2017) research has demonstrated that when the needs of refugee youth are not addressed, they experience feelings of helplessness, and are further marginalized.



The Surrey School District in British Columbia has an English Language Learner Welcome Centre that offers strategic programs to support parents and students in their initial settlement into the community (Powell, et al., 2017). The district started offering the SWIS program in 2009, believing that the school was an ideal place from which to support school age children and families in their settlement journey. The Bridge program operates out of the Welcome Centre to provide a “soft landing” for refugee students migrating into Canada. Instead of being placed with their age peers right away, students are placed in this program for a time to settle in, heal, relax, and acclimatize to the Canadian education system. The Bridge program assesses students’ social and academic language upon arrival, as well as their resilience, creating “a profile of language, strengths, and hope—for every child”.

The Bridge Centre takes a holistic approach to supporting refugee students, by creating a trauma sensitive learning environment (Powell, et al., 2017). They realize that students who have experienced trauma are likely to have diminished concentration, impaired executive function, periods of silence, and an overall impaired readiness for school, exhibited in poor attendance, tiredness and depression. Knowing the impact of pre-migration trauma, the teachers can focus on first building a sense of safety, creating social attachments, maintaining a sense of social identity and developing goals and plans for the future. Settlement workers, multicultural workers and counselors are integral partners in the program, addressing student needs to support their transition.

*“Comprehensive and cohesive settlement services must include a universal platform for services for all. Within that platform, the right tools and structures are provided at various levels of intensity and scale, tailored to the unique needs of different families and communities.” (Powell, et al., 2017)*

Rather than expecting refugee students to fit into the Canadian system, they have created a program using best practices that honours the background and experiences of newcomers and builds their capacity and resilience to thrive in Canada (Powell, et al., 2017).



### **Mental Health Support**

Baak, et al., (2019) and Stewart (2017) identify the important role that schools can play in supporting psychosocial well-being for refugee youth by connecting them to mental health supports. Research in South Australia (Baak, et al. 2019) identified the key role of bi-cultural workers in identifying and referring refugee youth for mental health support. Because of the trauma they have experienced, refugee youth will need varying levels of support in the settlement process. The researchers found that schools often didn't have mental health resources on site, but more often needed to refer youth to outside agencies. Teachers in this study did not feel confident in identifying mental health concerns for a variety of reasons including: a lack of relevant training, and difficulty distinguishing between typical adolescent behaviors such as non-attendance, disruptive behaviours, and lack of engagement, and mental health issues. If these behaviors are perceived as negative signals that they don't want to learn, and responded to with punishment, refugee youth may not receive the support they need, and become further disengaged from school.

Referrals to other agencies may not always be successful because of cultural or linguistic barriers, stigma related to mental health, and the myriad of other resettlement challenges (Baak, et al., 2019). The importance of engaging with families of children with refugee backgrounds cannot be overstated. When families are included, they can contribute protective factors, including advocacy, and connection to informal supports.

*"Bicultural staff play an integral role in brokering communication across cultural and linguistic barriers between young people, school staff, families, and external service providers" (Baak, et al., 2019. P. 14).*

### **Partnership**

In a study of a partnership program in Indonesia, Jatmika et al. (2020) identified the relationship among the school, family and community as an essential foundation of a good education. The researchers identified the important role of families as first educators of children, and the role of parents in supporting achievement and the behaviour of children. They identified factors that inhibited their partnership program including: lack of guidance from government, how information about the project was disseminated, lack of awareness on the part of families, the management system of the school, and the lack of facilities to support the implementation of the program.

As the coordinating site, the school plays an important role as initiator, facilitator, and manager of the partnership program (Jatmika et al, 2020). While they recognized the important contribution the government could play in providing guidance and supporting dissemination of information, the role of school and the principal was critical in communicating the importance of partnership, building staff capacity, and providing sufficient space and facilities for teacher-parent meetings.

Within Edmonton, there are examples of strong partnerships that serve shared priorities. The Community University Partnership (CUP) for the Study of Children, Youth, and Families (2020) celebrated twenty years of collaborative research and partnership. This purposeful relationship between community organizations and university researchers began organically, and was developed through conversation and open, trusting relationships. Edmonton Public and Edmonton Catholic Schools wanted to participate but wanted more agency in the research process. Non-profit organizations were interested because they had evaluation needs that the university could support. Strong leadership was key to establishing a formal partnership that utilized the strengths and met the needs of the partners, as well as providing everyone a voice. Their annual report from 2019-2020 articulates the many successful projects that have been completed through the collaboration of CUP, conducting community-based and culturally relevant research on early childhood development, poverty, capacity building, and evidence informed policy development. Much can be learned from their work.

### **Holistic Support**

Stewart (2017) identified the benefits experienced by refugee youth when they engaged in supportive programs that recognized their holistic needs. Most of the programs described in Stewart's research existed outside of school time. Participants suggested that more interaction with the schools and connection with the teachers would enhance the efficacy of these supports for integration of refugee youth. Stewart's findings pointed to the need for a comprehensive peace curriculum, the creation of more transitional programming in schools, and the need for more education for teachers—both pre-service and in-service. Stewart (2017) identified the lack of research exploring how schools and community agencies can work in partnership, and the need for greater implementation of best practices for supporting refugee students to foster healthy integration and intercultural understanding.

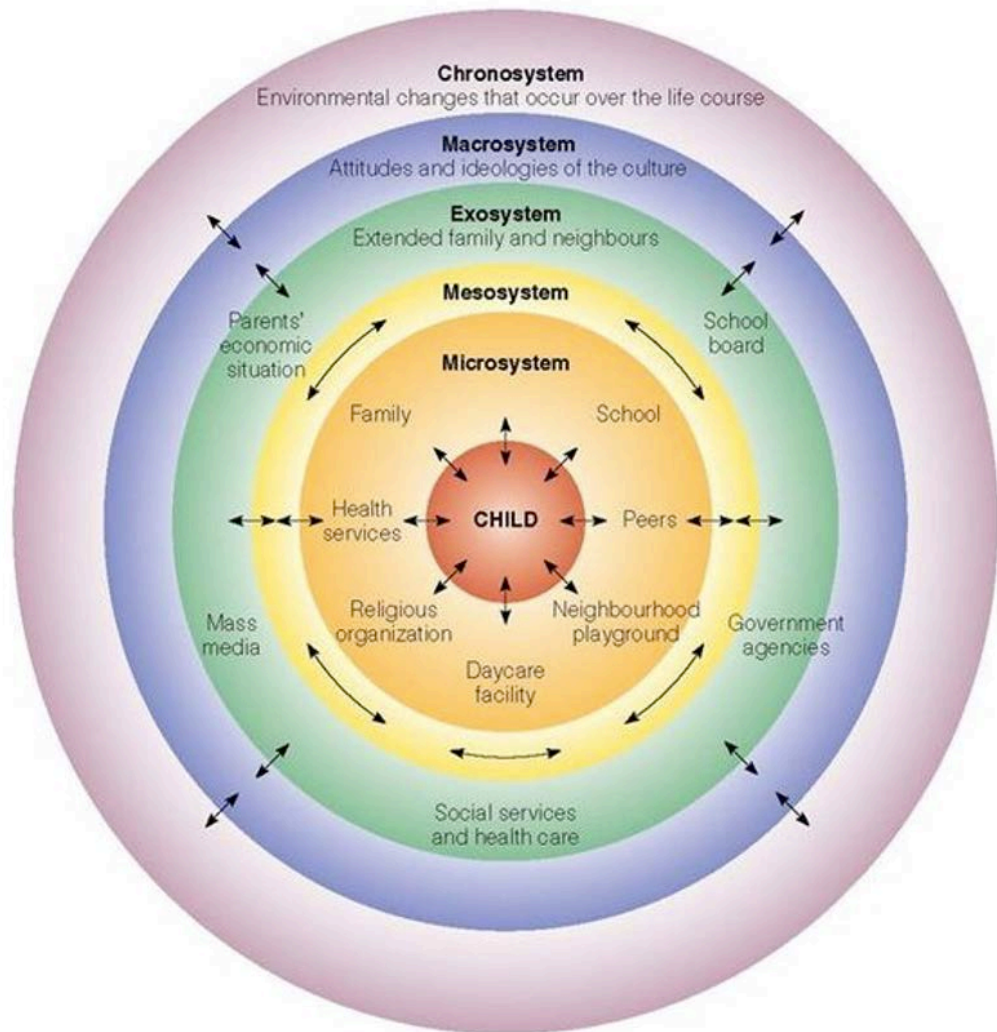
## **Conclusion**

From this selected review of the literature, we see that schools play a significant role in the academic and social integration of refugee students and families. Collaboration with settlement workers in schools, as well as other community partners has often played a role in supporting communication with families, enhancing intercultural understanding and providing holistic supports for refugee students and families. When school staff deepen their understanding of the experiences of newcomer students and families, and are able to communicate with students and families, they are better able to create safe, welcoming, and caring learning environments, that allow students to thrive. Leadership is key in building trusting relationships that support a mutually beneficial partnership in service of shared goals. While there are many challenges to navigate, newcomers also have many strengths and capacities to contribute when we inquire and make space for this to be demonstrated. The approach we take, and the protective factors we provide can make all the difference in supporting healthy integration.

# THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

## Bronfenbrenner's Bioecological Model

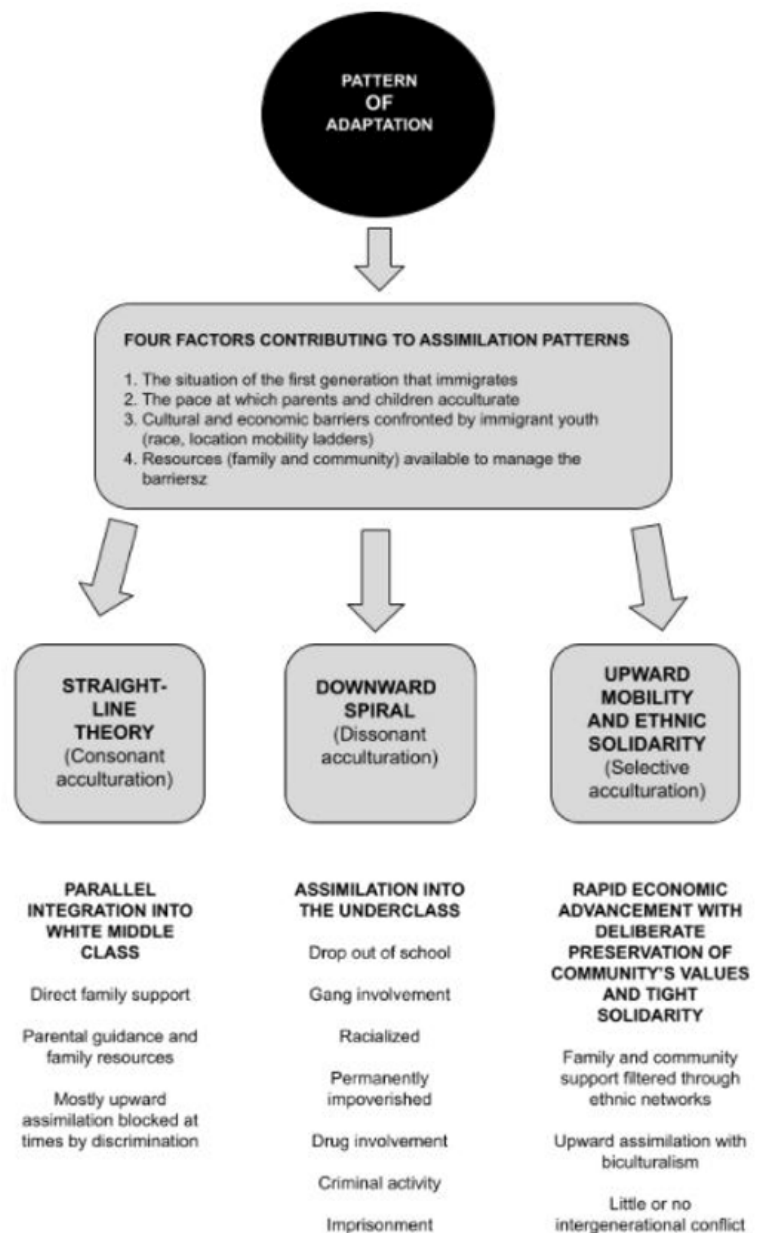
Stewart (2011, p. 18) often draws on Bronfenbrenner's Bioecological Model (2001) to illustrate how various systems interact with one another to shape the personal, social, and academic development of a student. Bronfenbrenner's model is illustrated with nested circles moving out from the individual student, identifying the different people, programs and systems that will influence an individuals' life. Amongst the influencing factors are the family, the teacher, the faith community, after-school programs, social agencies, refugee centres, extended family, friends and other community members. Stewart recognized that educational support includes interactions between many systems, that influence the experience of a student in school.



Accessed at: <https://i.pinimg.com/564x/a0/al/38/a0al3892c64be7f7789436c93d3ce531.jpg>

## Segmented Assimilation

Stewart (2011, p. 22) also identifies the theory of segmented assimilation, proposed by Portes and Zhou (1993). Zhou (1997) further developed the theoretical framework to explore and account for the different paths to assimilation demonstrated by various immigrant youth. Zhou identifies the many personal and contextual factors that can influence whether youth follow a smooth path to integration, or one of struggle and exclusion. The social and financial conditions of their homeland, as well as the context in which they land can play a significant role in their path to assimilation. The segmented assimilation theory recognizes that whether newcomers are absorbed into the affluent middle class or embedded in poverty in the inner city, also depends in part on the resources available to the family. Portes and Zhou name three possible patterns of assimilation: “straight-line theory, upward mobility, or downward spiral.” (Stewart, 2011, pp. 22 – 23).





**Straight-line Theory:** Straight-line theory describes a linear path of growing acculturation and integration into the white middle class (Stewart, 2011). This path is made possible by family support and resources and may have been more typical of European immigrants after World War II. This path of integration assumes few barriers, and the social and economic capital to integrate smoothly and quickly. It does not require much support from the host country to navigate.

**Upward Mobility:** The path of upward mobility and ethnic solidarity is nurtured by selective acculturation, that is, adopting some aspects of the North American culture, while retaining aspects of the first culture by maintaining networks within the ethnocultural group. In this pattern, socioeconomic status can be mitigated by amplifying the “social capital embedded in the family and ethnic community.” (Zhou, p. 993) Economic advancement is enhanced by preserving solidarity with the family and ethnic community (Stewart, 2011).

**Downward Spiral :** Contrasted with these two paths to integration with positive outcomes, is the downward spiral that results in newcomers getting caught in the underclass, marked by poverty, dropping out of school, drug use, criminal activity and gang involvement. In this pattern, family relationships are disrupted as youth learn the language faster, align with negative peer groups, and reject the culture and values of their parents (Stewart, 2011).

### **Achieving Better Outcomes for Newcomers through Collaboration**

This theory provides a possible explanation for why immigrants experience diverse outcomes, and what we can do to enhance the chances of integration and upward mobility. While some immigrants, perhaps from the economic class, may experience a smooth path to integration, many other newcomers experience a range of barriers that could put them at risk, without adequate support to navigate systems. While there is not much we can do about the individual and contextual factors shaping newcomers' experience prior to arriving in Canada, we can influence the cultural, economic, and practical barriers they face upon arrival. This report identifies both barriers and the various support services that are available to newcomers through settlement agencies and other community partners. It is our hope that by addressing barriers, strengthening cultural capital, and enhancing supports that more students and families can experience healthy integration and economic security.

## CONTRIBUTIONS OF COMMUNITY PARTNERS

*“Most of these students and families are entering schools with high hopes and aspirations. Most of these families and students acknowledge and expect some challenges with the transition into a new school, new culture. But few anticipate the broader resettlement and acculturation challenges that are present and that are going to have both direct and indirect impacts on the experience of these youth in schools. Families are working hard to transition to rebuild a new life in Canada, but the impacts of trauma, loss, and poverty are incredibly overbearing on them, and are often overlooked on the children. When children are having moments in class that might be connected to pre-migration trauma, post-migration trauma, or even trauma incurred at the schools, it's being looked at as sort of deviant behavior rather than an underlying issue with the youth.”*

- Cultural Broker Participant

Based on the initial review of the literature, a list of key roles and contributions of settlement workers and staff from community agencies within schools was compiled and shared with participants in the invitation. During the focus group discussions, participants were invited to affirm, challenge, and add to this list of contributions:

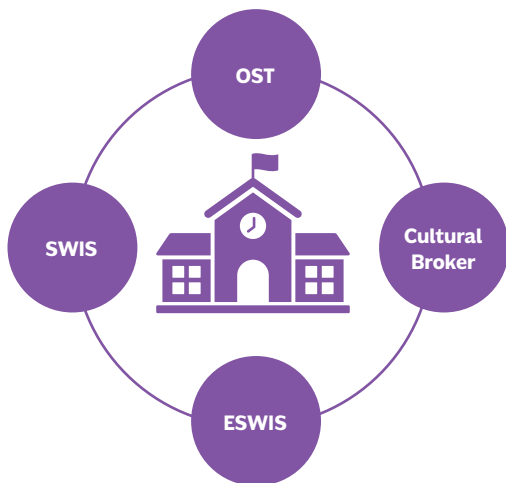
- Supporting home-school Communication: Language translation & interpretation
- Help navigating systems
- Providing information to teachers about the students' culture, past experiences
- Providing tutoring, setting up tutoring programs for students who may benefit from academic support.
- Providing social and emotional support to refugees
- Building capacity for the refugees and the system
- Connecting school and family to other community supports
- Identifying students with mental health concerns and connecting with mental health supports.
- Training on trauma-informed approach
- Bridging gaps & building understanding.
- Supporting intercultural communication and anti-discriminatory education.

**Focus group question:** Tell us a story of a time when you were working with a family: the problem that you were trying to solve; the barriers that the newcomer child or family was facing, and how you and/or your colleagues were able to work with the school to solve the issue and help the child/family.

In each of the four focus groups, participants affirmed all of these roles, as well as adding other contributions, depth and insight to the many ways they provide holistic support to students and families. Following is a discussion of the findings.

### Different Types of Community Partners

One key role represented in the groups was that of the Settlement Worker in Schools (SWIS). Each worker is typically assigned to three to five schools, where they would speak the same language as many of the newcomers at that school. They work to build relationships with the principal and teachers and may stay associated with a school for many years.



*"I tell them I am their go-to person for any issues related to newcomer students and families. If I don't speak the language or provide the service, I will find someone who does."*

- SWIS participant

School personnel can change from year to year, and often the SWIS staff would start the year with a presentation to the staff describing their services, and the families they had helped the year before. Where they have a strong relationship with the principal, they can do a lot of good: connecting with families when there is a question about student behaviour or learning needs, explaining cultural customs to the school, or the unique challenges a family may be dealing with that are impacting the children's participation at school. They also provide broader settlement services to the families, and help them navigate not only school systems, but other systems they are dealing with.

Recently, we have seen the introduction of the Enhanced Settlement Workers In School (ESWIS) program. The Enhanced-SWIS program supports newcomer children, youth, and families at risk of serious challenges in their settlement experience, especially those with underlying health conditions directly affected by the COVID-19 pandemic and school closures. To be eligible for ESWIS services, newcomer youth and families must have complex needs such as disabilities, special needs, mental health challenges, relationship breakdown, homelessness, those experiencing family violence, and at risk of issues with drugs, addiction, gang involvement and police contact. ESWIS staff work closely with school administration, and community agencies to navigate systems, and provide the needed support. Whenever working with families who are interacting with social systems, E-SWIS staff can advocate for a more holistic human approach, addressing the root causes of the problem, not just the outer symptoms.



