



A Rocky Path: Understanding Access to Education Challenges for Newcomer Children & Youth

Presented by:

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This presentation is possible thanks to the support of:



Land Acknowledgment

The land we are standing on today is the traditional territory of many nations including the Mississaugas of the Credit, the Anishnabeg, the Chippewa, the Haudenosaunee and the Huron-Wendat peoples and is now home to many diverse First Nations, Inuit and Métis peoples.

We also acknowledge that Toronto is covered by Treaty 13 signed with the Mississaugas of the Credit, and the Williams Treaty signed with multiple Mississaugas and Chippewa bands.

Disclaimer

The scope of this project is extended only to the Public English Language Regular and Separate school systems in Ontario at the Elementary and Secondary Levels; and the Public Post-Secondary Educational Institutions.

Among the families that participated in the research component of this project we had participants with different statuses, such as, Refugee Claimants, Non-Status, Humanitarian and Compassionate Grounds Applicants and Protected Persons/Convention Refugees.

About the Centre

FCJ Refugee Centre

- The FCJ Refugee Centre is a **non-profit organization and registered charity, that has been working with newcomers, refugees, and others at risk due to their immigration status for more than 32 years.** We address systemic issues that newly arrived refugee claimants face in Canada including lack of resources, marginalization, and discrimination. Our strength is found in our community, and with operational excellence we provide adaptive, agile, **intersectional service delivery to the full spectrum of the newcomer population**, with specialized attention to refugee claimants, those without status, and precarious migrants. We work every day to increase social visibility, acknowledge the value, and respect the inherent human dignity of all refugees and precarious migrants.

FCJ Youth Network

- Over slightly more than the last decade, we have developed a program that **brings newcomer youth together with the purpose to participate and establish deep roots in Canadian society while understanding the impacts of colonialism** – this group being called the FCJ Youth Network (FCJYN). The FCJYN is a brave space for newcomer and migrant youth to come together on a weekly basis to learn, build, and participate in community development. It is an inclusive space for youth to support each other, get involved in the community, participate in a variety of activities and workshops, and engage in self-advocacy and activism on the frontlines.
- A really important aspect of the FCJYN is that it is open to any newcomer youth regardless of their status.

About the Project

- In 2016, the FCJYN produced a report **assessing the secondary school system** in Ontario on 5 areas: **Getting In, Equitable Participation, Anti-Discrimination, Support, Moving On.**
- The 2016 report was crucial in **improving educational access for people with precarious immigration statuses.** However, due to recent setbacks and thanks to the support from the **Maytree Foundation** we have created a more comprehensive updated version.
- This **new version** addresses concerns, encourages communication, and **promotes equitable change, covering Elementary, Secondary, and Post-Secondary education access for newcomer youth and families.**
- The project was led by the **Uprooted Youth Committee**, a group of youth that have experienced issues in navigating the education system due to circumstances that intersect at their immigration status.
- The new report is divided into two phases:
 - Phase 1: 2024 School Year End** [Assessing Elementary, Secondary & Post-Secondary System with List of Areas Of Improvement]
 - Phase 2: 2025 School Year End** [Updates on Implementation of Suggestions]

Getting in: Findings

Levels of Education

- **Elementary:** 4 to 13 years of age
- **Secondary:** 14 to 18 years of age
- **Edvance:** 18 to 20 years of age
- **Adult School:** 21+ years of age
- **Post-Secondary**

Mandatory Documents

- Passport (parents + child(ren))
- Birth Certificate (child(ren))
- 2 different Proof of address
- Refugee status documents if you are a refugee
- Proof of Entry: Entry stamps/plane tickets/boarding passes
- Baptismal Certificate*

