Newcomer Education in California

Sam Finn

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PACE
Policy Analysis for California Education

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Sam Finn, Californians Together, Oakland Unified School District

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

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Executive Summary

Newcomers—immigrants in their first years at U.S. schools—are a large and underserved group of students in California's K–12 system who generally require specialized academic instruction and social services to succeed in school. Despite great efforts, many districts report that they are struggling to create these conditions for success.

In the 2020–21 academic year, there were 151,996 newcomer students in California, more than the combined K–12 enrollment of 23 California counties. However, newcomers do not show up as a distinct subgroup in most state and local education data systems, and data for this report were only available because of a special request granted by the California Department of Education (CDE). This lack of data makes it difficult for newcomers to be seen by CDE, local educational agencies (LEAs), policymakers, researchers, and curriculum developers.

The funding environment for newcomers is suboptimal. A handful of state and federal programs provide grants to support newcomers in various ways, but the overall level of funding is low relative to the number of students. LEAs report that California Newcomer Education and Well-Being (CalNEW) grants are impactful and express a desire for funding to be expanded.

Newcomers can succeed in school with specialized curricula and instruction, administrative practices, school models, social-emotional learning, and community engagement. There is strong demand by LEAs for improved curricula, research, and development in the field as well as resource curation and general district-level guidance in implementation.

Many LEAs partner with local nonprofits, government agencies, and faith-based organizations to provide social services to newcomers in the form of legal representation, housing, food, health care, translation, and community navigation. These services are critical to the success of many socioeconomically disadvantaged newcomer students who cannot attend school if they are not able to meet their basic needs.

Although newcomers are in many ways poorly served by a lack of policy, curricula, data, and guidance, there are many opportunities to significantly improve the educational experience of this group. With substantial room for improvement statewide, the state and philanthropy can expect new investments to be relatively high in impact. California should build state leadership capacity specific to newcomer education, include newcomers in data systems, and invest in developing resources and knowledge to support the field.

Introduction

This report gives an overview of newcomer education in California and makes recommendations to support improved student outcomes. The report is informed by a special data request to the California Department of Education (CDE), interviews with staff from 12 California school districts, and a literature review. My perspective is further contextualized by my experience as an elementary school teacher in three cities, a consultant for the California Newcomer Education and Well-Being (CalNEW) program, and a researcher and advocate for Oakland Unified School District.

The Challenge and the Opportunity

The term *newcomers* is commonly used to describe students who have recently arrived in U.S. schools. Depending on usage, newcomers may mean students in their first 6 months in U.S. schools, in their first 4 years, or anywhere in between. A majority arrive speaking little to no English, most are from socioeconomically disadvantaged backgrounds, and a large but unknown proportion have experienced trauma. Unfortunately, reliable national data are not available on language proficiency or socioeconomic status.

Newcomers are typically thought of as a subgroup within the English learner population, but newcomers have a substantially different profile than the typical English learner envisioned in most policies, planning, and curricula. The average English learner can speak and understand English and is working to improve their academic language skills. The average newcomer has highly limited English skills that may prevent access to mainstream instruction and comes to school with additional social-emotional and material needs.

Newcomers share characteristics with other vulnerable student groups as well. Many newcomers arrived in the United States as unaccompanied minors, experiencing some of the same traumas and challenges of youth in foster care. Many newcomers require special education services, but they are underserved, as many educators hesitate to apply a diagnosis or services for English learners in their first years in the country. Unlike youth in foster care and special education students, newcomers lack a system of safeguards and supports to ensure meaningful access to free and appropriate public education.

Schools across California struggle to meet newcomers' distinct academic and extracurricular needs because of a lack of technical expertise, instructional resources, state systems, community connections, and/or dedicated funding. This results in high dropout rates, low graduation rates, and low college/career readiness. Newcomers arriving in high school are at particular risk, having just a few years to learn English, master academic content, and prepare for postsecondary life. Outcomes are poor in part because newcomers are missing from many important places: policy, systems, data, accountability, curricula, research, district plans, equity conversations, and the general education discourse.

A combination of pedagogical specialization, creative program structures, social integration, and wraparound services enables newcomer success. Exceptional teachers, schools, administrators, districts, nonprofits, nonprofit workers, and advocates exist across California, but scale and consistency are missing.

There are significant opportunities to improve education for California's newcomers through policy, systems change, data, curricula and program development, and models for collaboration with community-based organizations. Because of the lack of existing resources and infrastructure in the space, investment in newcomer education is likely to have an outsize impact on practice and outcomes.

Student Terminology

Newcomer is a broad term for students in their first months or years of U.S. schooling, but it has no singular definition. A variety of subgroup definitions are used for different purposes, including the following:

- **Title III Immigrant Students** are aged 3–21 years, were not born in a U.S. state, and have not attended U.S. schools for more than 3 years. Local educational agencies (LEAs) that receive Title III funding report their count of immigrant student totals to state educational agencies as part of the reporting requirements, and states in turn report these totals to the U.S. Department of Education. However, these data are not integrated into state or federal data systems accessible to LEAs, researchers, policymakers, or the public.
- **Students with interrupted formal education (SIFEs)** are behind grade level in academic content because of limited schooling in their country of origin. There is no common definition, but these students are most often considered to be at least 2 years behind grade level in reading and math in their home language, with many significantly further behind and/or preliterate in their home language. Although most of the focus is on SIFEs in high school, SIFEs who arrive in third grade or later are often unable to access mainstream curriculum.[1]
- **Refugees and asylees** have fled their country of origin because of persecution, war, or violence. Many receive supportive services from the federal government specifically dedicated to their education and their integration in the community, but some categories of people that we would think of as refugees do not qualify for assistance.

[1] Many within the field prefer to use SLIFE—students with limited or interrupted formal education—in place of SIFE, with the additional "limited" describing those students whose prior education may not have been interrupted but was of a different focus or quality than the education provided in the U.S. education system. The two terms, SIFE and SLIFE, are used interchangeably in practice. As the field develops and data definitions are standardized, one term will need to be chosen.

- **Undocumented students** have no lawful immigration status in the United States, but they do have a lawful right to education.
- **Unaccompanied undocumented minors** are unaccompanied children under 18 who are defined upon entry into the U.S., have no lawful immigration status in the U.S., and have no legal guardian in the U.S. or available to provide care.