There are also cultural brokers whose primary relationship is with the family not the school. Brokers have lived experience coming to Canada as newcomers, so they can relate to the families, and also provide support navigating systems and challenges, as they have done this themselves. Families will seek support from brokers to advocate on their behalf to the school, or to stand with them as they try to understand what is happening with their children, and to negotiate a solution that takes into account the student's background and culture.

There are also many agencies that provide Out of School Time (OST) programming. This can be in the form of tutoring and/or recreation programs. The additional tutoring is so valuable for students who are learning a language and catching up on back-ground knowledge. This can be more effective when there is good communication between the OST staff and teachers, so that staff can focus on the most significant gaps, and timely learning tasks. Principals can refer students to the OST programs when they think they would benefit from the additional support. In addition to supporting achievement in school subjects, students can learn more about Canada and their community, and engage in other activities that they like and are good at, such as sports and artistic endeavours. Some programs focus on leadership development and enhancing social and emotional well-being. Others are led by ethnocultural groups, strengthening connections to first language, family and cultural traditions. These diverse programs provide opportunities for holistic support and development, as well as sometimes bridging relationships to Canadian students who participate alongside newcomers.

*"I got beat up so bad when I came to Canada. And I know what these kids are like, just like my brothers and sisters and I were put through the wringer because we were the only Muslim Arab kids in the school at the time. And we experienced a lot of oppression. So I know what the kids are going through, like I understand, and I feel it. This is why I'm really passionate and love my job because I really get to advocate for these kids."*

- SWIS staff participant

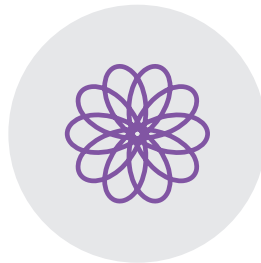
## KEY CONTRIBUTIONS OF COMMUNITY PARTNERS



**Timely  
Communication**



**Academic  
Support**



**Holistic  
Support**



**Supporting Specialized Assessment  
And Class Placement**



**Navigating  
Systems**



**Training In Intercultural  
Understanding And Trauma  
Sensitivity**



**Advocacy**



**Interagency Collaboration**



### **Timely Communication**

#### **Timely Communication**

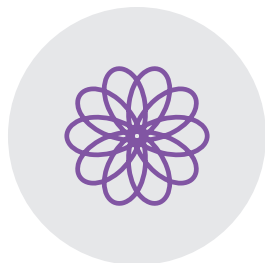
Providing timely communication, between the school, parents and students, to build trusting relationships was paramount. As newcomers are learning the English language, SWIS and Brokers are critical partners in providing interpretation and supporting intercultural understanding between the school and the parents. Strong partnerships between schools and SWIS staff would often result in more proactive supports and activities, like a newcomer parents' night, or a Newcomer Orientation Week in high schools, where school routines and expectations could be communicated specifically for those new to the system. Stories were told of times when the principals opened up a room for parents to have coffee or tea together when dropping off students. Other principals hosted a monthly coffee time with newcomer parents. Such events helped build relationships and shared understanding and allowed parents to feel at home in the school, more comfortable to come into the school when they have questions or concerns. When timely communication between home and school does not happen, assumptions go unchecked, students don't feel supported, and poor decisions can be made that lead to more problems.



### **Academic Support**

#### **Academic Support**

Community partners are often involved in arranging or providing academic support. This could be in the form of language lessons, after-school tutoring (OST), or working with students during the school day one-on-one or in small groups (SWIS). Recognizing that older students may have gaps in their learning and catching up to do once they learn English, academic supports are important for helping students to complete high school before turning 20 years old.



### **Holistic Support**

#### **Holistic Support**

A key aspect of the support provided by community partners is that they seek to provide strengths-based holistic support. Community partners can deepen intercultural understanding by sharing cultural beliefs or practices that may be influencing a school situation. When a student is having difficulty engaging in learning activities, or seems to be having behavioural issues, it is easy to lean toward a deficit approach-thinking there is something wrong with the student. What community partners can do by strengthening the communication between home and school, is to help interpret the behaviour through a different lens. Perhaps there are social-emotional needs to be met before a child can participate fully. Have the school routines and expectations been made explicit? Is there a home or family situation that is impacting the child's ability to engage in school? Is there a different explanation for the behaviour that school staff may not have considered? Is there a way to engage the student around their strengths and interests? Challenges in school may have very little to do with school, so adopting a holistic strengths-based approach to addressing the situation is more likely to lead to a solution that contributes to a safe, welcoming and caring environment that supports learning.



Another aspect of holistic support is supporting students in developing life skills for settlement and integration. At the schools' request, one agency established small group sessions to help the students develop personal and social skills essential for settlement into Canadian society, while also maintaining their cultural identity. By supporting these sessions during school time, they were able to maximize participation of newcomer students and enhance their sense of school as a supportive environment. Another positive outcome of these groups was the sense of community that developed amongst participants. Students became more supportive of each other, deepened their understanding and respect for diverse experiences, and build strong bonds that made them happy to come to school. Attending to these holistic needs deepened the students' skills, social connections, and therefore ability to keep engaging in school.



### **Supporting Specialized Assessment And Class Placement**

#### **Supporting Specialized Assessment and Class Placement**

In many cases brokers indicated that families did not know what class their child had been placed in, or for what reason. They did not know about learning challenges, or their progression through ESL levels, or the supports available. Newcomer families are sometimes reluctant to sign paperwork seeking specialized assessments for their children. There is often stigma associated with disability in other countries, so there is a need for in-depth conversation and shared understanding of what the school is seeing alongside what the parents are seeing, in order to determine an appropriate path forward. Community partners have played an important role in advocating for clear communication about why the school wants to assess a student, and the potential consequences of the assessment or coding.

Sometimes students may need more time to feel comfortable participating in learning activities, or mental health supports to deal with trauma. Support for learning English as a Second Language (ESL), or one-on-one assistance could be helpful before seeking specialized assessment for special needs. When it comes to diagnosing special needs, the partners described challenges on both ends: schools jumping too quickly to assessments and coding, as well as not providing the support needed to progress. Community partners can strengthen communication in developing a deeper understanding of the child's strengths, learning challenges and lived experiences. When needed, they can also support the process of getting informed consent for specialized assessment, as well as debriefing the results, and understanding the implications for support and placements.



### **Navigating Systems**

#### **Navigating Systems**

There is so much information for newcomers to take in, and processes to learn to navigate life in Canada. Not only do community partners help families understand the school system, but they also help them navigate many other systems outside the school that may impact the family's well-being. Once consent is obtained and community partners connect with a family through the school, they can provide assistance with other challenges. Figuring out the healthcare system, the justice system, banking, transportation, employment, and social services are all critical for families to overcome barriers and move toward healthy integration.



### **Training In Intercultural Understanding And Trauma Sensitivity**

#### **Training in Intercultural Understanding and Trauma Sensitivity**

Community partners can provide training for school staff to deepen intercultural understanding, or sessions in trauma sensitive approaches that honour and recognize pre-migration experiences. Participants indicated that this had not happened as much lately because of funding cuts, and increased time pressure on teachers. Enhancing intercultural understanding can happen one on one with a teacher and family, or in group sessions with the whole staff. It is critical that any staff working with newcomer students are cognizant of the trauma they may have experienced and respond with compassion and flexibility to create a safe learning space with appropriate support.



### **Advocacy**

#### **Advocacy**

All four focus groups stressed the importance of advocacy in their work. In this context that involved speaking to school staff with, or on behalf of families to get greater clarity, to change the actions of school personnel, or negotiate class placement, or disciplinary measures. Newcomer parents have had very different experiences of schooling, if any schooling at all. In some countries, it is rude to question the teacher or principal. They are used to just accepting what they are told. Community partners are instrumental in informing parents of their rights, and in deepening understanding of their child's learning and progress. They can be especially helpful in addressing behaviour incidents. For example, in other settings, rough play could have been more accepted. If a child has lived in a refugee camp, they may have had to defend themselves or their siblings or fight to acquire food and supplies. Understanding the students' background, as well as what actually transpired in the situation—such as taunting or bullying—can be instrumental in navigating an appropriate way forward.

Partners noted that their advocacy was not always welcome at schools. In some schools, they felt they were only invited in as interpreters, when the school wanted to communicate something to the family. Community partners long for true partnership, where communication and learning go both ways, where the school is willing to adjust for the newcomers, not just expect newcomers to do all the adjusting.



## Interagency Collaboration

### Interagency Collaboration

*"Do we have enough resources? And are we utilizing them in the most efficient manner? And this has to do with the coordination of our services, of folks working collaboratively in interagency collaboration. So that's a big piece. Can it be enhanced? I think I think we can always improve, particularly when it comes to the district and the front line."*

- Focus group Participant

No one agency does everything, making interagency collaboration essential. Different agencies have different mandates: an area of the city, or a specific need, or a particular ethnocultural group they support, or limitations to service because of IRCC funding guidelines. Some agencies provide Out of School Time (OST) programming and can only provide support before or after school hours, whereas SWIS can support during the school day. The school divisions have their own intercultural workers who focus on initial intake, assessment, and school or division priorities. While performing essential services, they do not have the capacity to meet all the needs of newcomer students. This means schools may need to have partnerships with several agencies to meet the needs of all their students. Newcomer students and families should receive timely and appropriate support wherever they attend school.

