

What is the best way to integrate newcomer students into schools and classrooms?

The following factors influence the educational experience of recently immigrated students:

- age of arrival in the country of residence
- proficiency in the language of instruction
- perceived differences between the school systems of the country of origin and host country
- circumstances surrounding the departure from the home country
- conditions affecting the family's settlement in the host community
- educational background (years of school, prior learning, etc.)

In light of these various factors, the following steps can help foster the integration of recently immigrated students into schools and classrooms.

1. Implement a welcoming protocol that:

- documents the student's path from country of origin to host country (e.g., pre-immigration experience, languages spoken, previous schooling, immigration status, family structure)
- prepares the class to receive the student
- helps the student adapt to the new school system

The welcoming protocol can include activities involving exploration of the school and community in general, peer-pairing and mentoring between former students and recently immigrated students. From the moment the student arrives in the school and in the medium term, it is also important to monitor interactions among peers and look out for the phenomena of isolation, exclusion and intimidation that can undermine the integration of newcomer students.

2. Conduct a detailed assessment of prior learning and provide linguistic support

It is very important to assess prior learning in order to provide students with effective support that meets their needs. However, schools must look critically at the diagnostic tools and assessment procedures used, as these can convey negative perceptions of certain students or contain a cultural bias that discriminates against them (e.g., if the student is unfamiliar with the cultural context referred to in an exercise).

Linguistic support is key to integrating students with an insufficient command of the language of instruction. To be effective, this support must:

- be ongoing and target the needs of students
- avoid delaying their progress in other subjects and their ability to integrate into a regular classroom
- not curtail opportunities to socialize with peers
- if needed, make use of the students' language/culture of origin to highlight their cultural identity and skills in their mother tongue

3. Help parents understand the school system

Schools and teachers must use any opportunities for formal and informal school-family communications to respond to parents' concerns. School communities can also refer parents to online resources that are sometimes available in several languages, or direct them to community organizations in their neighbourhood that act as intermediaries between school and families.

In short, to promote the integration of recently immigrated students, schools must support students and their parents in their new school environment, effectively assess the needs of the students welcomed to their community and support their learning of the language of instruction.

For online resources as well as the research references that inform this issue, please visit:

www.cea-ace.ca/facts-on-education

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