Law

Three federal court rulings guarantee English learner and immigrant minors the right to a free and appropriately tailored public education:

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

Although all California districts appear to comply with the *Lau* and *Plyler* rulings, many districts may not satisfy the *Castañeda* legal standard for adequate English learner instruction for newcomers or other English learners. Put another way, many districts fail to properly staff or support effective programs for newcomers, and this likely puts them out of compliance with federal law.

However, lawsuits are not filed for several reasons. First, many newly arrived immigrant families do not want to call attention to themselves with legal entanglements and/or do not know where to access help. Second, districts are generally making efforts to serve their newcomers but simply lack the requisite resources, systems, knowledge, and expertise to support them properly. Finally, advocates must consider the possibility that a lawsuit to guarantee additional funding for immigrants could have negative political consequences.

Data

A general lack of data makes it challenging for newcomers to be seen by education leaders, policymakers, researchers, and curriculum developers. In California, newcomers are absent from publicly accessible state data and accountability systems. In practice, this absence as a distinct group makes it difficult for newcomers to be seen and understood by policymakers, state education agency (SEA) staff, LEA staff, academics, and publishers. This frequently leads to newcomers being understood as "English learners," which may leave their distinct instructional, social-emotional, and outside-of-school needs unaddressed.

This section summarizes the statistics that could be obtained for newcomers in the California K–12 setting, discusses research on SIFE, and showcases Oakland Unified District's data system as an example of promising LEA practice.

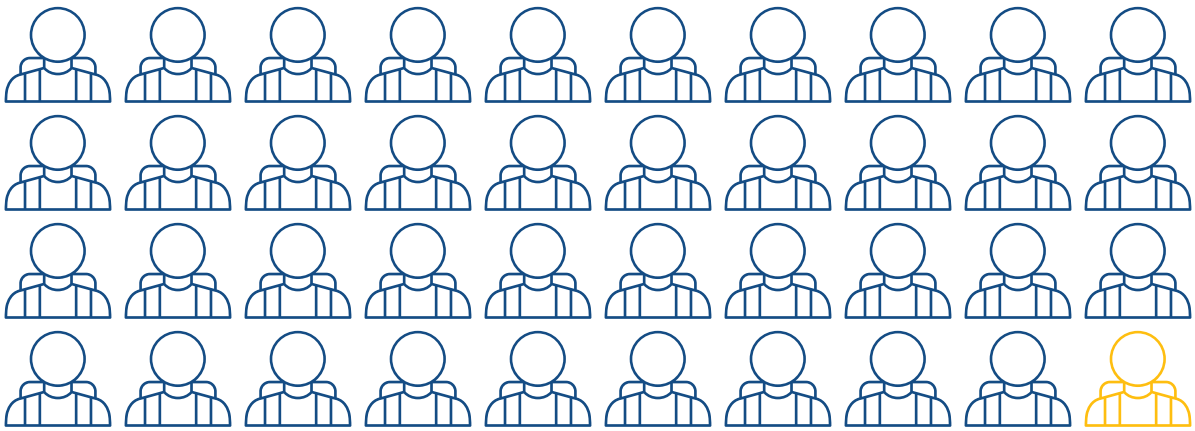
Title III Immigrant Students

Data on Title III Immigrant Students is the only district-level data available for newcomers in California. Title III Immigrant Student status is determined by date of birth, place of birth, and prior school enrollment, all collected by LEAs in home language surveys. This data collection does not include immigration status, which LEAs cannot legally ask about (*Plyler v. Doe*).

A special data request to CDE in 2022 allowed us to analyze 2020–21 Title III Immigrant Student data by district. These Tableau dashboards, created in collaboration with Ian Castro, shows district-level information on newcomers in heat maps, tree maps, and a sortable table.

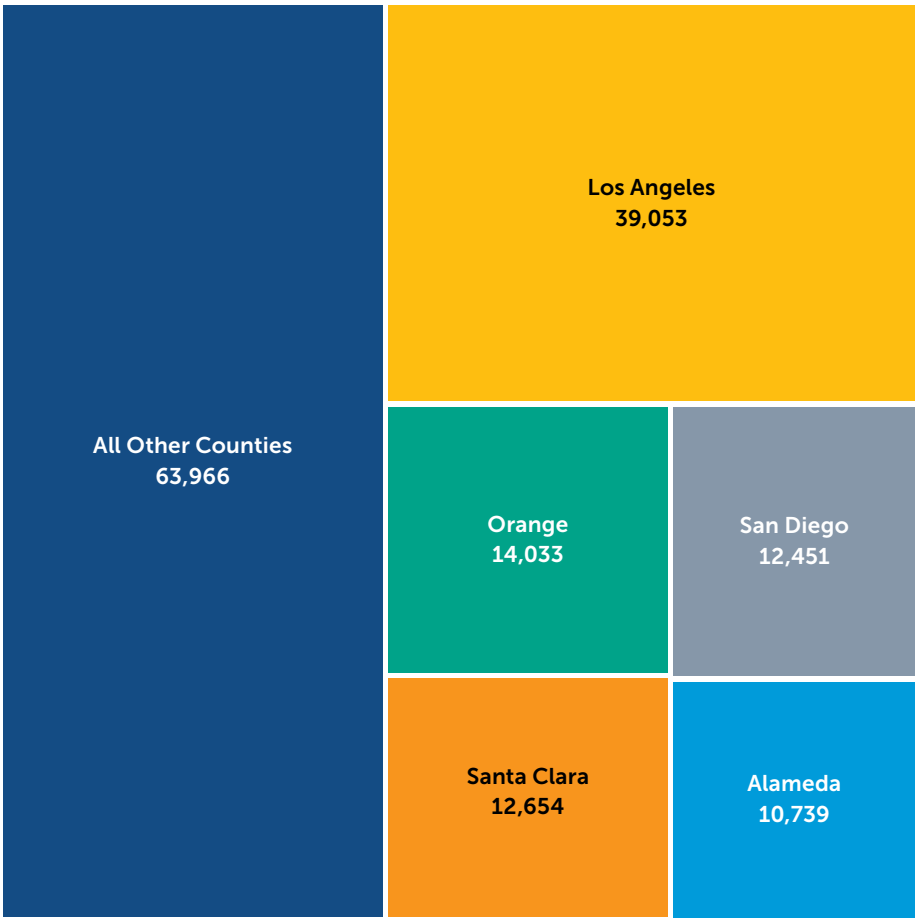
During the 2020–21 school year, there were 151,996 Title III Immigrant Students in California, amounting to 2.5 percent of the state's K–12 student body. One in 40 Californian students was a newcomer (Figure 1).