Not all schools have partnerships to support newcomers, depending on the area of the city and how many newcomer students are in the school. SWIS staff and many community partners prioritize schools with more newcomer students which is appropriate. And populations change. Schools may suddenly find themselves serving newly arrived families from different countries than in the past. Principals and teachers can change each year, requiring tending of the collaborative relationship, and ongoing communication about what community partners offer and how they support families and schools.

Although collaboration increased with the arrival of the Syrians, the ECVO report (2019) identified an ongoing need to enhance inter-agency collaboration, by mapping available services and program strengths and rewarding greater collaboration. With the multitude of agencies working in partnership with schools, it can be difficult and time consuming for a principal to figure out who to call for support. Having a single number to call, alongside a map/directory of services would make it easier for educators to reach out for support. REACH Edmonton has been engaging in efforts to map programs and facilitate this knowledge and collaboration with their 2021 report *Increasing Alignment between Community Collaboratives and Schools*.



Participants were grateful for the efforts of many educators they worked with who did all they could to support newcomers. They also identified that they didn't feel welcome in some schools, and that they could support better outcomes for newcomer students and families with broader access and deeper partnership with teachers, principals, and the system. The needs are great, and there is room for improvement.

*"What makes collaboration successful? There are at least two things that come to mind that make collaboration Successful. One is that the teacher, principal or the school board, understands the immigrant experience. That's number one. And number two, that they also understand the limitations of systems and institutional answers, or solutions.*

*And I'm thinking of a high school where the English Language Learner (ELL) director would sometimes find themselves in a situation. And they would put themselves in the shoes of the family and say, you know, I'm going to slow the institutional process down, because I know that you as a community agency, will do a better job of supporting this situation, and bringing us in that way.*

*And sometimes it had to be off the record. I always appreciated when that happened, because it showed their insight into the disparity of power, I guess. And I'm thinking of a principal of two schools that we were involved with, where this principal actually had a learning curve on the immigrant experience, with a negative experience that allowed him to learn how to bring in an agency like ours, to prevent the need for systems to intervene, because when systems intervene, it can be problematic. Sometimes it's the only option."*

- Focus Group Participant

## SYSTEMIC GAPS AND BARRIERS



**Long Road  
To Integration**



**Inconsistent Service  
And Support**



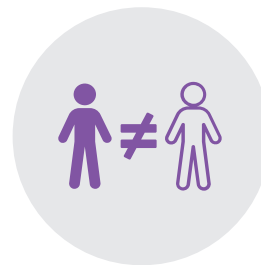
**Consent**



**Understanding Family Background,  
Context, And Trauma**



**Lack Of Intercultural Understanding  
And Competence**



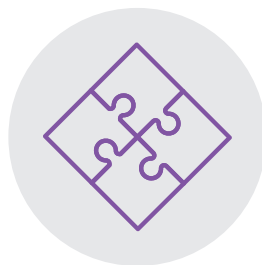
**Racism  
And Discrimination**



**Support For Late Arrivals With  
Limited Or Interrupted Formal  
Schooling**



**Commitment To Including  
Immigrant Families**



**Layers Of Support For  
Students And Families With  
Complex Needs**



**Insufficient Funding And  
Resources**

## SYSTEMIC GAPS AND BARRIERS

While recognizing the work of so many educators and community partners in serving newcomers, the stories of practice also revealed many systemic gaps and barriers that were impacting newcomers' experiences of school and learning. The gaps noted were brought up in more than one focus group discussion, with examples provided from several participants. Participants noted that these gaps were present prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, but were amplified during this period, and need to be addressed long-term.

The following systemic gaps and barriers are summarized and illuminated with quotes from focus group participants:

1. Long road to integration
2. Inconsistent service and support
3. Consent
4. Understanding family background, context, and trauma
5. Lack of intercultural understanding
6. Racism and discrimination
7. Support for late arrivals with limited and interrupted formal schooling
8. Commitment to including immigrant families
9. Layers of support for students and families with disabilities
10. Insufficient funding and resources





### I. Long road to integration

Discussions reflected the long process of integration, the overwhelming amount of information to understand, and the layers of barriers that families face. Newcomers cannot take in all the information at once. There is some immediate information needed for settling, but more needed as time goes on to understand the systems. Information needs to be delivered over time, so that newcomers can process and apply it. Stewart's (2011, p. 127) model of adjustment challenges notes the progression of moving from meeting basic needs to addressing larger economic and psychosocial challenges.

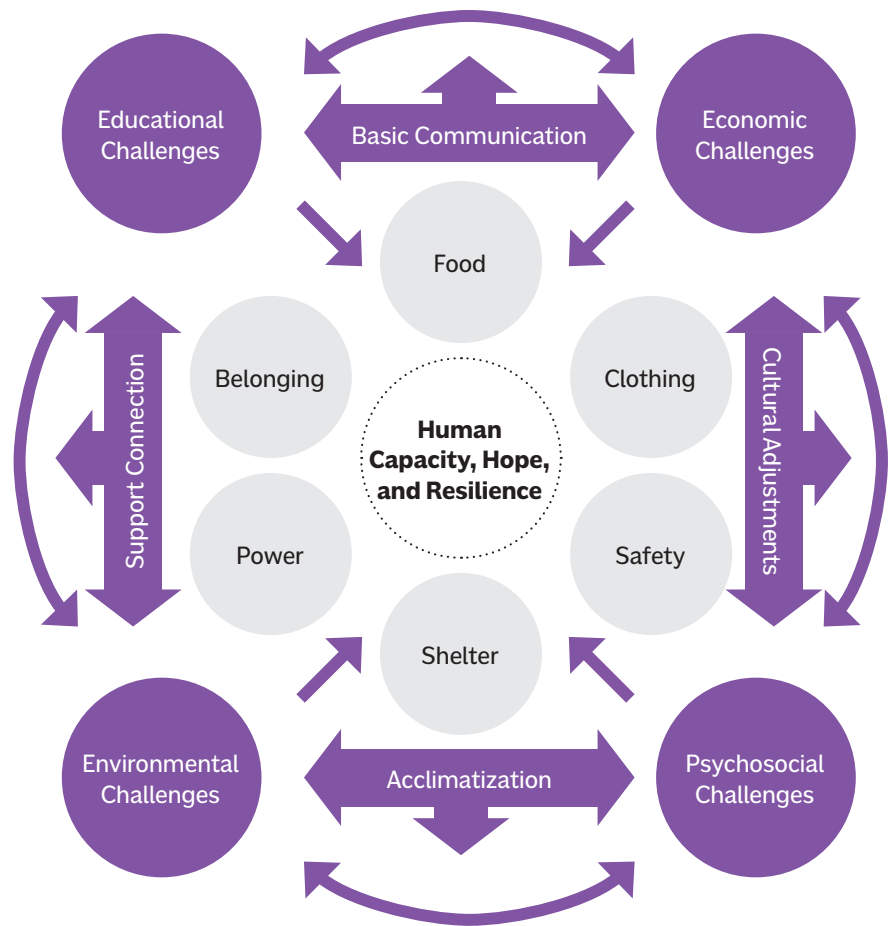


Figure 4.1 Adjustment challenges for refugee children

Participants noted the lack of information about what was needed for high school completion, or to plan for a career or post-secondary education. Since the Canadian education system is different from what has been experienced before, we cannot take for granted that parents understand their rights and responsibilities for participation in the school community. Examples of newcomer orientation events, and ongoing informal interpreted conversations should be available to all newcomers so they can know what is expected of them, what opportunities are available, and how to make progress to integration and contribution.

*"I think we need to build a system that gives the right information to the parents and to the students. Because one important thing that jeopardizes the integration of newcomers, is a lack of information, in many, many domains. We have lack of information in financial literacy, we have lack of information in this education system, we have lack of information on the system of health and support that we have.*

*So there are gaps everywhere in terms of critical information that these people need, in order to make a good process of integration in the new country. How do we put a system in place where we make basic, critical information available to the newcomer? I think that it's something very, very critical."*

- Focus Group Participant



## 2. Inconsistent service and support

While policies are in place that support community partnerships in both school authorities, the application of that policy is not consistent across schools. No one agency does everything. Different groups serve different needs, for different populations in different parts of the city. Populations change in schools, requiring new relationships and local partnerships to develop. We need to build the capacity of all schools to work with community agencies in support of newcomers.

*And so I really want to highlight the fact that a lot of this stuff is really school based. The successes are school based, the problems are school based. Where does that accountability and responsibility lie at the end of the day, for making the systemic change? If it's school based, then I think that should be communicated, and we will not waste our time trying to engage school boards. And if it's the school board, then you know, the work between the school board and the schools needs to change as well, so that we, as partners out of the school systems, are able to engage in a productive way.*

- Focus Group Participant



## 3. Consent

Before schools can share any information about students with community partners, a consent form must be signed by the parents to work in collaboration. It is one piece of paper that opens the door to collaborative work that can benefit schools and families, and Freedom Of Information and Protection of Privacy (FOIPP) legislation requires this consent for the protection of all concerned. Families need to understand what they are signing, and may be suspicious of systems, based on past experience. Building trusting relationships with community partners paves the way to so much support that can make a significant difference in healthy integration.



#### 4. Understanding family background, context, and trauma

When a school identifies an issue such as a family coming to school late, or children not having lunches, it is important to consider the many challenges that family may be dealing with. Community partners told stories of families living in poverty, with parents working several jobs, or perhaps attending Language Instruction for Newcomers Class (LINC). In some cases, older siblings may be making lunches, or getting younger siblings to school. Many newcomers rely on buses for transportation and may have children attending several schools. There could also be cultural factors, or different experiences in the past that influence a family's understanding of school expectations for promptness, or what is provided at school.

