

Let's  
play!

¡Vamos  
a jugar!

Hãy cùng  
chơi với  
nhau

# Teacher Ethnographer: Getting to Know Your Newcomers



Wisconsin Center for  
Education Research  
SCHOOL OF EDUCATION  
UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN-MADISON

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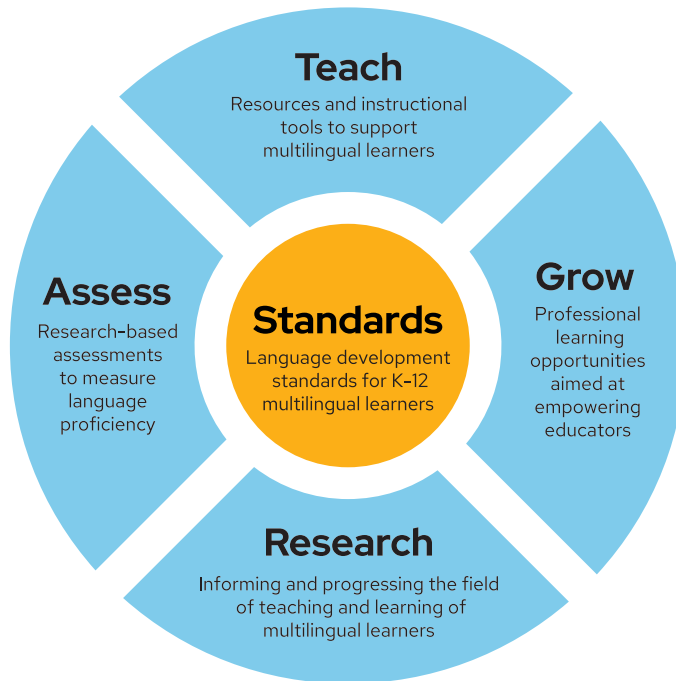


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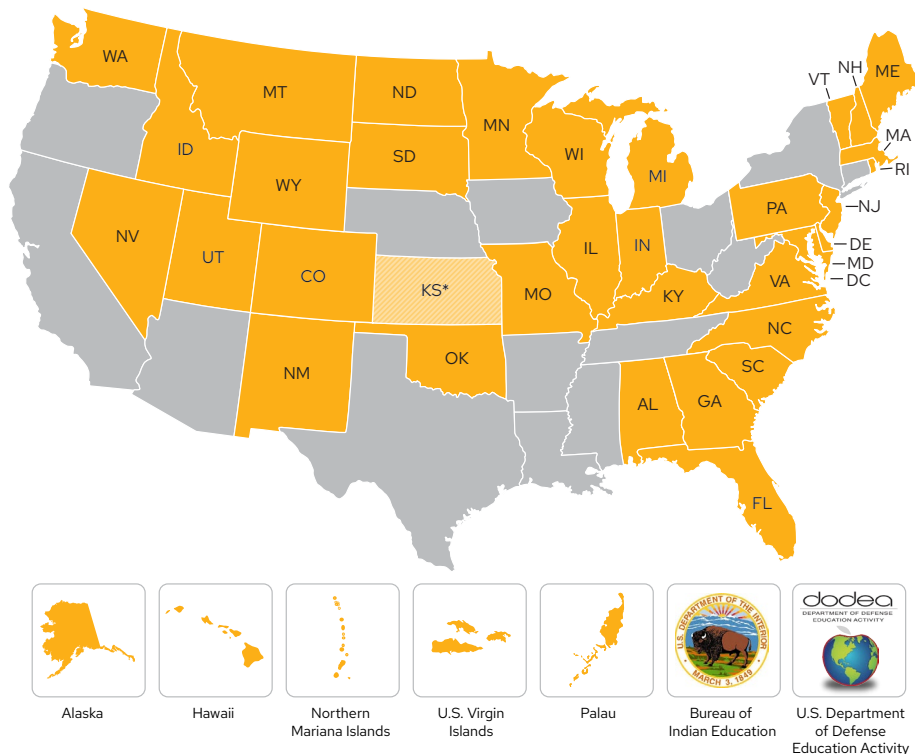
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# What Is WIDA?

WIDA provides a trusted, comprehensive approach to supporting, teaching, and assessing multilingual learners.



The WIDA Consortium is made up of 41 U.S. states, territories, and educational agencies.



\*WIDA Alternate ACCESS user.