Figure 1. One in 40 California Students Is a Newcomer



Newcomers are enrolled in LEAs across the state, with the majority (58 percent) educated in five urban counties (Figure 2). These counties are grouped into two high-density clusters: Alameda and Santa Clara adjacent to the San Francisco Bay Area and Los Angeles, Orange, and San Diego in the south.

Figure 2. Top Five Counties by Newcomer Enrollment



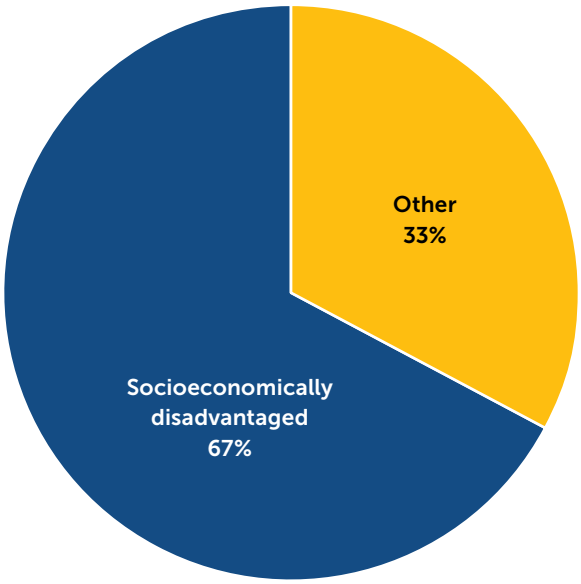
About half of LEAs in California enroll fewer than 21 newcomers. These districts educate less than 2 percent of the state newcomer population.

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

Newcomers are also socioeconomically heterogenous. Some immigrate with highly educated parents and find immediate material stability, while a much larger group of students faces additional challenges. The socioeconomic background of newcomers is often connected with the quality and duration of their prior formal schooling. In California, 67 percent of newcomers are socioeconomically disadvantaged (SED), which is defined in these data as

- neither parent having a high school diploma;
- eligible for the free or reduced-price meals program; and
- migrant youth, youth experiencing homelessness, or youth in foster care (Figure 3).

Figure 3. California Newcomer Student Socioeconomic Status



In examining the districts with the most newcomers in California, it is important to note the differences in the characteristics of the newcomers they educate. Some districts with large numbers of newcomers—Cupertino and Irvine, for example—have relatively few newcomers who are SED. Districts with many SED newcomers—such as Oakland or Twin Rivers—face additional challenges with providing wraparound services and tailored instruction.

Table 1 lists the LEAs with the most Title III Immigrant Students ranked by the total number in each district, with additional details for socioeconomic status and language.

Table 1. Top 25 California School Districts by Newcomer Enrollment

Local educational agency information			General enrollment			Socioeconomically disadvantaged (SED) newcomers		Language		
	County	District	Total enrollment	Newcomers	Percentage of total enrollment that are newcomers	SED newcomers	Percentage of newcomers that are SED	Percentage of newcomers with Spanish as home language	Top non-English/ non-Spanish newcomer home language	Percentage of top non-English/ non-Spanish newcomer home language
–	**All**	**All**	**6,002,393**	**151,996**	**3**	**101,540**	**67**	**43**	**Mandarin**	**6**
1	Los Angeles	Los Angeles Unified	574,996	20,599	4	17,798	86	68	Filipino	3
2	Orange	Irvine Unified	35,660	4,365	12	953	22	3	Mandarin	27
3	San Diego	San Diego Unified	118,523	3,921	3	2,461	63	30	Filipino	8
4	Alameda	Oakland Unified	48,704	3,534	7	2,973	84	53	Other	25
5	Sacramento	San Juan Unified	50,762	2,982	6	2,630	88	8	Other	40
6	Alameda	Fremont Unified	35,187	2,195	6	397	18	7	Telugu	14
7	Santa Clara	Cupertino Union	15,663	1,979	13	74	4	1	Mandarin	12
8	Contra Costa	West Contra Costa Unified	31,027	1,755	6	1,478	84	63	Portuguese	11
9	Orange	Garden Grove Unified	40,124	1,669	4	1,382	83	17	Vietnamese	71
10	Sacramento	Elk Grove Unified	63,947	1,594	2	1,216	76	10	Vietnamese	17
11	Contra Costa	Mt. Diablo Unified	29,908	1,580	5	977	62	36	Other	12
12	San Francisco	San Francisco Unified	58,705	1,580	3	1,067	68	56	Cantonese	17

Table 1, continued. Top 25 California School Districts by Newcomer Enrollment

Local educational agency information			General enrollment			Socioeconomically disadvantaged (SED) newcomers		Language		
	County	District	Total enrollment	Newcomers	Percentage of total enrollment that are newcomers	SED newcomers	Percentage of newcomers that are SED	Percentage of newcomers with Spanish as home language	Top non-English/ non-Spanish newcomer home language	Percentage of top non-English/ non-Spanish newcomer home language
13	Sacramento	Twin Rivers Unified	32,284	1,535	5	1,454	95	21	Russian	20
14	Los Angeles	Glendale Unified	24,924	1,396	6	1,104	79	5	Armenian	71
15	Los Angeles	Torrance Unified	22,490	1,352	6	382	28	7	Japanese	17
16	Santa Clara	Santa Clara Unified	14,808	1,344	9	394	29	16	Hindi	8
17	San Diego	Poway Unified	35,663	1,195	3	306	26	8	Mandarin	11
18	San Mateo	San Mateo-Foster City	10,969	1,075	10	432	40	40	Japanese	10
19	Alameda	Hayward Unified	21,638	1,065	5	785	74	64	Filipino	9
20	Sacramento	Sacramento City Unified	45,078	1,033	2	927	90	26	Other	12
21	Orange	Capistrano Unified	50,419	1,032	2	419	41	27	Mandarin	10
22	San Diego	Cajon Valley Union	16,732	1,004	6	896	89	20	Arabic	24
23	Santa Clara	San Jose Unified	28,710	981	3	422	43	41	Korean	8
24	Los Angeles	Alhambra Unified	15,747	971	6	699	72	9	Mandarin	49
25	Santa Clara	East Side Union High	25,946	954	4	695	73	36	Vietnamese	43

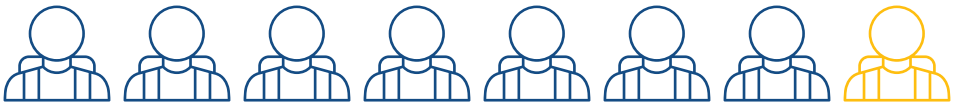
There is significant language diversity among California's newcomer students (Table 2). In contrast to California's larger English learner population, which is roughly 80 percent Spanish speaking (California Department of Education, 2021), less than half of all newcomer students have Spanish as a home language. All other things being equal, Spanish-speaking newcomers have a structural advantage in acquiring English in an academic setting because Spanish has many cognates with English and Spanish-speaking newcomers are more likely to encounter bilingual staff and peers who speak their home language.