For families that have spent time in a refugee camp, there can be significant trauma, dysregulation, and limited school experience. In the Bridge program, Powell et al., (2017) described how trauma informed teachers saw the diminished concentration, impaired executive function, periods of silence, and an overall impaired readiness for school, for what it was, a result of their past experiences. As a result, they focused first on building a sense of safety, creating social attachments, and maintaining their sense of social identity, before expecting students to engage in academic work.

Compassion and curiosity are foundational for developing trust, and creating a safe space in which students and families can share their stories of experience. It is critical for schools to respond to newcomer students and families with support to prevent further trauma from occurring.

*"Even the simple thing of parents coming on time, it can be a cultural thing, or you have to acknowledge that parents might be busing everywhere, they're still learning English. So all those commitments might make them late. So even understanding that this is where we come in to solve the problem with the family and the school. Getting them into the same room can take a lot of communicating. And then once we get the parents in the room and understanding what the problem is, why it's a problem, and kind of getting everybody on board.*

*I think, especially with families that come from refugee camps, they aren't used to the routine, the kids aren't used to routine. So kids might not be able to focus in class.*

*Or another situation I can think of is maybe lunches are not made, and the misunderstanding could come from, the school might think that there might be neglect involved. But once we kind of communicate that with the parents, then they realize, okay, well, the older sibling could be actually helping with preparing the lunches, and then they work it out. And then the problem becomes solved that way."*

- Focus Group Participant



## 5. Lack of Intercultural Understanding and Competence

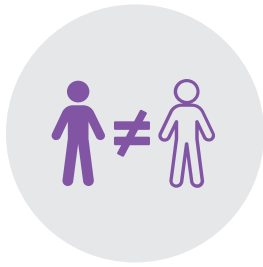
In Edmonton, there are students from many different cultures and countries, and the population in a given school can shift from year to year. Many of the challenges that community partners helped to navigate arose from misunderstanding around cultural values, beliefs and customs. Intercultural understanding is defined as a “thorough comprehension of the complexities, challenges and benefits inherent in the interactions between two or more cultures” (Alberta Teachers’ Association, 2010). Intercultural competence begins with a deep sense of respect for different cultures, and a willingness to learn from other cultures and adjust our practices to support student success.

Intercultural competence is defined as “the ability to function effectively across cultures, to think and act appropriately, and to communicate and work with people from different cultural backgrounds.” (Welcomm website). Developing intercultural competence requires knowledge, skills, and attitudes that support deepening understanding and respect for other cultures. Community partners worked with teachers to help them explore different reasons for behaviours they were seeing. Too often, it was expected that newcomer students simply comply with Western standards and expectations, without seeking understanding of cultural values that might be influential.



*“Another aspect we ran into a lot doing kindergarten work, is the difference of values for our kindergarten children in different cultures. In our Canadian kindergartens, we value responsibility; you take off your own jacket, put on your own shoes, tie up your own shoes, those are the measures of success. But in many cultures, that is not a measure of success. And it doesn’t mean that the child is defiant or incapable. It’s a different cultural value system. And so I feel for our teachers, because there is so much to learn, but we have to have a trusted conversation going on all the time about how that is happening.”*

- Focus group participant



## 6. Racism and discrimination

Racism was noted in different ways, primarily as lower expectations, and being treated differently based on an accent. There were many stories from African students who didn't feel that the teachers held high expectations for them. They saw this in being given easier work, and not hearing encouragement to pursue challenging goals. In some cases this seemed to derive from an overriding focus on the challenges that the newcomers had faced, rather than adopting a strengths-based approach that invites possibility. Hammond (2015) describes this tendency to provide English Language Learners and students of colour with fewer opportunities to develop higher order thinking skills, and to challenge their thinking. She provides teaching strategies to increase rigour and authentic engagement for culturally and linguistically diverse students in her book on Culturally Responsive Teaching and the Brain.

Another participant felt discrimination based on her accent when she made phone calls. She felt that they heard her accent and didn't take her seriously, or even consider the content of what she was trying to communicate to schools or doctor's offices.

*"Something that I can't help talking about here is the issue of racism in schools, that some parents and students, especially from African descent, are facing. We often have students that say that they don't have any support from the staff, in terms of, 'you can do it, keep doing, you are able to do it'. That's what you would expect from a teacher, encouraging the student to do something, to challenge yourself. But usually what they will experience is 'that's too difficult for you, you can't do that. Here is the shortcut.' 'If you think you're going to university, do you think is really a good idea? Isn't it better for you to do this, or to do that, because it's too difficult?'"*

*Some are doing that, not really out of some kind of racism, but because, that's the usual stereotype about students that are newcomers; they have so many challenges, that there are requirements they can't meet. And so students face the situation where there is one narrative for them, and there is something else that will be communicated to their classmate that they will not tell them.*

*It seems that in the mind of the teacher or the staff, they don't necessarily have the ability to do the same thing as their classmate. I was really shocked by the number of students that were sharing that with me, that they don't feel that encouragement to do better. It is like they are deemed to do things that are less, less important or less challenging."*

- Focus group participant



## 7. Support for late arrivals with limited or interrupted formal schooling

This topic came up within every focus group. Participants noted that students who arrived in high school, at age 15 or older, had so much to catch up on. They need to learn the language, and gain background knowledge to achieve passing grades in core subjects. This is affirmed by Stewart (2011) as she identifies two levels of language learning, first basic communication, and then academic language and background curricular knowledge. The OECD (2018) report noted that students who arrived in a country at or after the age of 12, showed considerably lower levels of academic adjustment on PISA tests than immigrant students who arrived before the age of 12.

Time is limited, and participants noted that seldom was there evidence of proactive planning to make the most of the time and help for students to pursue a specific path. They told stories of repeating ESL levels several times, and then aging out at 20. Even bright students with good educational backgrounds struggled to know and meet the requirements for high school graduation and post-secondary admission. Once students turn 20, taking high school courses at Norquest costs over \$700 per course, and this is often a barrier for students and families living in poverty.

For those older students who have experienced interrupted or limited formal schooling, being placed with their Canadian aged peers does not meet their learning needs. Participants told stories of refugee students who arrived as teenagers, functioning at an early elementary level, being placed in high school courses. This often led to deep frustration, behaviour problems, dropping out of school, and poor social choices. Their stories demonstrated the classic downward spiral of the Portes and Zhou (Stewart, 2011) framework. This path of not completing high school is costly for individuals and also society, often leading to under or unemployment, involvement in crime, a lack of social inclusion, and a greater dependence on government support (Uppal, 2017)

*"So even when the kids leave school at 18 or 19 years old, they still can't continue free of charge. And these kids come in the age of 18. And two more years, now, they might not even upgrade to get a 10 level. So now they're going to have to go to NAIT or other places. One English upgrading for grade 11 or 12 is \$719. And imagine all these kids are brand new, and their family doesn't even have the means to buy the basics.*

*That's why we see a lot of kids in Alberta right now; they do not go to college, don't do up-grading, because it's expensive. They end up in labour jobs in the camp or Fort Mac. And that's why we lose a lot of young kids."*

- Focus group Participant





## 8. Commitment to including immigrant families

There were many stories shared by community partners of incidents where parents were not included in conversations early. There were behaviour incidents where parents weren't notified about a problem or included in a conference when the other student had parent representation. By the time parents were included, the situation had escalated, and students were being suspended or expelled. A lack of compliance might be treated as defiance rather than misunderstanding and punished. If schools are using the students and siblings to provide language support, that puts the children in the lead position, rather than the parents.

Coming from very different education systems, parents were often unaware of how things worked, and what their rights are with respect to placement in programs or supports. In many cases this lack of communication was exacerbated by the language barrier. There is a recognition that it takes more time and energy, and to find someone who can interpret, but it is absolutely essential that newcomer parents are included in all the conversations that any other parent would be in. Newcomer parents need the opportunity to build an understanding of how the system works, and then to participate in support of their child to create better outcomes.



*"Because if you see what is happening, most newcomers think that the school is taking their children away from them. And that's something very common in newcomers thinking, maybe because they don't understand, don't know what is happening. But of course, you will see that. They will always put this conflict between them and the children on the school on what the student is learning."*

- Focus group participant



## 9. Layers of support for students and families with complex needs

Canadian parents of students with disabilities can have difficulty navigating the school system and the options for support. For newcomers, the language barrier, cultural differences, and a lack of knowledge of systems makes it even more difficult. In some cultures, there is additional stigma associated with disability. Newcomers without permanent resident status may be fearful that having a family member with complex needs may impact their ability to remain in Canada.

*"A challenge linked specifically to disability is systems navigation. I think we're experiencing a situation where a family gets volleyed between systems and meanwhile, they're languishing. That is, the family is delayed in receiving support, while people figure out whose role it is, and kind of abdicating responsibility sometimes, but we don't. I wish we could invoke the 'Jordan principle of the schools', where the family gets the support they need, and the system figures out later who is paying for it."*

- Focus Group Participant

Within Edmonton, inclusive programming at the community school is the first option. Within Edmonton Public, parents can choose to have students with documented special needs programmed for at various congregated sites throughout the city. Community partners told divergent stories, with considerable inconsistency in how schools assessed for special needs. In some cases, school staff jumped too quickly to special needs assessment and coding, without due process to gain informed consent. In other cases, it seemed that students who were struggling did not receive in-depth assessment and adequate support.

Students with severe special needs in an inclusive setting sometimes receive the support of a one-on-one educational assistant (EA). This can be a tremendous support for students, allowing them to receive customized academic, personal and behavioural assistance. This is expensive for schools though, and with recent cutbacks, there are far fewer educational assistants. One partner told a story of a child who was thriving with the support of an EA, only to have that person cut. The student is having a much more difficult time now. The level of support for parents of children with special needs during COVID has been affected, and is varied. At various times students have been sent home for health reasons, and this change in support and programming has had an impact on the wellbeing and progress of students and parents.