Watch the intro video on this page. <https://wida.wisc.edu/about>

# Videos and Resources From This Webinar

## Video Series: “Newcomers: Promoting Success Through Strengthening Practice”

- Maryna’s video: <https://vimeo.com/839765605/4bdb86cccc>
- Ann’s video: <https://vimeo.com/839828597/0b608e2ce7>
- Nathaniel’s video: <https://vimeo.com/838275701/a14b9db6e7>

## Additional Resources

- Bartholomae, L., & Sheikh, E. (2024, March). *Five strategies to welcome newcomers into your classroom*. WIDA and the Board of Regents of the University of Wisconsin System. <https://wida.wisc.edu/news/five-strategies-welcome-newcomers-your-classroom>
- Nordmeyer, J., & Honigsfeld, A. (2020, July). *Collaboration: Working together to serve multilingual learners* [Focus bulletin]. WIDA and the Board of Regents of the University of Wisconsin System. <https://wida.wisc.edu/resources/collaboration-working-together-serve-multilingual-learners>
- Office of English Acquisition. (2023, June). *Newcomer toolkit*. U.S. Department of Education. <https://ncela.ed.gov/educator-support/toolkits/newcomer-toolkit>
- Sugarman, J. (2023). *Recent immigrant children: A profile of new arrivals to U.S. schools*. Migration Policy Institute. [https://www.migrationpolicy.org/sites/default/files/publications/mpi-recent-immigrant-children-2023\\_final.pdf](https://www.migrationpolicy.org/sites/default/files/publications/mpi-recent-immigrant-children-2023_final.pdf)
- U.S. Department of Justice and U.S. Department of Education. (2023, June). *Protecting Access to education for migratory children: A resource for families and educators*. <https://www.ed.gov/media/document/ocr-factsheet-migratory-children-202306pdf>
- WIDA. (2020). *Family connections through home languages* [Flyer]. The Board of Regents of the University of Wisconsin System. (Available in multiple languages.) <https://wida.wisc.edu/sites/default/files/resource/Family-Connections-Home-Languages-Flyer.pdf>
- WIDA. (2024, May). *Trauma informed considerations and strategies for multilingual learners* [Focus bulletin]. The Board of Regents of the University of Wisconsin System. <https://wida.wisc.edu/resources/trauma-informed-considerations-multilingual-learners>
- WIDA Self-Paced eWorkshop: Newcomers: Promoting Success Through Strengthening Practice: <https://portal.wida.us/course/detail/newcomers-promoting-success>

## **Teacher Ethnographer: Getting to Know Your Newcomers**

Responding to the needs of newcomers and their families with effective instruction starts with building relationships with them. Creating or adding to a student portrait is a good starting place for organizing and sharing student information. Keep in mind, this information is not meant to inform programming or label students. Rather, it is intended to support relationship-building with them and their families.

As you begin the process of gathering information, consider how and when it will be collected and shared with colleagues. Many districts and schools have a formal intake process for new students and may gather this type of information during parent and student interviews. Find out what resources are available from the district and community. This may include information on how to access a network of interpreters. Educators who have experience working with multilingual students and families can also provide insight and information on newcomers.

If families are not comfortable sharing sensitive information, encourage them to ask questions. To build a foundation of trust, it is critical for families to know that they are part of a team working together to understand the needs of their child.

The following section offers questions that capture a newcomer's experiential, cultural, linguistic, and social-emotional assets. As you read through, there is space in each category to add or modify questions based on your personal reflection and context.

## Experiential Assets

Check the student's home language survey for the date the student entered U.S. schools, their country or place of origin, and their home and previously studied language(s).

- Where are all the places they've called home?

- Did the student experience any separation from their family?

- What life and educational experiences has the student had prior to arriving in the United States?

- Who is their caregiver or support person here?

- Is there anything else the student would like to share about their journey to your school?

- Additional questions/information:

## Social–Emotional Assets

- What are the student’s particular interests, talents, and skills?

- Who is the student’s closest friend or mentor?

- Has the student ever experienced trauma?

- Are there any health concerns?

- If so, what services is the student connected to?

- What social–emotional support does the family need?

- Additional questions/information:



## Cultural Assets

- What are the family's goals for their student's education?

- What important cultural practices do the student and/or family observe?

- What are the most effective ways for the school to communicate with the family?

- Additional questions/information:

## Linguistic Assets

- What languages does the student speak and in which context (e.g., which language is spoken with parents, with siblings, with friends, in school, etc.)?

- To what extent is the student able to read and write in these languages?

- What experiences have the student and family had with learning and using English?

- What linguistic aspirations do the student and family have?

- Additional questions/information:

## Personal Reflection: What's Next?

Now you know more about your multilingual newcomer! How is this deeper understanding of the student and their family going to inform your interactions, support creating safe learning environments, and help design engaging lessons for equitable opportunities and access to grade-level, academic learning?

## Time for Orientation: Important Procedures for Newcomers and Their Families

Procedure	Essential questions	Special considerations for newcomers	School personnel involved in this procedure	School personnel responsible for communicating to students/families
<b>School bus procedures and expectations</b>	<p>Who is eligible for bus transportation and why?</p> <p>How does it work?</p> <p>What are appropriate riding behaviors and expectations and why?</p>	<p>Have they ridden a school bus before?</p> <p>Previous school transportation method</p> <p>Explanation of why punctuality is an important value in U.S. schooling</p>		
<b>Physical exams and state immunization requirements</b>	<p>What vaccinations are required to attend school and why?</p> <p>At what ages/grades are they required?</p> <p>Are there resources to assist families in locating health services at all price points?</p>	<p>Potential differences in experience, understanding, expectations, or perspectives on immunizations</p> <p>Is paperwork available on past medical history?</p>		
<b>Uniform and dress code guidelines</b>	<p>What are the guidelines and why?</p> <p>Where can these items be acquired at a reasonable price?</p>	<p>Visual or picture examples</p> <p>Aspects that might conflict with cultural, religious, or comfortable clothing styles</p>		