Table 2. Home Language Diversity

Home language	Number of newcomers	Percentage of total number of newcomers
Spanish	65,316	43
English	13,920	9
Mandarin	8,365	6
Vietnamese	5,706	4
Filipino	4,778	3
Arabic	3,853	3
Korean	2,853	2
Russian	2,823	2
Farsi	2,746	2
Armenian	1,898	1
Pashto	1,822	1
Cantonese	1,756	1
Japanese	1,677	1
Hindi	1,628	1
Punjabi	1,485	1
Other	14,828	10
Missing or unclear	16,562	11

Although the Title III Immigrant Students data are not technically connected to English learner status, it can be inferred from home language information that roughly nine in ten newcomers are classified as English learners. We can further conclude that English learner newcomers make up about 13 percent (or one in eight) of English learners in California (Figure 4).

Figure 4. Newcomers Within English Learner Group



English learner newcomers tend to have dramatically lower English-language proficiency levels than the "typical" English learner. The median newcomer has a limited understanding of English and struggles to access mainstream instruction and curriculum. The typical English learner speaks and understands English functionally but lacks some academic language skills and cannot pass all elements of a state language exam. Because of these differences between the two groups, English learner accountability standards and curricula do not fit most newcomers well.

Moving away from language, the data show that just 19 percent of all newcomers were in high school, a percentage well below the 33 percent that would be expected from an equal distribution by grade, especially given that the literature base for newcomers most often focuses on high school students. (The data received from the state for this analysis did not contain grade levels but rather a binary field for "in high school" or "not in high school.")

Title III Immigrant Students more commonly enroll in traditional school districts than in charter schools, with newcomers making up 1.5 percent (10,403) of all charter-school enrollment compared to 2.7 percent (141,566) of all district enrollment. Newly arrived immigrant families are naturally more likely to take the default option of the public district rather than navigate another system of school choice. Some administrators also report that their public districts hold and fund "seats" for newcomers that they anticipate arriving throughout the year while the charters in their jurisdiction do not.

Students With Interrupted Formal Education

SIFE data are exceptionally important for student placement and instruction because these students' educational needs are likely to be some of the greatest in the district. SIFE are unlikely to succeed in mainstream coursework initially without substantial scaffolding and support. In most cases, SIFE are best served by some form of differentiated support classes or programs.

There are no statewide data on SIFE in California. At least six states collect SIFE identification data in their data systems: Massachusetts, Minnesota, Oregon, New York, Rhode Island, and Virginia (Sugarman, 2022). A literature review by the Center for Applied Linguistics (2022) summarizes research reports showing a range of prevalence of SIFE in the K–12 population, with estimates ranging from 4 to 20 percent of all English learners in various contexts. In California, that could mean that there are between 40,000 and 225,00 SIFE statewide, with some proportion of those students being newcomers.

Local Data System Example: Oakland Unified

LEAs may implement their own data definitions and systems to track and provide appropriate services to their students. Oakland Unified developed and implemented a data system that provides some nuance while still being relatively simple.

All newcomers have a "newcomer" tag to designate them as part of the newcomer population. The newcomer designation is further differentiated by year of arrival, which shows up in the data system as N0, N1, N2, N3, and N4 (N0 is for students who arrive between January and May, N1 is first full year, etc.). The student information also has a binary field to indicate SIFE status.

Funding

Newcomers have unique needs that require additional resources to meet. In many cases, the tension between student need and district capacity is worsened by the fact that districts frequently fill in as a "government of last resort" that supports immigrant students and families where local, state, and federal systems have proven challenging to access. Districts have been able to make improvements with the sources of supplemental funding available to them, but many practitioners report that they still do not have sufficient resources to educate their students adequately.

State

General Context. Compared with the average state, California is relatively underinvested in education. In a report from the Education Law Center (Farrie & Sciarra, 2022), California was ranked 33rd among states in per-pupil expenditure adjusted for differential state costs. The report gives California a low D grade for "funding level," meaning that relative to other states, California funds its schools at a level just above what would be considered failing. California ranked 43rd and received an F grade for "funding effort," meaning that the state dedicates too small a proportion of its resources to public education.

California's below-average funding directly results in conditions such as significantly higher teacher-to-student ratios than the norm. In 2021, California had the highest teacher-to-student ratio in the nation (National Education Association, 2022).

Table 3 compares newcomer education in three especially significant states: California, New York, and Texas (National Education Association, 2022). California and Texas tend to have the largest number of immigrant students, and New York has been the historic leader in developing newcomer policy and practice. New York, often grouped with California as a coastal elite state, has half the number of students per teacher, while Texas, a state not known for its investment in public education, has six fewer students per teacher.

Table 3. Teacher–Student Ratios in California, Texas, and New York

	Number of teachers	Number of students	Teacher-to-student ratio
California	269,850	5,978,111	22:1
Texas	369,478	5,427,370	15:1
New York	213,537	2,407,124	11:1

Fiscal challenges also have an impact on California's capacity for state-level instructional leadership and support. A PACE report found that "conditions in the CDE constrain the agency's ability to support frontline practice" (Moffitt et al., 2018). The constraining conditions are summarized as follows:

- **Limited CDE in-house subject-matter expertise:** Reductions in CDE staff have occurred disproportionately in portions of the agency devoted to instructional support.
- **Greater staff reductions in California than in other states:** State-level staff reductions over time have been significantly higher in California than in other states.
- **Lower average salaries for state-level positions:** One challenge to attracting and retaining subject matter experts arises from lower average salaries in CDE than in high-enrollment county and district offices.