What became clear through the various stories shared by partners is that newcomers who have children with special needs face additional barriers and challenges in schooling. Ongoing communication (with interpretation where there is a language barrier) to understand the child, their strengths and needs, and different options for support is critical.

*"We were working with a student who is just brilliant, getting 90%, honors on all her assignments. She was put in Knowledge and Employability, in K & E because of her test scores. She shouldn't have been there. She kept saying that for a year, just complaining. "This is so frustrating. I know that I don't belong here." But the teachers insisted that was what the testing showed, so she has to be in there.*

*After a recent midterm, the student got really frustrated. We sat down with her and asked, what happened? She's replied, "When I do exams, I get shaky, I get blanked out." So, she just had test anxiety. That's all it was.*

*So basically, myself, my colleague and her parents went in there and we just said no, she needs to be in regular programming. Teacher and principal pushed back, but then they changed their mind. They're like, Okay, well let her go in. And now she's flourishing. She's doing amazing. So yeah, it was a lot of pushback, for sure. But she has test anxiety. It's normal. And then ever since then she's able to cope with it."*

- Focus group participant



#### **10. Insufficient funding and resources**

Community partners identified the issue of insufficient resources both in the schools and agencies. It is important to note the limited resources, recognizing that education is funded by the provincial government and immigration supports at the federal level. Due to recent cuts in provincial funding for education, school authorities have adjusted their programming and support, even as the number of newcomers and diversity of needs has increased. Community partners recognized the tremendous pressure that schools are under, and the load teachers are carrying, especially during the pandemic. They recognized how things have changed over time with decreased funding, and how this is impacting newcomers. In the past there was a central advisory board with staff from Edmonton Public Schools, and from many agencies meeting monthly, discussing emergent needs and being responsive. Together, we need to advocate for sufficient funding for the education system, and settlement agencies, so that newcomers can more quickly learn the language, integrate, contribute and thrive.

*As a community, we need to ensure that all refugees receive a level of support that equips them to put down healthy roots so that they can flourish and contribute, as so many are eager to do. (ECVO Summary, 2019, p. 7)*



# COVID-19

It is not an understatement to say that the COVID-19 pandemic changed everything. The work of community partners is based on relationship, on individualized and small group service and support. When the pandemic was declared, and schools closed, this person-to-person communication and support was interrupted.

## Changes to Schooling

Education in the spring of 2020 can best be described as emergency remote learning. It was different than “online learning” where teachers are trained in pedagogy suited to an online environment, and both teachers and students have chosen that path. School divisions, teachers and leaders did their best to connect with students and provide learning material in accessible formats, but it was a steep learning curve for all concerned.

Returning to school in the fall of 2020 was different in that families could choose online or in-person formats. Many school protocols were adjusted to create distance, and limit exposure to many different people. For example, teachers moved from class to class rather than students, or specialist teachers taught via Zoom instead of meeting with many groups of students. Recess and physical education activities and processes were altered. Schools were strategic in limiting contact with outside people, including parents, service providers and community partners. Everyone was figuring out new ways to keep everyone safe while accomplishing the most essential tasks and pushing non-urgent matters to the background.

*So that's one thing, is the language barrier. And the other thing is clear misconception or rumors that newcomers hear in the community, from other community members. One example that I can give you is that when schools reopened back in September, there was a rumor going on that if your child is tested positive for COVID, Children's Services are going to take them. And they were all hearing that stuff. And then they're saying, Hey then, I'm not taking my child to school; I'm gonna do online school. But do you have a computer to provide that, for the child to be part of the school? No, I don't. Then that's again, another problem going around.*

- Focus Group Participant

# COVID-19

## Communication

Many community organizations pivoted in their focus. The pandemic amplified the gaps in society between those with space, technology, and jobs they could do from home, and families in small homes, with several students, limited or no technology, and unstable employment. Food security and enhancing technology access became emergent priorities. Clear communication of health information was essential and challenging to access in different languages.

*“One thing that we have noticed is the language barrier. As soon as everything COVID related happened, it was in English, and then slowly, they started turning into the other languages, but it took a very long time.*

*For those newcomers, they were still at step one, when we were maybe in step three, or four, and a little bit further. So then we noticed that some newcomer families are isolated from school, and, and mainly in terms of safety protocol. And when I say isolated, I'm talking in terms of information. So if the school has a COVID outbreak, the parents didn't know what's going on, they get the information in English. And they tell them you got an email, or it is on our SchoolZone or something. Again, they don't know what SchoolZone is, we didn't notice that.”*

- Focus Group Participant

## Technology Support

Technology is an essential tool for communication in many systems. We discovered how important personalized support was, and how limited the access to technology was, as well as the ability to use it. The language barrier was amplified, as schools tried to communicate new procedures and expectations, and set students up through Google classroom. Schools loaned out Chrome books, but typically allowed one per family. Many newcomer families had several students needing access.

There was a drive to get technology in the hands of families, by distributing refurbished computers that families could keep. Then they needed affordable internet, which was offered by Telus through the schools. Then parents needed to learn how to use the technology—to create an email account, log on to Schoolzone, access Google Classrooms, use different apps. This was challenging for many Canadian parents who knew the system, let alone for newcomer parents with a language barrier, who were missing background knowledge and technical skills.

### **Changing Protocols; Fewer Clients served at a time**

Community agencies offering OST programming were not able to offer programs in the ways they had previously. Some agencies pivoted to offer different support. In some cases, they found innovative ways to achieve the goals of their programming online. If they did figure out a way to offer summer and fall programming in person, they were serving far fewer students at a time, due to distancing guidelines. As more information became available, and as health protocols changed, schools and agencies had to adjust so many ways of doing things and develop new health protocols which trumped previously recognized promising practices. Then there was the challenge of “Zoom fatigue”. With many students spending more time online for school, the capacity for more online programming after school was limited. Without the holistic programming from OST programs, community partners were concerned for the social-emotional well-being of newcomer students, noting the isolation many were experiencing.

*“So our organization provides a lot of afterschool programs. Many of those programs were formerly offered in the school, pre-COVID. When we were offering those programs within the school, it was an easy transition point. We had a lot of school administrators referring the kids to the programs that were running right in the school.*

*Since COVID, that has impacted our ability to be able to offer those services after school. Most of the schools want the programmers off site. And so as soon as kids are done, for the end of the day, they try to shoo everyone out of the building. And so with the latest restrictions, it's been very challenging to offer services to youth over the age of 12, that's not in a one on one capacity.”*

- OST community partner



Schools also faced ever-changing protocols. Both Edmonton school divisions offered a choice of online or in-person schooling initially. Edmonton Catholic asked parents to make a final choice in November, while Edmonton Public offered this choice in November, February and April. Even for those who chose in-person schooling, groups of students and/or teachers could be sent home to learn online for two weeks if they were exposed to COVID. Supports for students with special needs changed. In some cases, one-on-one support was no longer available. For students with significant needs, this was de-stabilizing. Changes in programming, either into or out of a congregated site could be delayed. With all of the energy that needed to be focused on staying healthy and adjusting for the pandemic, community partners perceived limited capacity for the additional supports required for diverse learners, including ELLs, and those with special needs.

*"I'm finding that understanding of diversity, is upfront in everyone's face right now, because systems are stressed. So these gaps are kind of in front teachers, they're realizing they have to balance all these changes. And then there's a student who is acting differently or having these challenges. And teachers are leaning towards us more so, because they're able to see these gaps, or the challenges students are having, because of all these changes happening from COVID.*

*Classes are going online, back in school, back online. The students are struggling, so teachers are seeing that. If a teacher has an online class, they have students from different schools that they're not used to seeing, so, they're struggling to provide that support that they might have otherwise gotten in person, pre COVID. The diversity is kind of really upfront there now."*

- Focus group participant

## MOVING FORWARD

*It's kind of a time of reckoning for all systems, right? To just acknowledge our colonial history, and that we have had in schools, a pretty Eurocentric lens on everything. And I think that a lot of times, that's what we're trying to help schools do, all of us do gently, is unpack the assumptions and the lenses we are using that are different than the families'.*

*-Focus group participant*

While we started our conversations talking about what was working and how community partners were being of service, the conversations seemed to move quickly to what was not working, how newcomer needs were not being met in schools. Community partners described an education system that seemed overwhelmed at times, entrenched in its procedures, reluctant to change. The suggestions for change ranged from small technical shifts, like granting community partners access to school technology systems, to help parents with SchoolZone, to systemic shifts in age of access.

How can we create an education system that is responsive to the holistic human needs of students? What actions need to be taken at every level so that the system can address diverse learning needs, rather than expecting children to fit a rigid system? If indeed we believe that relationships are critical for children to feel safe and learn, then our policies and practices need to be designed to support relationships between students, teacher, families and community. Such a system would benefit all students, including newcomers and those with complex needs. The work of community partners is relational, and so are their suggestions for change.

### **I. Recognize cultural and personal strengths**

Newcomer students arrive with gaps and challenges, but they also have skills, strength and tremendous perseverance. Whether a situation is approached from a deficit or strengths'-based approach can change the outcome. Community partners shared insight about recognizing and enhancing strengths in newcomer students and families.

Rather than lowering expectations because a student doesn't yet speak English well, why not celebrate the fact that they already know other languages? If educators can embrace the openness and curiosity of an intercultural perspective, then the strength of diverse languages and cultures can be made visible and built on. Stewart (2011) noted the importance of enlisting family and community support, filtered through ethnic networks, in order to contribute to the upward spiral.

Many newcomers have overcome great adversity to get to Canada. It can be exhausting to always be working on academic tasks that are out of reach. By creating space to discover individual strengths and interests in music, art, or athletics, students can be engaged in something they are good at. The sense of accomplishment and the affirmation that comes from that can give students the encouragement they need to keep persevering with a new language and challenging curricular material.

