

# Newcomer Education in California

## Report Summary With Recommendations

### Overview

Every year, there are between 150,000 and 200,000 immigrant students in California who have been in U.S. schools for less than 3 years. These newcomers generally require specialized academic instruction and social services to succeed in school. Despite great efforts, many districts are struggling to create these conditions for success. Many newcomers drop out of school or learn little in class because of inaccessible instruction and/or lack of adequate housing, food, medical care, or legal services. The full PACE report *Newcomer Education in California* by Sam Finn finds that newcomer outcomes in California can be improved dramatically by developing three key areas: data, instruction, and social support services.

### Three Findings for California Newcomer Education

#### **Lack of data makes it challenging for newcomers to be seen by practitioners, policymakers, researchers, and publishers.**

Data on newcomers are sparse, as newcomers do not exist as a distinct subgroup for state or federal academic accountability purposes. This lack of visibility in data may help explain the lack of research, curriculum, and policy addressing newcomers' unique needs. A special data request to the California Department of Education (CDE) allowed us to analyze 2020–21 Title III student data for every district in California, with summary statistics as follows:

- All Title III Immigrant Students: 151,996
- Socioeconomically disadvantaged: 101,540 (66.8 percent of total)
- Spanish as home language: 66,438 (43.7 percent of total)
- English as home language: 15,103 (9.9 percent of total)

#### **Districts struggle to educate newcomers and seek support in developing effective instructional models.**

Many of the state's newcomers are unable to access effective instruction in their schools. This likely puts many of districts out of compliance with the Equal Educational Opportunities Act, which requires school districts to take action to overcome barriers to students' equal participation. Specialized resources and programming are necessary for newcomer success: curriculum, administrative practices, school models, social-emotional learning, and community engagement. There is strong demand for research, development of instructional resources, professional development, and implementation assistance in this area.

#### **Meeting newcomers' basic needs requires social services from partner organizations.**

Newcomers are unable to attend school consistently if their basic needs are unmet, which leads to many districts seeking support for providing essential social services to their students. Nonprofits, local government agencies, and faith-based organizations have partnered with school districts to serve newcomers with legal services, housing, food, health care, and so on. The California Department of Social Services (CDSS) administers social support services for some immigrant student subgroups and awards grants to districts through the California Newcomer Education and Well-Being (CalNEW) program. Some newcomers are succeeding with the support of partner organizations, but districts need more partners to reach all of their students.

## Recommendations

Transparent data, effective instruction, and social services to meet basic needs 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 should be similarly leveraged from a variety of sources. A great deal of existing district and state funding can be targeted towards newcomers, and even a modest new state appropriation to support field development could have an outsize impact. Philanthropic partners may be especially critical for supporting innovative research and development projects.

The state itself is in a prime position to catalyze and guide the work necessary to prepare all newcomers for successful postsecondary lives. Recommendations for state action include the following:

### 1 Build state leadership capacity.

- a. Staff or contract a position to support development of newcomer education in California.
- b. Institutionalize collaboration between CDE and CDSS.
- c. Collaborate with national partners in developing the field of newcomer education.

### 2 Improve existing state systems.

- a. Include newcomers and SIFE as distinct student groups in state data systems.
- b. Codify and continue the Opportunities for Youth Initiative.
- c. Adjust the funding formula for “late-arriving” newcomers who enroll after census day.
- d. Require the Instructional Quality Commission to address newcomers in instructional frameworks.

### 3 Support the development of the field.

- a. Invest in open curriculum and instructional resources.
- b. Support and promote critical research areas.
- c. Advocate as a state for federal action.