Local Control Funding Formula (LCFF). The low level of general education funding in California is somewhat ameliorated by a progressive distribution model. California distributes per-pupil funding to school districts based on the LCFF (California Department of Education, 2023a). Under the LCFF, districts serving larger numbers of high-needs students with identified cost factors—English learners, low-income students, or youth in foster care—receive additional funding. Each cost factor is only counted once, though; a low-income English learner is not double counted.

There are three components to the LCFF funding formula:

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

Because newcomers are likely to be both SED and English learners, most qualify as high-needs students for the purposes of supplemental and concentration grants. However, this funding is unduplicated: They do not receive additional funding for being both English learners and SED.

CalNEW Program. The Office of Immigrant Youth in the California Department of Social Services (CDSS) administers and oversees the state-funded CalNEW program, which is funded with an ongoing annual appropriation of $5 million. The goal of CalNEW is to provide support services to SED newcomer students and their families using school sites as the services hub. School districts implementing the CalNEW program hire culturally and linguistically responsive community liaisons to connect students and families with resources and services that address critical basic needs, such as food, housing, and health care. These resources and services support family stability and well-being while integrating families into the school community and equipping them with the information and capacity they need to partner with school staff in supporting their children's education. CalNEW partners also support the academic, linguistic, and social-emotional growth of students, and they build pathways to postsecondary success by providing individual and group academic enrichment and intervention programs, civic engagement activities, and college and career counseling and preparation programs for newcomer students.

The CalNEW program plans to launch a community of practice in 2023 to build relationships and share knowledge across LEAs, organizations, sectors, roles, and geographic regions. There are 20 school districts and one County Office of Education (COE) in the CalNEW network.

Opportunities for Youth (OFY) Pilot. Administered by the CDSS Office of Immigrant Youth, the OFY project is a state-funded initiative to meet the specialized needs of California's unaccompanied undocumented minors through culturally and linguistically responsive, trauma-informed, postrelease supportive services. The program was funded for a total of $9.7 million with two one-time appropriations from the state's general fund (rather than from education dollars). Services include case management, systems navigation, mentorship, and wellness supports to youth as well as support services to their caregivers. These specialized services are intended to foster healthy and responsive relationships for youth and caregivers; strengthen youth's core life skills while providing social connections, knowledge of adolescent development, and concrete support in times of need; and alleviate stressors. Despite initial and ongoing challenges as well as the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic, providers have been successful with implementing this initiative. Between October 2020 and March 2022, 665 youth and 532 households were served (California Department of Social Services, personal communication, January 6, 2023).

Federal

Federal funding represents roughly 10 percent of all funds received by LEAs in California and is intended to supplement existing core instruction. Block grants are administered by CDE to LEAs via a per-pupil formula.

Title III: Language Instruction for English Learners and Immigrant Students. Title III of the Every Student Succeeds Act (2015) allocates funds to state education agencies, such as CDE, to provide subgrants to eligible LEAs based on the number of English learner students and recent immigrants enrolled (California Department of Education, 2022). Funds are to be used to

- increase the English-language proficiency of English learners by providing effective language instruction educational programs;
- provide effective professional development to classroom teachers, principals and other school leaders, administrators, and other school or community-based organizational personnel; and
- provide activities and strategies that enhance educational programs for English learners which include parent, family, and community engagement.

During the 2022–23 academic year, California's total Title III apportionment was $142,673,439 (California Department of Education, 2023b).

Title III Immigrant Student Program According to Title III, state education agencies must make a "required reservation" of up to 15 percent of their total Title III allocation "to award subgrants to eligible entities in the State that have experienced a significant increase, as compared to the average of the 2 preceding fiscal years, in the percentage or number of immigrant children and youth [enrolled]." In California, the CDE has set the growth threshold at one half of 1 percent (0.5 percent) or greater growth in the enrollment of immigrant students in 2021 as compared to the average for the previous 2 years of enrollment (California Department of Education, 2022).

The rationale for the growth requirement (which is written into the Every Student Succeeds Act) is that funding can have the best impact when it goes to districts with growing numbers of immigrant students. In practice, immigrant students are consistently showing up to districts in large numbers and with high needs, but the natural ebbs and flows of immigration make the grant program unpredictable, unreliable, and inequitable in its distribution mechanism.

The CDE allocated 3.9 percent of its $142,673,439 Title III allocation to the Title III Immigrant Student Program, for a total of $5,558,705. Each district that met the growth requirement over the previous 2 years received $150.85 per eligible student. Because of declines in many districts' newcomer enrollment compared with the previous 2 years, districts representing just 34,041 of the 151,996 Title III Immigrant Students in California received funding. This means that 77.6 percent of newcomer students in California were not supported by the grant.

A relatively small proportion of high-needs districts received funding to support their qualified immigrant students, and what funding went out did not necessarily arrive in areas of serious need. For example, Cupertino Union, an affluent district with just 4 percent of their newcomers categorized as SED, received $355,252, while Oakland Unified, a financially struggling district with the second highest number of SED newcomers in the state, received nothing.

The recent decline in numbers is thought to be caused by a combination of the COVID-19 pandemic and Title 42 border policy. It is likely to reverse in the future.

Refugee School Impact (RSI) program, including supplements for Afghan and Ukrainian students. The CDSS administers federally funded programs to support refugee youth and families. The RSI program is designed to assist local school systems affected by significant numbers of newly arrived refugee children and support the academic needs and performance of refugee youth as well as the integration of these youth and their families. These services include activities focused on support for basic needs, family engagement and empowerment, and youth engagement and development. For fiscal year 2022, California was allocated $2.3 million to support 5,643 refugee students (Office of Refugee Resettlement, 2022).

In response to the displacement of families from Afghanistan and Ukraine, the federal Office of Refugee Resettlement (ORR) allocated supplemental funds from the Afghanistan Supplemental Appropriations Act (2022) and the Ukraine Supplemental Appropriations Act (2023). The Afghan Refugee School Impact (ARSI) and the Ukrainian Refugee School Impact (URSI) programs are implemented in affected regions in California to provide a range of direct services and supports to newly arrived youth and families from these two countries. ARSI and URSI service providers work to connect youth and families with academic and social supports needed to integrate into their communities. In fiscal year 2022, California was allocated $9,003,220 for the ARSI program, which supported 4,215 school-age children (Office of Refugee Resettlement, 2022). Numbers for the URSI program are more challenging to ascertain from the Office of Refugee Resettlement website.

