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## ***The Best Ways to Teach Young Newcomers***

By [\*The Editors\*](#)

### **Teach in Two Languages**



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Immigrant children are the fastest-growing sector of the student population — 22 percent and climbing. Unfortunately, American schools are unprepared to meet the historic challenge of educating these children. Federal policies over the last decade have made the task even more problematic.

#### **Resources**

- [Explaining English Language Proficiency Among Adolescent Immigrant Students](#)
- [Immigrant Youth Adapt to Change](#)
- [Academic Engagement and Achievement Among Newcomer Immigrant Youth](#)

Fully developing *academic* English skills (not just colloquial) takes longer (five to seven years under optimal conditions) than impatient policy makers allow. Students with limited literacy in their native language need even longer to solidify their academic skills in a new language. As a result, simply throwing an English-language learner into a full immersion program doesn't work. A better bet is providing high-quality intensive English lessons while teaching math, science and social studies in the students' native tongues, thus helping newcomers work at grade level while they master the new language.

The best results come from [dual-immersion](#) classes, in which students learn half the time in English and half in their native language, usually Spanish, with half the class being native English speakers and the others native Spanish speakers. Strong programs also provide language tutoring, homework help and writing assistance as newcomers move into mainstream classes.

The best way for English-language learners to succeed — and not become a burden on society — is to place them in programs that identify their incoming literacy and academic skills and provide them with consistent English instruction and annual assessments to measure progress and make adjustments, if necessary. The key to success with a program like this is transitional academic support, including tutoring, ongoing language instruction, homework help and writing assistance. The [Internationals Network for Public](#)

[Schools](#) in New York are an excellent example of what can be done to engage new arrivals.

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The current high-stakes testing accountability system creates unintended consequences for immigrant English-language learners that outweigh whatever benefits standardized tests may have. Because too many immigrant students attend segregated, impoverished schools and typically change schools and programs often, their performance on these tests is further compromised. Indeed, many of them are tested well before they have adequately developed academic language skills.

What's more, immigrant students from low-income families do not typically have the academic supports at home that middle-class students have: educated parents who can help them on their essays, a computer with Internet access, a quiet place to do homework. A school committed to seeing its English-language learners succeed should provide after-school programs that offer homework help, language tutoring and college counseling.

Here we have much to learn from our neighbors to the North. The Toronto District School Board is doing marvelous work in providing “wrap-around services” — including nutrition, homework, after-school programs and family outreach to newly arrived immigrant students.

A century ago, uneducated immigrant children could start on the factory floor and rise to the middle class, but that path for mobility no longer exists. If we fail to teach today's newcomers the skills they need to prosper in a global economy, we condemn them to a life of poverty and alienation from the mainstream society.