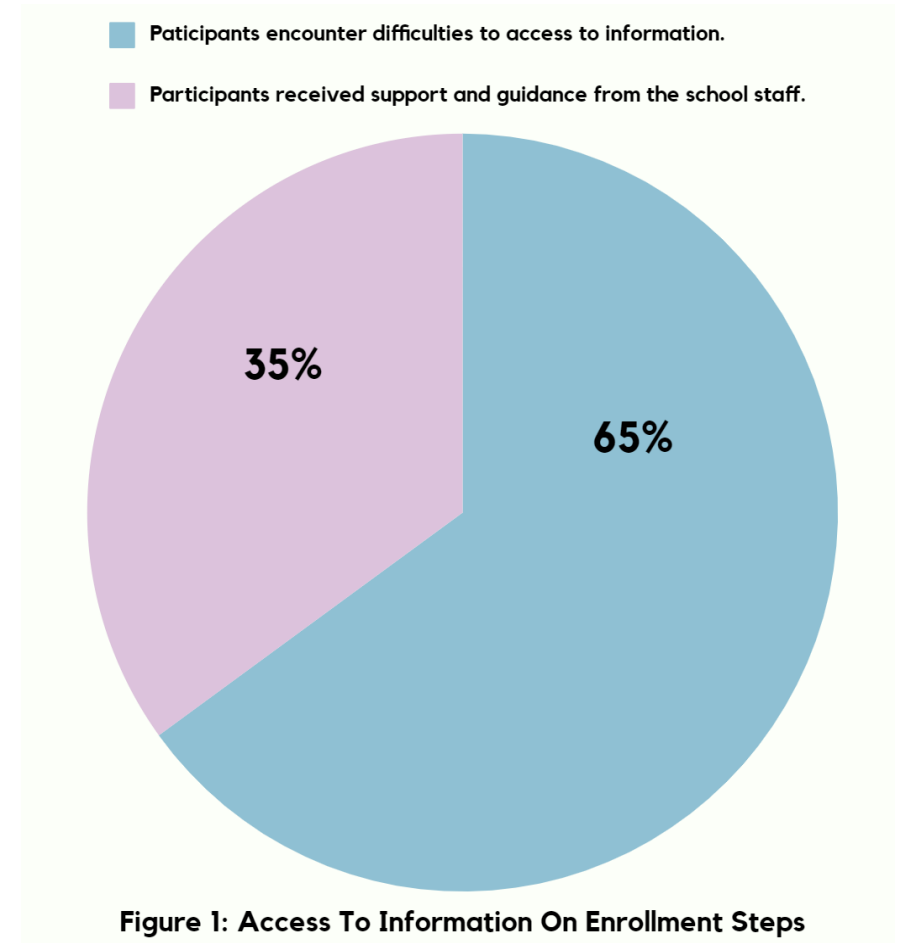
GETTING IN

How Ontario Secondary School Boards, the Ministry of Education and other relevant actors (including principals, vice principals, secretaries, and other school staff) facilitate or impede newcomer youth, particularly those with precarious immigration status, from getting into high school in Ontario.

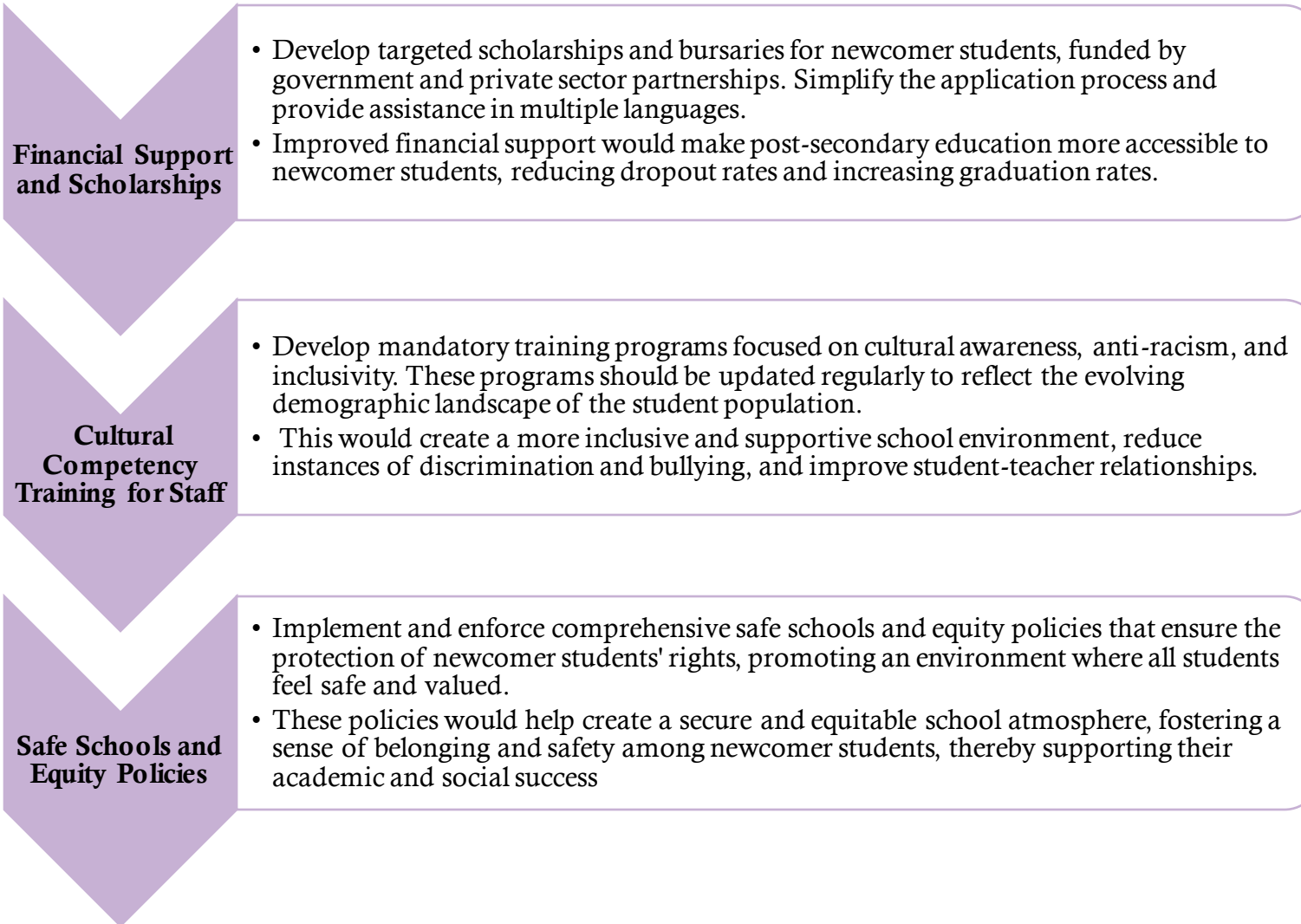
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Getting in: Findings