It is worth noting that many immigrants and newcomers who may colloquially be considered "refugees" by the general public are not in fact supported by official refugee programs. Practitioners report that this is often the case for students who have fled persecution and/or dangerous conditions in Central America, often arriving with interrupted formal education and significant trauma.

Schooling

A large but unknown number of the state's newcomers lack access to appropriate educational services. The majority of districts with newcomers seek support in obtaining more effective instructional materials, program models, and guidance.

Specialized resources and programming are necessary for newcomer success: curricula, administrative practices, school models, social-emotional learning, and community engagement. Unfortunately, the field currently lacks the tools, infrastructure, and capacity to scale high-quality newcomer education effectively. There is strong demand for the development of instructional resources, curation of instructional resources and guidance, academic research, professional development, and district implementation support.

This section summarizes the services and strategies linked with newcomer academic success, drawing on both the existing literature and interviews with educators and administrators. For deeper reading, see *Humanizing Education for Immigrant and Refugee Youth* (Bajaj et al., 2022); *Beyond Teaching English: Supporting High School Completion by Immigrant and Refugee Students* (Sugarman, 2017); *The Newcomer Tool Kit* (U.S. Department of Education, 2016); *Schools to Learn From: How Six High Schools Graduate English Learners College and Career Ready* (Castellón et al., 2015); and *Helping Newcomers Succeed in Secondary Schools and Beyond* (Short & Boyson, 2012).

Program Structure

Specialized, newcomer-specific instruction is necessary for most newcomers, at least during their first year, and is particularly important at the secondary level. At schools with enough newcomer students, specialized classes are ideal, and where that is not possible, newcomers should be grouped in the same mainstream classes so that they can be efficiently supported. In mainstream settings, teachers must provide additional scaffolds, supports, and small-group instruction to make the material accessible. Depending on their academic profile and the capabilities of the school, newcomers may transition to mainstream instruction after a single intensive year, they may spend their entire high school experience in an environment specifically tailored to their needs, or their experience may be anywhere in between.

Newcomer high schools have proven highly effective in areas with a large enough critical mass of students. These may be 4-year comprehensive programs or 1- to 2-year programs focused on preparing students to transfer to a traditional high school. Where the population is smaller, unified programs within a comprehensive high school can offer similar benefits, with programs ranging from 1 to 4 years.

Modified school schedules have been used to overcome the challenge of school–work conflicts for high school students who must support themselves. For example, a district offering classes ending by 1 p.m. can enable students to stay in school while still working an 8-hour shift in the evening.

Extended learning time is important for SIFE who arrive in high school with limited literacy and academic skills. Many students will need additional years to graduate high school college and career ready, and they should be supported in doing so. Some older SIFE may benefit from being placed in ninth grade to receive additional time, even if their age would typically place them in a higher grade. Extra learning time may also take the form of Saturday school, summer school, or evening classes.

Instructional Approach

Integrate language and content instruction whenever possible. While most newcomers will require at least one class focused on language acquisition, most instruction should happen through integrated grade-level academic content in math, science, and social studies. Language cannot be learned in isolation: Students grow by applying new skills in the classroom and acquiring content-specific vocabulary. Programs that have taken the approach of exclusively teaching language before content have proven unsuccessful. In addition to the pedagogical necessity of learning language through content, newcomers simply do not have time to waste on classes in which they are not mastering grade-level content. To graduate high school college and/or career ready, students must begin accumulating academic credits in a timely manner.

Translanguaging, the practice of using one's home language in class to support English-language acquisition and content learning, should be encouraged. Home language can be used in school settings to collaborate with other students, acquire and demonstrate content knowledge, and access language through translation tools.

Collaboration is a common feature of effective learning environments for newcomers. Because practice with authentic communication is critical to language development, collaboration should take place between students every day in the classroom. Collaboration between teachers is also necessary to integrate language instruction, routines, and vocabulary across content areas.

Oral language development should be emphasized and protected, as oracy and literacy are developed together for newcomers. This is misunderstood by some outside of the English learner field, since many English-only students have sufficient vocabulary and oral language fluency to engage in literacy acquisition without explicit instruction in oral language development.

Curricula

Insufficient curricula are available to meet the academic needs of newcomers at all grade levels. Few curricula directly address SIFE or students with limited English proficiency, and educators are not satisfied with their options. At a planning meeting in December 2022 for a California Newcomer Education Community of Practice, attendees indicated more interest in working on curriculum development and sharing together than in any other topic.

The mainstream curriculum is entirely inaccessible to many newcomers, and many are also ill-served by districts' official English learner curricula because they often do not provide adequate materials or plans for students with limited English proficiency and/or prior schooling. Newcomers can be stranded in the liminal space between "survival English"—the basics for communication, finding the bathroom, and so on—and the much more developed levels of English spoken by students who either were born in this country or have been here for many years.

High-quality curricular materials for newcomers will emphasize dynamic and collaborative tasks, both social and academic language, and integration with age-appropriate and grade-level content. Oracy and literacy instruction should be explicit and reinforce one another. Translanguaging and mutual help among students should be encouraged and leveraged.

Educator Support

Teachers need training to educate newcomers effectively, just as with any special population or content area. This can be a challenge in some areas where available expertise or training is limited. Training is especially important for secondary school teachers who lack training in foundational reading and arithmetic instruction, but it is also critical for elementary school teachers, who often lack newcomer-specific resources to teach non-English-speaking students in their mainstream classrooms.

Additional planning time is necessary for teachers of newcomers to adapt grade-level content, develop scaffolds, and produce accessible materials. It is time-consuming labor. Content teachers need time to plan with other teachers so that they can reinforce language objectives across subjects. Designated English language development teachers need this time to coordinate with content teachers as well. And elementary school teachers in mainstream settings must essentially create two sets of lesson plans every day: one lesson and set of materials for their English-proficient students on grade level and another very different lesson and set of materials for newcomer students. For example, a third-grade teacher delivering a math lesson on two-step word problems in all four operations cannot adapt the same content for their newcomers who speak no English and have limited math knowledge.