Procedure	Essential questions	Special considerations for newcomers	School personnel involved in this procedure	School personnel responsible for communicating to students/families
<b>Attendance and grading policies</b>	<p>What are the school attendance policies? Why are they important?</p> <p>In what format are grades given? How are they communicated?</p> <p>Are there exceptional procedures for multilingual learners?</p>	<p>What is or is not considered an "excused absence"? Provide culturally relevant examples.</p> <p>How are grades interpreted?</p> <p>What is required for multilingual learners to graduate?</p>		
<b>Cafeteria procedures and dietary expectations</b>	<p>Who is eligible for free and reduced meals, and what documentation is needed to enroll, if any?</p> <p>What are the procedures for ordering food?</p> <p>How can students check the school menu options?</p> <p>What behavioral expectations are in place for the cafeteria and why?</p>	<p>Accessible free and reduced meal forms</p> <p>Religious holidays</p> <p>Cultural or religious dietary restrictions</p>		

Procedure	Essential questions	Special considerations for newcomers	School personnel involved in this procedure	School personnel responsible for communicating to students/families
<b>Following a class schedule</b>	<p>Will the student have multiple teachers? Do they know where classrooms are located?</p> <p>How much time do they have to transition?</p> <p>Are there different schedules for different days or special occasions?</p>	<p>Previous school schedule and experience switching classes</p> <p>Run through the schedule with an adult mentor and meet teachers.</p> <p>Mirror schedule with a buddy student.</p>		
<b>Classroom behavioral expectations</b>	<p>What are appropriate and encouraged ways to engage in classroom participation?</p> <p>How should students communicate when they have wants and needs?</p> <p>How do expectations vary across time and circumstance (i.e., different points in the lesson, interacting with teachers vs. students)?</p>	<p>Physical interactions with peers</p> <p>Co-ed classrooms</p> <p>Guidance for using the bathroom, standing in line, talking to teacher and peers, group work, etc.</p> <p>Model expectations for behaviors across a variety of locations and situations.</p>		

<b>Procedure</b>	<b>Essential questions</b>	<b>Special considerations for newcomers</b>	<b>School personnel involved in this procedure</b>	<b>School personnel responsible for communicating to students/families</b>
<b>Discipline policies</b>	<p>What are classroom discipline policies and why are they necessary?</p> <p>What are school-wide discipline policies and why are they necessary?</p> <p>What consequences can students expect if they do not follow them?</p>	<p>How were students disciplined in their previous schooling experience?</p> <p>How might this affect how they understand and react to discipline in your schooling context?</p>		
<b>Role of school personnel</b>	<p>Who are important adult contacts across the school and what are their roles (e.g., nurses, counselors, front office staff, librarians, homeroom teacher)?</p> <p>Where are safe spaces located throughout the building for student's physical, academic, and social-emotional needs?</p>	<p>When is it appropriate to visit each one?</p> <p>How should different school personnel be addressed?</p> <p>Based on their lived experience, should connections with certain personnel or resources be established?</p>		
<b>School security</b>	<p>What security measures are in place? Why are they necessary?</p> <p>Who/where can students turn to if they do not feel safe?</p>	<p>School security may be a novel or triggering presence if not understood.</p> <p>Experience with security and security-like personnel and procedures</p>		

Procedure	Essential questions	Special considerations for newcomers	School personnel involved in this procedure	School personnel responsible for communicating to students/families
<b>Emergency drills</b>	<p>What is their purpose?</p> <p>Which drills can be expected and how often?</p> <p>What actions are required of the student?</p>	<p>Loud noises, leaving items behind, hiding/sheltering in place, and rushing and panic can be triggering for students with traumatic lived experiences.</p> <p>Explicit explanations on the purpose of different drills, guided practice of expectations, and warnings from a trusted adult before they occur can help with stress associated with these activities.</p>		
<b>Gym class</b>	<p>What physical activities and requirements are involved?</p> <p>Do students need to change clothes? If so, why and what is considered appropriate attire?</p>	<p>Level of comfort with changing clothes for gym class</p> <p>Access to appropriate change of clothes</p> <p>Level of comfort with co-ed physical education classes</p>		



Procedure	Essential questions	Special considerations for newcomers	School personnel involved in this procedure	School personnel responsible for communicating to students/families
<b><i>Mutual discourse and resolution between schools and families on factors of potential dissonance or discomfort</i></b>	<p>Do you have any questions about school policies and procedures?</p> <p>Are there any policies that are uncomfortable or confusing for you or your family?</p>	<p>Refer to interviews, portraits, and any collected documentation describing the individual newcomer and their family's lived experiences.</p> <p>Ensure the conversation is held in a comfortable space and in a comprehensible manner (i.e., translation services, family liaisons, and/or visual and supportive tools are available).</p>		

## Top Tips for Implementing Trauma-Informed Approaches

As you watch the videoclip from educator expert Nathaniel Jacobson, write takeaways that resonated with you below.

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