- The families involved in this research shared that due to language barriers, lack of resources (such as computer or internet) and lack of technological literacy, finding the information needed about the education system was very difficult.
- 70% of the newcomer families were not familiar with the enrollment process or the mandatory documents needed to start the enrollment process until they connected with a community agency like FCJ Refugee Centre.
- February to June 2023 alone: 18 cases of non-status families that were getting the directions of needing to cancel their Visa/Electronic Travel Authorization (ETA).
- Non-status families are being asked for a notarized letter confirming their immigration status prior to admission, which is an additional bureaucratic barrier and a financial burden on families.



Getting in: Strategies



Equitable Participation: Findings

Once a newcomer child or a youth in Ontario has access to school, they can access different services:

- **After-School Programs**
- **Academic Support**
- **Settlement Workers in Schools (SWIS)**
- **Multicultural events and celebrations**
- **Social and Emotional Support**
- **Family and Community Engagement**

In spite of having after school programs, academic support, scholarships and other the services, 50% of the participants of this research project shared that the school did not offer any academic support at the moment of enrollment. The other 50%, shared that the school offered them ESL classes and transportation services.

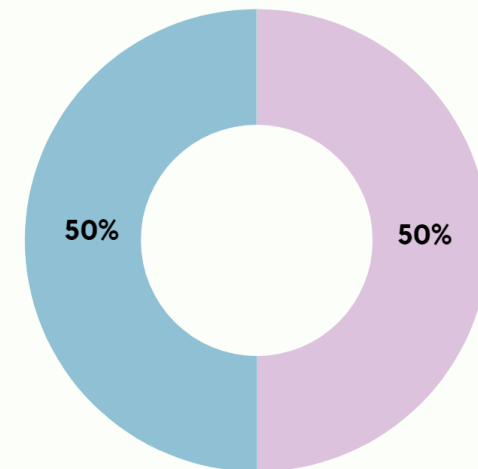


Figure 2: Academic Support Received During School

EQUITABLE PARTICIPATION

To what extent precarious immigration status youth feel included once in school, and valued as equal participants with diverse lived experiences; and how these experiences impact their participation in school.

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Equitable Participation: Strategies

Campus Inclusivity and Support Services

- Create newcomer support centers on campuses that offer academic advising, mental health services, legal aid, and social integration programs. Promote cultural events and diversity initiatives to foster an inclusive campus culture.
- Reduce barriers to academic success

Holistic Support Programs

- Create partnerships with community organizations to provide additional resources and support, such as tutoring, financial assistance, and family counseling.
- Comprehensive assistance, promoting their academic achievement and emotional well-being.

Expanding Support Services

- Enhance language support services, such as ESL programs, to ensure students with limited English proficiency can fully participate in their education.
- An inclusive environment would improve the overall well-being of newcomer students, helping them succeed academically and socially.