Social-Emotional Learning

Welcoming school environments are important for creating the conditions of psychological safety that are necessary for academic learning. Moving countries is inherently stressful. Students are dislocated from their home communities and thrust into strange new environments, often without strong social networks. In the academic context, it is well established that students who feel alienated and uncomfortable in school struggle to develop the confidence necessary for academic success (Sugarman, 2017). It is imperative that schools make every effort to welcome and affirm newcomers as valued members of their communities. Newcomers' backgrounds, home languages, and customs should be actively celebrated by staff and other students. Organizations and programs like Support for Immigrant and Refugee Students at Californians Together and Reimagining Migration can support this work.

Cultural norms are often very different in U.S. schools than they were in newcomers' previous homes, and many newcomers will benefit from orientations to U.S. social and schooling norms (Bridging Refugee Youth and Children's Services, 2018). School norms include protocols for raising hands, talking in class, lining up, and being on time. Social norms include expectations around greetings, eye contact, personal space, interaction with the opposite sex, and general socializing.

Social programs and activities that promote collaboration, leadership, and agency have proven effective at building student confidence, attendance, relationships, social skills, and language. For example, soccer programming has been central to the development of the Fugees Family schools (fugeesfamily.org) and the Soccer Without Borders programs (soccerwithoutborders.org) that operate in multiple states. Newcomer leadership councils, in which students work with staff to discuss and act on challenges they see at school, have also proven popular.

Administrative Practices

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

Planning for new student placement is important for all students but especially newcomers, because they arrive throughout the school year and require specialized programming.

Transcript articulation ensures that newcomers get credit for prior schooling in their country of origin. Reference materials and processes should be put in place to ensure this happens properly.

Assessment

Educators report that standardized assessments do not appear to capture sufficient nuance for newcomers at the early levels of English-language acquisition and so are not of great use for those students. There are no accountability measures tailored to newcomer growth and performance in particular, and if there ever is to be, more research will be needed to determine the expected growth trajectory, scope, and sequence of language acquisition in the K–12 system, depending on various student characteristics. Given the heterogeneity of schooling contexts and newcomer experiences, this is a complex puzzle to piece together.

The most recent research indicates that, on average, newcomers have low initial levels of English proficiency but can improve quickly in the right context (Umansky et al., 2022). There is wide variation in English level and growth patterns among newcomers, and evidence suggests that tailored school practices play a significant role in fostering academic and linguistic growth.

Assessing growth via accountability measures designed for the average English learner distort the perceived performance of districts serving large populations of newcomers. For example, consider a refugee who arrives at a district in high school with no English and little prior schooling but still graduates in 5 years. That would be a great success. However, it does not look successful in the macro accountability data; instead, it appears as though the district is failing its English learners because they graduate "late" and potentially without completing the A–G course requirements for undergraduate eligibility in the California State University and University of California systems.

Internationals Network for Public Schools

Internationals Network for Public Schools (internationalsnetwork.org) has been recognized nationally and internationally for its innovative and impactful approach to serving newcomer students. Internationals is a national nonprofit organization that partners with communities and school districts to open welcoming, high-quality public secondary schools and programs that support newly arrived students. Internationals' students are proficient in other languages and are learning English as they adjust to their lives in their new country. Internationals supports 31 schools and programs in 11 districts in six states, including four California districts. These schools and programs serve more than 9,000 newcomers each year.

The Internationals approach builds on the significant assets, knowledge, and cultural and linguistic skills that newcomer students bring. The approach relies on the program's more than 35 years of school-based expertise as well as evidence-based research on the most impactful educational practices for schools serving newcomers. Building on immigrants' diverse experiences, the Internationals supports school communities with developing project-based, experiential opportunities that promote learners' use of language in challenging credit-bearing classes. Students work together as newcomers grow their academic, linguistic, cultural, and social-emotional knowledge and skills and as educators increase their professional expertise.

Internationals supported the founding of Oakland International High School (2007) and San Francisco International High School (2009). It has opened semiautonomous "academies" in West Contra Costa Unified (Richmond High School, 2018, and Helms Middle School, 2019) and Los Angeles Unified (Belmont High School, 2021; Van Nuys High School, 2022; and Helen Bernstein High School, 2022).

Social Services

Outside-of-school services and partnerships are vital to newcomer well-being and academic success. Newcomers are unable to attend school consistently if their basic needs are unmet, so many districts seek partnership in providing essential social services to their students. Nonprofits, local government agencies, and faith-based organizations can partner with school districts to provide newcomers with legal services, housing, food, health care, and so on. The CalNEW program currently supports 21 LEAs with grants to maintain such partnerships (California Department of Social Services, 2023).

This section provides a broad overview of the social services strategies linked with improved newcomer outcomes, drawing on the same sources named in the Schooling section.

Family and Community Engagement

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

Nonprofit and Government Collaboration

With needs assessed and parents connected, students and their families can be supported by community-based organizations. Although students' stability outside of school is a precondition for academic success, it is beyond the role and capacity of school districts to address all of the needs of newcomer students. Government and nonprofit groups are essential partners in this work. County governments are critical for providing information and access to public supports that newcomers and their families may be eligible for, such as Medi-Cal. Community-based organizations are often well situated to assist districts with family engagement, translation services, and afterschool social and academic supports as well as to connect students and families with the other services described in this section.

Legal Services

Studies have found that there are roughly 700,000 undocumented children in the United States under the age of 18 (Kirksey et al., 2020) and 5 million children with at least one undocumented parent (Passel & Cohn, 2018). For many of these children and families, the threat of deportation can trump all else and affect school performance, increasing absenteeism and the likelihood of dropping out of school (Kirksey & Sattin-Bajaj, 2021). Many districts seek to connect their newcomer families with legal services, since advocates are often necessary for newcomers to make their case for legal status and/or asylum.

There are significant and nuanced differences in the need for legal services in different districts serving newcomers. A few lesser-known groups with distinct legal needs include students who may be undocumented and have no open immigration case (i.e., they were not apprehended when they entered the United States), unaccompanied minors (in removal proceedings and needing to find legal help on their own), and children of migrant families (where at least one parent is involved but still in removal proceedings). Whereas some districts with Title III Immigrant

Students have no need for such services, others have large concentrations of newcomers who require expert legal representation. In Oakland, for example, it is estimated that between 35 and 50 percent of all newcomer students are asylum seekers who must still win a court battle to remain in the country (Oakland Unified, personal correspondence, January 27, 2023).

Material Needs

Many newcomers and their families require assistance with accessing housing, food, and health care. Like all low-income students, low-income newcomers are likely to struggle in school when these material needs are unmet. In addition to collaborating with nonprofit organizations and government entities to provide these essentials, districts may consider partnering with faith-based organizations to support their students, as Hayward Unified has done in connecting faith-based organizations to their students to provide food.