*“One thing that we have concluded, is that there’s actually cultural strength here. There’s strength from the communities and their stories, and how they’ve overcome some of these difficult situations. Because for every story where we have a youth that has succumbed to the pressure of being a newcomer—someone with a split identity and a new culture that they don’t quite fit into—we’ve had a lot of youth that have, through the support of their of their family, or maybe their community or a broker, tapped into whatever cultural wealth there is, underneath the traditions, maybe the teachings, the principles of their family, they’ve tapped into that. And they’ve been able to overcome things.”*

- Focus group participant

## **2. Embrace research and storytelling**

Participants spoke of the power of research and storytelling to help us recreate systems that are responsive to human needs for connection. Hearing people’s stories can generate empathy, and a desire to come alongside.

*“I’ve had multiple conversations with each level, there’s a reluctance to change. If not a reluctance, at least, like some sort of ambivalence to change. And in order to draw out, sort of the rationale, and maybe even some empathy, it’s the stories that are being shared today. Nothing really will impact as much as these stories. These are the real keys, to having the system start to begin to see where it’s going wrong. And then having those stories supported by the proper academic journals or the proper academic sort of studies.”*

- Focus group participant

### 3. Convene the community

Schools could become a place for gathering and hosting events that allow for conversations, deepening of relationships, and finding common ground to move forward. This could be monthly coffee gatherings with the principal, or family-oriented events. It connects parents not only to the school, but also to Canadian neighbours, which supports long-term social integration in the community.

*"I think meeting with the principal monthly, in a formal way. Or perhaps we can do an activity with the school, engaging newcomers and those who have been born here in Canada. It would be valuable for the refugees themselves to share their settlement journey or their story, how they fled their country, how do they reach out to be in a camp, and then move to Canada will be good. In the end, it will be meaningful connection, connecting newcomers with the students who were born and raised here in Canada, connect the parents with the activity and the school staff as well. And adding this social validation factor is a key component for students and their family to integrate in an easy way into Canadian society and school systems, school regulation."*

*- Focus Group Participant*

### 4. Engage in two-way dialogue & intercultural learning opportunities

In some cases, community partners felt like they were in a one-way relationship, where they were asked to come in and provide interpretation, or a specific service. What they longed for was a two-way dialogue, and an opportunity to sit at the table with educators, and engage in problem-solving together, to better meet the needs of newcomer families. Community partners want to increase the intercultural learning opportunities, where everyone is learning and adjusting to find a path forward.

In the past they have been asked to do workshops to educate school staff on cultural norms in the community, or to share background experiences, or trauma-informed practices. These workshops deepened the understanding of school staff and paved the way to a stronger partnership and better support for students. This has not happened as much lately, due to the increasing demands on teacher time and resources.

There is also a recognition that staff from community agencies have more to learn about the school system. If there were opportunities for staff from schools and agencies to come together in support of families, there could be learning for everyone about goals, priorities, strengths, challenges and opportunities to work together to support newcomers to learn, belong, and succeed.

## 5. Mobilize together

We are living in a time when the issues of systemic racism and discrimination are being noticed and discussed. It goes beyond the education system to policing, social services, and so much more. Community partners articulated the need to go beyond band-aid solutions to addressing the systemic issues. This work has already started with the two school divisions engaging in policy review around their previous multicultural policies to actually naming and addressing systemic racism.

To enact a cultural change, there needs to be learning and conversation at every level. Creating welcoming supportive spaces for newcomers requires the participation of teachers, principals, central administration and the boards of trustees. When the trustees enact policies, there needs to be conversation about what that looks like in the classroom, how school structures support the policy, and how central office supports that work.

*"I think what needs to happen is that, like this conversation, right now, we need to start mobilizing together. It's the same thing with Edmonton policing. They're being approached by these community members, by people within the community to say that there's deep, deep rooted issues with how the current standards are and how things are going at the moment. And that there needs to be changes. And I think it's the same conversation that needs to happen with Edmonton Public Schools and Catholic Schools. It's that conversation around the fact that it's not a band aid fix; there are some systemic issues that need to change over time. And conversations like this, where we're brought together and we're able to sort of mobilize together I think, are really important."*

*- Focus Group Participant*

## PREFERRED FUTURE

After describing the kinds of service they provide, the gaps in the system, and the barriers that newcomers face settling into Canada, community partners were asked to dream about a preferred future. “If you could wave a magic wand, and improve service to students, what would that look like? The magic wand question is helpful because it can help us think beyond current limitations, which can then support practical solutions. The participants painted a picture of their preferred future that is described under the following themes:

- School building as community hub
- Humanistic and holistic approach to support
- Proactive and sufficient support for thriving
- Deep unhindered collaboration
- Systemic commitment to equity and accountability

We imagine schools as open and welcoming places for parents and community agencies. We imagine spaces where newcomer and Canadian parents can gather to have coffee or tea with the principal or meet with community partners. When the physical building is open and holds space for parents, then they can deepen their understanding of what their children are learning and deepen their family connection. Regular presence in the school can enhance relationships amongst parents, staff and community partners such that small issues are solved in positive ways by providing support, rather than leading to bigger problems born of misunderstanding. Newcomers could receive support from settlement workers in navigating other systems and learning their way forward to integration and interdependence.

We imagine schools as a place where newcomers are seen as complete human beings, with strengths and needs: physical, emotional, and social, as well as intellectual. We want our children’s academic progress to be seen in a context of overall wellbeing, so that school is also a place of healing from trauma, being nourished physically, emotionally and socially. Students are focused and engaged in learning, as they feel safe and cared for, and understand the expectations in their language. When students are dysregulated or make mistakes, we invoke the power of restorative practices to support learning and deepen community, rather than resorting to punishment. With after-school programs providing tutoring, recreation, leadership development, social connection and learning opportunities outside school curriculum, students can thrive and develop in multiple ways.

We imagine a world where there are adequate, proactive supports in place for thriving. Although newcomers expect a certain degree of struggle in settling into a new country, how wonderful it would be if they could move from dependence to interdependence without being in crisis and living on the edge of survival for years. It would be a game-changer if they had enough money to provide for their families, learn the language in a timely manner, and gain the knowledge they need to navigate systems and gain meaningful employment. This would reduce the overall cost to the system, as well as reduce suffering for newcomers, and allow them to create their preferred life after all the hardship they have already overcome prior to their migration.

All families would have the time and resources they need to learn and thrive. Families would have computers and access to the internet to support education, communication, accessing information for health, employment, and overall wellbeing. Students would be accurately assessed and able to progress in a timely way through the system. High school students would get the language support they need, as well as guidance to map out a career path in line with their strengths and interests. They would be funded to finish high school, rather than running out of time at age 20. Students with extra learning challenges would have the individualized support they need to progress and maximize their learning and contribution.

As community partners, we imagine a world of unhindered collaboration. We see possibility when we are all at the table: settlement workers, community partners, teachers, principals, ESL and Intercultural consultants, and system leaders to promote deep understanding of the family situations and student needs. Together, we could create innovative solutions that maximize our resources in service of students and families. Together we would see newcomers build their capacity to learn the language. Together we would create a culture of continuous improvement. Together we would identify and dismantle systemic barriers and build more equitable systems where newcomers are present and visible in all staff groups as role models for students. Together, we would be accountable to the community for the holistic success and wellbeing of all students.

While we acknowledge that such a world would be enhanced by more government funding, we also recognize the power of relationships, communication, and sitting together at the table to remove barriers and imagine innovative options for improved outcomes now. We look forward to working and learning with all who are committed to an equitable world where schools are the heart of the community, and education is the path to thriving for all people.



## APPENDIX A- INVITATION TO PARTICIPATE

### Invitation to Participate

#### Focus Group Conversations

#### Collaboration between Schools and Community Agencies

#### In support of Newcomer Students and Families

Are you a settlement worker, cultural support worker, community liaison personnel, or cultural broker working to bridge the gap between schools and newcomer students and families?

We are engaging in an initial research project to deepen understanding of the following:

- Understand how staff from settlement and community agencies interact with schools and education systems to support newcomer students and families.
- Identify gaps revealed through COVID in 2020-2021.
- Explore new ways to deepen the collaboration and communication between schools and community/settlement agencies to better meet the needs of all newcomer students and families.

#### Focus group times:

- Tuesday February 23, 10:00 am – 12:00 pm
- Thursday, February 25, 1:30 – 3:30 pm

From the literature, we see these types of contributions of staff from community agencies:

- Supporting home-school Communication: Language translation and interpretation.
- Supporting intercultural communication and anti-discriminatory education.
- Helping navigate systems.
- Providing information to teachers about the students' culture, past experiences.
- Providing tutoring, setting up tutoring programs for students who may benefit from academic support.
- Identifying students with mental health concerns and connecting them with mental health supports.
- Providing social and emotional support to refugees/newcomers.
- Connecting school and family to other community supports.
- Training on trauma-informed approach.

If you have worked in this field, we invite you to a focus group discussion to:

- Challenge, validate, or add to the identified contributions.
- Share stories about what these contributions can look like in practice.
- Identify gaps or barriers that interfere with newcomer students and families from having access to appropriate supports.
- Imagine a way forward to strengthen support for all newcomer students and families.

If you would like to participate, please contact Dr. Kathy Toogood at [kjtoogood@shaw.ca](mailto:kjtoogood@shaw.ca) to register for one of these times and receive a Zoom link.

This research is funded by IRCC, approved by the ELIP Secretariat.

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## APPENDIX B: ALBERTA EDUCATION CONTEXT FOR REFUGEE STUDENTS

According to the Immigration Refugee and Citizenship Canada (IRCC) website, immigrants are selected for their economic contribution, to reunite families, or in recognition of their humanitarian needs. Each year, targets are set for the number of immigrants that will be allowed into the country in each class. The number of refugee students saw a significant increase starting in 2016 with the arrival of the Syrians. The rate of immigration continued to grow after that, with a significant increase in the number of newcomer students that enrolled in Alberta schools. Although the arrival of new immigrants to Canada slowed during the pandemic, Canada plans to welcome approximately 400,000 immigrants in 2021, increasing to about 421,000 in the year 2023. Approximately 10% of new immigrants are refugees.