Anti-discrimination: Findings

- Some families indicated a **slower response to bullying** in different schools and school boards. A few families indicated receiving through text, email, and seeing flyers at school regarding bullying prevention and the adverse outcomes of bullying, such as suicide.
- Ontario education system **challenges**: funding limitations, variability in program availability across different regions, and the need for continuous professional development for educators remain.
- **Limited programs** are designed to support undocumented students and those with precarious immigration status in accessing higher education such as Sanctuary Scholars.
- Ontario education system offers a range of holistic programs designed to support newcomers at all levels of education, addressing their academic, social, emotional, and physical needs to facilitate successful integration and overall well-being, **barrier-free as long as they have a regularized immigration status or are already in the educational system.**

Anti-discrimination: Findings

ANTI-DISCRIMINATION

How effective are current anti-discrimination policies in making precarious immigration status youth feel safe and included in schools.

To what extent is immigration status recognized as a contributing factor to the complex relationship of power, privilege and oppression of students; are there appropriate and safe mechanisms for complaint.

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■ Participants are unsure if they signed an anti- discrimination agreement.

■ Participants remember signing an anti- discrimination agreement.

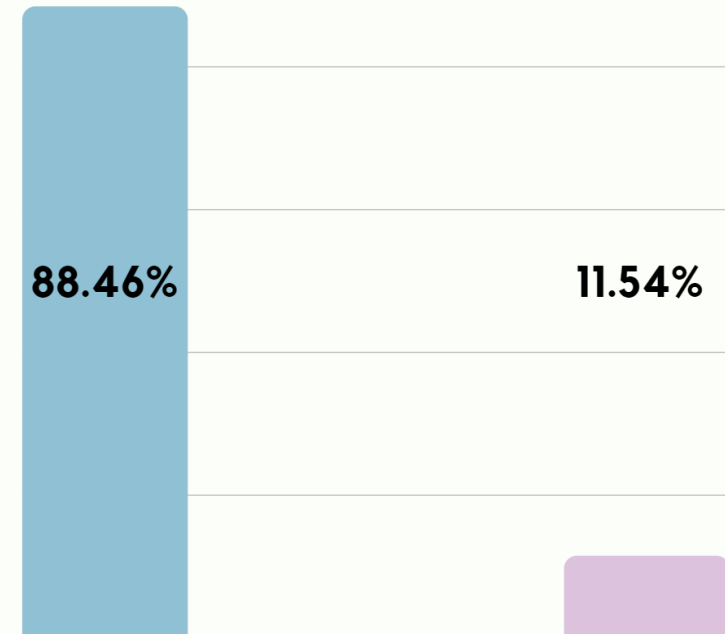


Figure 3: Anti-Discrimination Agreement Signing

Anti-discrimination: Strategies

Implementing Anti-Bullying and Anti-Discrimination Agreements

- Require students and parents to sign anti-bullying and anti-discrimination agreements during enrollment. Educate the school community on the importance of these agreements.
- This proactive approach to set clear expectations for behavior, reduce instances of bullying and discrimination, and create a safer school environment for newcomer students.

Language Support Programs

- Ensure all schools offer ESL (English as a Second Language) programs and language support to help newcomer students improve their language skills and communicate effectively.
- This will enable newcomer students to fully participate, improving their academic performance and social integration.

Bi-annual Cultural Sensitivity Trainings

- Implement bi-annual cultural sensitivity training for all students and staff, including measurements and evaluations to assess effectiveness. Update training content regularly to reflect current cultural dynamics.
- Regular cultural sensitivity training would reduce cultural misunderstandings, promote inclusivity, and create a more supportive school environment for newcomer students.

Support: Findings

There was a mixed response in data from families regarding receiving support, some families indicated that they did not receive any support at all and needed to navigate the system by themselves, some only received support at the time of a crisis, and some received support but the lack of comprehension of their status by the staff led to inadequate remedies.

SUPPORT

What level of support exists for newcomers students in Ontario schools?
is this support effective and responsive to the nuanced needs of precarious migrants

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One family said:

“It is not easy because people always hiding information and until I was suffered, they decided to mentioned about FCJ.”