Mental Health

Some newcomers have undergone serious trauma, and nearly all experience significant acculturation shocks. Counselors can provide support through both individual and group sessions, either in school or in an outside community setting. Although the proportion of newcomers requiring these services is likely small, many practitioners report that focused mental health services for those who have experienced trauma can mean the difference between a student's success and dropping out of school. Mental health and social-emotional support could be considered as a continuum of need for the broader population, with those in need of counseling at one end of that spectrum.

Recommendations

Effective instruction, services to meet basic needs, and transparent data for newcomers can only be developed through a collaborative multisector effort. Change must come through a combination of policy, state agency assistance, nonprofit and foundation partnerships, and expert practitioners being supported in creating replicable models for implementation.

Funding Sources

Funding should similarly be leveraged from a variety of sources.

Federal Every Student Succeeds Act funding provides multiple opportunities. Title I (Improving Basic Programs Operated by Local Educational Agencies) can be leveraged because many newcomers cannot access the basic programs operated by their LEAs.

Title II (Supporting Effective Instruction) can be leveraged because there is a lack of expertise and high-quality curricula for newcomers. Title III (English Language Acquisition, Language Enhancement, and Academic Achievement) can be leveraged in that there is relatively little strategic policy or action in place to support achievement for students who approach English as a new language.

Most of the funding in education comes from the state, and even a modest appropriation to support field development could have an outsize impact. California has increasingly used block grants to support areas of education that have been overlooked or underinvested in, with dyslexia research and development of community schools as two recent examples. Newcomer education could follow a similar path.

Philanthropic partners have played a critical role in supporting the work of research, development, and convening that government has traditionally shied away from. This report and the research that went into it, for example, would not exist without support from the Sobrato Foundation.

State Action

Recommendations for state action include the following:

1 Build state leadership capacity.

Staff or contract a position to support development of newcomer education in California. A dedicated staff member or contracted expert is necessary to implement significant changes at the state level. Without one, statutory changes and state initiatives may fail in implementation. While it is not the norm to specify the roles of specific staff at CDE, it is important in this case because of the current lack of leadership in the landscape.

Institutionalize collaboration between CDE and CDSS. Both CDE and CDSS have vested interests and obligations regarding newcomers but do not currently share data or collaborate in a structured fashion. Regular meetings, strategic planning, and coordination of services will improve the ability of practitioners to access guidance and information for supporting newcomer students in a streamlined fashion.

Collaborate with national partners in developing the field of newcomer education. Many states, districts, and nonprofit organizations outside of California are discussing collaboration to standardize data definitions, spread best practices, and develop and share instructional resources. For a relatively small outlay of CDE time and resources, California can help funnel the collective knowledge and tools of the field to LEAs and COEs to support their students.

2 Improve existing systems.

Include newcomers and SIFE as distinct student groups in state data systems. The newcomer data presented in this report were not publicly or easily available, and this absence of data is partially responsible for newcomers' absence in policy, educational resources, LEA planning, and the education discourse. There are no data on SIFE in California. Data for newcomers can easily be brought into state systems using the Title III Immigrant Students data referenced in this report. For SIFE, a new definition is necessary for adoption.

Codify and continue the Opportunities for Youth initiative. The OFY initiative is the only state-sponsored program building sustainable community capacity to support a student population that combines the characteristics of youth in foster care, English learners, and asylees. CDSS staff, service providers, and participating LEAs report that OFY support has made a substantial impact on the ability of students and families to integrate and begin a path toward stability and self-sufficiency. Continuing the program in some form will support the continued success of highly vulnerable students.

Adjust the funding formula for "late-arriving" newcomers who enroll after census day. Under our current policy framework, LEAs that enroll large numbers of newly arrived newcomer students after census day can only recoup partial per-pupil funding and cannot access supplemental or concentration funds during the students' first year of enrollment. This is counter to the spirit of LCFF and leads to the underresourcing of schools and LEAs serving students in great need of these supportive resources. The legislature should change the LCFF so that the unduplicated pupil percentage is recalculated at P-2 (the second, later fiscal apportionment date) rather than at census day.

Ask the Instructional Quality Commission to address newcomers in instructional frameworks. A core problem for newcomers is the lack of high-quality instructional materials that address their distinct academic and English language development needs. This can be remedied with a strong state signal to publishers and districts of the necessity of including newcomers in curricular offerings. The Instructional Quality Commission should consider including content designed to provide teachers with resources to meet the needs of newcomer pupils at all grade levels at the next regularly scheduled revision of the curriculum framework in English language arts and English language development.

3 Support the development of the field.

Invest in open curriculum and instructional resources. The most consistent LEA ask besides additional general funding is for accessible curricula and texts. Unfortunately, the market has failed to produce adequate materials for newcomers. An investment in the development of common instructional materials offers a high return on investment for the state in terms of funding

and time saved by LEAs that no longer must buy inadequate curricula or dedicate practitioner time to developing their own.

Support and promote critical research areas. The research base for language acquisition, pedagogy, program design, community supports, postsecondary pathways, and outcomes for newcomers needs development to support improvements in practice. Encouraging and/or directly supporting public and private research partners to contribute to this understudied area offers the promise of significant advancement.

Advocate as a state for federal action. California educates the most newcomer students in the nation by a significant margin and should be vocal about the field's need for support. Legislators and government staff should approach this in two ways. First, they can call upon the U.S. Department of Education to help develop the field through targeted grant competitions, systematic curation of relevant knowledge, and facilitation of interstate dialogue and collaboration. Second, when there is an opportunity to revise federal legislation, California should advocate to include newcomers in federal data systems and remove the district growth requirement in the Title III Immigrant Student program.

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Author Biography

Sam Finn is director of newcomer policy and practice at Californians Together. He advises state agencies and local educational agencies in newcomer program strategy, and organizes working groups, projects, and events for the field of newcomer education. He has experience teaching elementary school in Washington, DC, Berkeley, and Oakland. He holds a bachelor's in history from Carleton College, a master of education from Lesley University, and a master of public policy from the University of California, Berkeley.

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Stanford Graduate School of Education
520 Galvez Mall, Suite 444
Stanford, CA 94305

Inquiry: info@edpolicyinca.org
Media: press@edpolicyinca.org

Office: 650.576.8484

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