Refugee students are defined by Alberta Education as someone who has been forced to flee their country due to persecution. Alberta Education recognizes that “these students require significant additional supports and services to deal with issues such as limited or disrupted formal schooling, traumatic events and adjusting to an unfamiliar culture.” (Alberta Education Funding Manual, p. 101).

While governments identify immigrants by class, school systems identify students by learning needs under two categories, those with refugee status are coded 640, and English Language Learners are also identified as either Canadian born (303), or foreign born (301). Alberta Education provides additional funds to educate English Language Learners (ELL) (\$1200/student) and Refugees (\$5500/student) under their Weighted Moving Average (WMA) formula. School authorities can decide how to use the additional funds they receive to support their refugee and ELL students.

Additional funding is provided in only one category, ESL or Refugee, for a total of 5 years for each student. The way students were defined and counted changed in 2020 with a new funding formula, resulting in lower student counts, and less additional funding being provided (Edmonton Catholic School Division, March 24, 2021 Board report, page 228)

While refugee students typically have more complex and diverse needs based on their traumatic history of persecution, and the range of pre-migration experiences, the supports provided are not directly related to their status. Typically a jurisdiction will set up a range of services and supports that can be accessed by schools with newcomer students. In this report, the term newcomer is used as an umbrella term for immigrant students, recognizing a variety of barriers that may be faced by any immigrant student or family, and a continuum of supports that may be needed, regardless of immigration status.

## APPENDIX C: ALBERTA PRACTICE STANDARDS FOR TEACHING AND LEADERSHIP

### Teaching Quality Standard

Within Alberta, all teachers must meet the Teaching Quality Standard (Alberta Education, 2020).

#### Teaching Quality Standard:

Quality teaching occurs when the teacher's ongoing analysis of the context, and the teacher's decisions about which pedagogical knowledge and abilities to apply, result in optimum learning for all students.

This standard is demonstrated through six competencies, two of which are particularly related to supporting newcomers. They are included here.

#### Demonstrating a Professional Body of Knowledge

A teacher applies a current and comprehensive repertoire of effective planning, instruction, and assessment practices to meet the learning needs of every student. Achievement of this competency is demonstrated by indicators such as:

##### (a) Planning and designing learning activities that:

- address the learning outcomes outlined in programs of study;
- reflect short, medium and long range planning;
- incorporate a range of instructional strategies, including the appropriate use(s) of digital technology, according to the context, content, desired outcomes and the learning needs of students;
- ensure that all students continuously develop skills in literacy and numeracy;
- communicate high expectations for all students;
- foster student understanding of the link between the activity and the intended learning outcomes;
- consider relevant local, provincial, national and international contexts and issues;
- are varied, engaging and relevant to students;
- build student capacity for collaboration;
- incorporate digital technology and resources, as appropriate, to build student capacity for: - acquiring, applying and creating new knowledge; - communicating and collaborating with others, - critical-thinking; and - accessing, interpreting and evaluating information from diverse sources;
- consider student variables, including: - demographics, e.g. age, gender, ethnicity, religion; - social and economic factors; - maturity; - relationships amongst students; - prior knowledge and learning; - cultural and linguistic background; - second language learning; - health and well-being; - emotional and mental health; and - physical, social and cognitive ability;

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## **(b) Using instructional strategies to engage students in meaningful learning activities, based on:**

- specialized knowledge of the subject areas they teach;
- an understanding of students' backgrounds, prior knowledge and experiences;
- a knowledge of how students develop as learners;

## **(c) Applying student assessment and evaluation practices that:**

- accurately reflect the learner outcomes within the programs of study;
- generate evidence of student learning to inform teaching practice through a balance of formative and summative assessment experiences;
- provide a variety of methods through which students can demonstrate their achievement of the learning outcomes;
- provide accurate, constructive and timely feedback on student learning; and
- support the use of reasoned judgment about the evidence used to determine and report the level of student learning.

## **Establishing Inclusive Learning environments**

A teacher establishes, promotes and sustains inclusive learning environments where diversity is embraced and every student is welcomed, cared for, respected and safe.

Achievement of this competency is demonstrated by indicators such as:

- (a) Fostering equality and respect with regard to rights as provided for in the Alberta Human Rights Act and the Canadian Charter of Rights and freedoms;
- (b) Using appropriate universal and targeted strategies and supports to address students' strengths, learning challenges and areas for growth;
- (c) Communicating a philosophy of education affirming that every student can learn and be successful;
- (d) Being aware of and facilitating responses to the emotional and mental health needs of students;
- (e) Recognizing and responding to specific learning needs of individual or small groups of students and, when needed, collaborating with service providers and other specialists to design and provide targeted and specialized supports to enable achievement of the learning outcomes;
- (f) Employing classroom management strategies that promote positive engaging learning environments;
- (g) Incorporating students' personal and cultural strengths into teaching and learning; and
- (h) Providing opportunities for student leadership.

## Leadership Quality Standard

School Leaders must be certificated teachers, and they must also meet the Leadership Quality Standard. (Alberta Education, 2020).

## Leadership Quality Standard

Quality leadership occurs when the leader's ongoing analysis of the context, and decisions about what leadership knowledge and abilities to apply, result in quality teaching and optimum learning for all school students.

This standard is demonstrated through nine competencies, one of which is particularly related to supporting newcomers.

### Leading a Learning community

A leader nurtures and sustains a culture that supports evidence-informed teaching and learning.

Achievement of this capacity is demonstrated by indicators such as:

- (a) Fostering in the school community equality and respect with regard to rights as provided for in the Alberta Human Rights Act and the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms;
- (b) Creating an inclusive learning environment in which diversity is embraced, a sense of belonging is emphasized, and all students and staff are welcomed, cared for, respected and safe;
- (c) Developing a shared responsibility for the success of all students;
- (d) Cultivating a culture of high expectations for all students and staff;
- (e) Creating meaningful, collaborative learning opportunities for teachers and support staff;
- (f) Establishing opportunities and expectations for the positive involvement of parents/guardians in supporting student learning;
- (g) Creating an environment for the safe and ethical use of technology;
- (h) Collaborating with community service agencies to provide wrap around supports for all students who may require them, including those with mental health needs; and
- (i) Recognizing student and staff accomplishments.

## APPENDIX D-EDMONTON SCHOOL BOARDS

### Edmonton Catholic School Division

Edmonton Catholic (ECSD) serves approximately 43,000 students in just over 100 schools. Over the past five years, the number of ELL students has fluctuated between 8449 and 10,060, reflecting between 19 – 22 per cent of their total population. Though much smaller, the number of refugee students has doubled from 360 students in 2015 to 858 in 2019, comprising between 1- 2 per cent of their population.

ECSD welcomes all newcomer students and families at One World. . . One Centre. At the Centre, Intercultural Liaisons interview families, students are assessed by teachers, and then the information is passed on to the receiving schools prior to students' arrival. Liaisons continue to work with students, parents and ECSD personnel to encourage parent participation in the learning process, and to support engagement, belonging, and greater achievement of ELLs.

Edmonton Catholic has established two sites to support students with limited and interrupted formal schooling. St. Alphonsus has a program for junior high students, and high school at St. Joseph's High School.

ECSD values working in partnership with others in the community with whom they share common values and goals. They seek out and endorse educational partnerships that support curriculum and research-based pedagogy, reflect and nourish their Catholic faith, promote high school completion and transition, and bring meaningful learning opportunities into their school.

Through One World . . . One Centre, ECSD has a Community Engagement Coordinator who liaises with community partners to better serve students and families. This is done through social media as well as by sitting on various committees and attending community meetings. This work was reported on at the March 24, 2021 board meeting. Two administrative procedures guide the work, and are currently under review: AP 170 on Ethno-Cultural Relations, and AP 211 English as a Second Language.

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## **Edmonton Public School Board**

Edmonton Public (EPSB) is a large urban school jurisdiction with an enrolment of approximately 104,000 students overall, served in 214 schools. About 24 per cent of their students are coded as English as a Second Language (ESL), with refugee students comprising 1-2 per cent of the population. EPSB is known for its school-based budgeting and site-based decision-making. Working within school board policy and regulation, collective agreements, and a budget, principals have discretion to meet the needs of their population by prioritizing particular professional development, pedagogical approaches, and additional supports.

In their 2019-2020 Results Review, EPSB has reported several strategies to support English Language Learners:

- Development of a guiding document for Supporting English Language Learners (ELL), available [here](#).
- Training consultants and teachers in the use of an English language assessment tool.
- Review of the use Reception Centres as a location for meeting newcomer students and families for initial intake and language assessment. It was decided to phase out reception centres in favour of meeting with families at their local school.
- EPSB has both ESL and Intercultural Consultants to aid in intake, and assessment of newcomer students and families, and to build capacity for teachers and leaders to support newcomer ELL students and families.

In their Multicultural Education Policy (GGAB.BP), EPSB commits to establish partnerships with agencies and organizations that serve culturally and linguistically diverse families, and to help schools in working with these agencies.

While Edmonton Public has had a Multicultural Education Board Policy (GGAB.BP) and Administrative Regulation (GGBA. AR) for some time, the board policy is currently up for review, informed by an Advisory Committee with community members. This review has resulted in a significant shift in language, to focus on and acknowledge systemic racism, and to provide accountability for student success. The first reading took place at the January 26, 2021 Board Meeting. It is anticipated that the policy review work will be completed in the 2020-2021 school year.



# APPENDICES

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