Anonymous, 2024

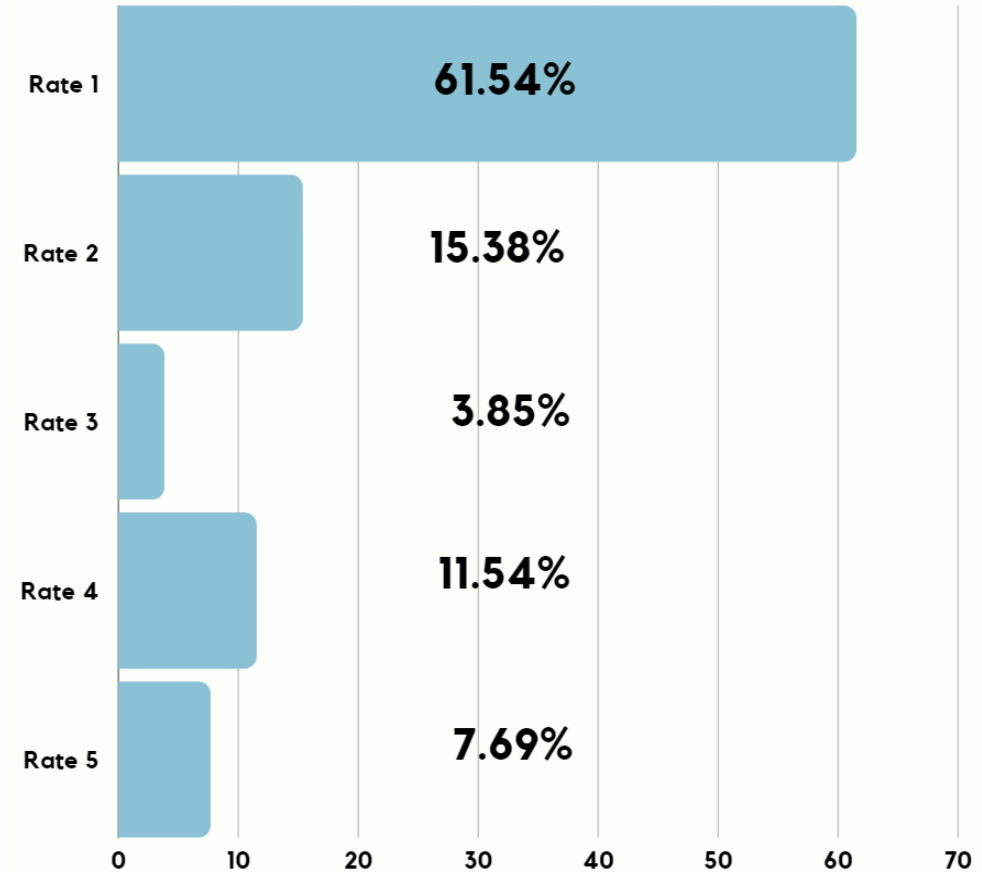


Figure 4: Access To Adequate And Informed Support

Support: Strategies

Enhanced Multilingual Support and Resources

- Provide multilingual enrollment materials, including forms, instructions, and informational brochures in languages commonly spoken by the local community, such as Spanish, Arabic, Mandarin, Punjabi, and others as relevant.
- Ensure the understanding of enrollment process, school policies, and available support services, reducing confusion and improving accessibility.

Bilingual Support Staff

- Employ or train bilingual support staff who can help families translate documents, explain procedures, and answer questions.
- Bilingual support staff would facilitate smoother communication during the enrollment process.

Comprehensive Orientation and Welcome Programs

- Develop orientation programs specifically tailored for newcomer families, covering topics such as school routines, academic expectations, extracurricular activities, and available support services.
- Orientation programs would equip families with the knowledge and tools they need to navigate the school system confidently.

Moving on

Targeted Academic and Career Counseling

- **Improvement Area:** Provide specialized academic and career counseling for newcomer students.
- **Proposal:** Create dedicated counseling positions focused on the unique needs of newcomer students, offering guidance on course selection, post-secondary pathways, and career planning.
- **Impact:** This initiative would help students make informed decisions about their education and career paths, improving their chances of success and integration into Canadian society.

Bridging programs and pathways for newcomer students

- **Improvement Area:** Expand bridging programs and pathways for newcomer students.
- **Proposal:** Establish more bridging programs that help newcomers meet the prerequisites for their desired programs, including language courses, academic upgrading, and preparatory courses for specific fields of study.
- **Impact:** These programs would facilitate smoother transitions into post-secondary education, ensuring that newcomer students are adequately prepared and confident in their academic abilities.

Conclusion

- Increase financial support for newcomer students through scholarships and grants.
- Provide cultural competency training for staff and implement safe schools and equity policies to reduce dropout rates and improve graduation rates.
- Enhance campus inclusivity with dedicated support centers, expanded counseling services, and holistic support programs.
- Combat discrimination and bullying with enforced agreements, language support, and cultural sensitivity training.
- Support families with multilingual materials, bilingual staff, and comprehensive orientation programs, along with targeted academic and career counseling for students.

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