



Canada is increasingly becoming home to more newcomer families each year. For newcomer youth, integrating into a new school system can be challenging and isolating. Schools can be places of support for these students but school staff may experience challenges meeting their complex and diverse needs.

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THE UNIVERSITY  
OF BRITISH COLUMBIA

# Supporting Newcomer Students at School

Tips for Administrators

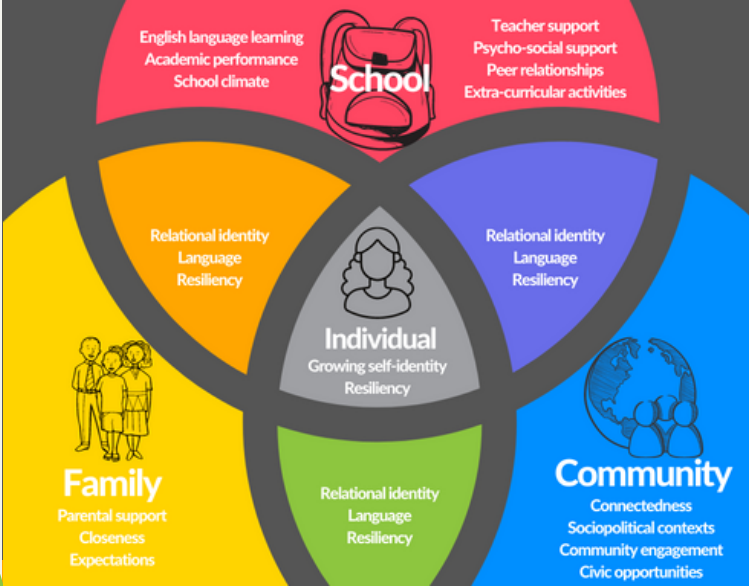
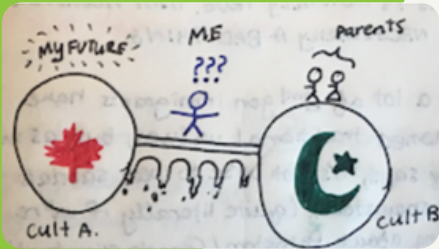
# Our Research

In our research, we talked to newcomer youth (immigrants and refugees between the ages of 14 to 24 who migrated to Canada within the past ten years) about their experiences of school integration. Defined broadly, school integration represents the adjustment of newcomer youth across all aspects of student life – both inside and outside the school context.

Eight high school and ten university newcomer students shared their experiences of immigrating to Canada and integrating into a new school system. We used an Arts-Based engagement ethnography, which included the use of cultural probes (i.e., maps, journals, photographs), individual interviews, and focus groups.

Students shared that they were more engaged and connected with their school and community when they received direct support from school staff, and this impacted their academic success and social-emotional well-being in a positive manner. We have taken the experiences they shared with us and created this resource to support administrators in their ongoing work with newcomer students.

This is an example of a drawing produced by one of our participants, Malia. It is titled "The Cultural Barriers" and it depicts bridging the different parts of her identities.



This graphic represents the ways in which newcomer youth experience school integration.

## Supporting Newcomer Students in Your School

### BUILDING RELATIONSHIPS

Newcomer students told us that building strong relationships with trusted school staff early in the process of school integration provided important support, academically and socially. They found that staff who had empathy for their situation allowed them to feel comfortable reaching out for assistance.

### NAVIGATING PARENTAL EXPECTATIONS

Bridging the gap between school culture and parental expectations is a challenge. Administrators who are empathetic to the values held by newcomer parents and approach them in supportive, non-threatening ways help students navigate these conflicting values. Translation services for written documents and meetings should also be arranged to approach these relationships.

## Creating Supportive Schools

### INCORPORATING DIVERSITY PROGRAMMING

Ethnic identity promotion in schools can foster a sense of acceptance and foster representation. This includes offering diversity clubs, ethnic studies courses, peer mentorship programs and school wide implementation of multicultural materials in curricula.

### TRAINING FOR SCHOOL STAFF

Administrators can support their staff members working with newcomer youth by providing cultural sensitivity and awareness training to increase empathy and understanding of newcomer experiences, as well as making school-based supports easier to navigate.

### HIRING DIVERSE SCHOOL STAFF

Diversifying staff members who are also newcomers, or who are bi- or multilingual can provide more opportunities for connection, support and diversity within the school for newcomers.

**"Educational systems have a cultural and social responsibility to create welcoming and engaging spaces for newcomer youth in order to maximize their academic success and civic potential."**

**DR. ANUSHA KASSAN**  
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