



Enhancing Equity in Ontario Elementary Education Symposium

PANEL H SUMMARY: Equity for Newcomer Students

PANELISTS

Hortense Mvuemba

Community Engagement
Advisor and Étienne
Parenteau

Safe & Accepting School
Principal, Conseil des
Écoles Catholiques du
Centre-Est (CECCE)

Sita Jayaraman

Senior Manager, Human
Rights and Equity, Halton
Catholic District School
Board

Malini Singh

Manager of Newcomer
Support Services, TNO -
The Neighbourhood
Organization

In a panel on equity for newcomer students, four speakers discussed many of the opportunities and obstacles that arise when an individual arrives in a new country. The newcomer experience is life-changing and filled with potential, but can also entail numerous potential challenges such as learning another language, finding a job, making friends, making cultural adjustments, coping with trauma, and navigating the public education system. An educator's role is not solely to teach the curriculum, but also to learn who their students are and to celebrate their diverse identities. An asset-based approach is important when supporting newcomers. It is important to recognize the robust range of knowledge and lived experiences that newcomers bring, working together to build on that rich foundation.

« Je travaille pour le conseil, les équipes écoles et les partenaires, ce sont nos alliés. Les élèves nouveaux arrivants et leurs familles sont au Centre de nos activités. »

- Hortense Mvuemba

« Le plus grand défi, c'est d'aller rejoindre les parents pour leur présenter toutes les initiatives en matière d'équité et d'inclusion et obtenir leur engagement. Le Conseil cherche aussi à avoir ces discussions là avec les leurs enfants. »

- Étienne Parenteau

“We cannot have a one size fit strategy - that is doomed to fail. So, we really need to look at understanding the whole child, and look at what other aspects of that child's identity...we need to be cognizant of.”

- Sita Jayaraman

“Creating a classroom environment that respects and values students' diverse cultural backgrounds is key.”

- Malini Singh

Similar to promising practices for other equity deserving communities, it is critical to build strong relationships by engaging newcomer students and their families throughout the process of supporting their settlement. Translators, settlement workers, and social workers play a vital role in facilitating conversations with newcomers to determine their goals and needs, answer questions, and co-develop solutions. Moreover, this process cannot be standardized; a one-size-fits-all approach would overlook the unique circumstances of each individual.

Other impactful approaches include implementing professional learning communities in school boards, mandating training on anti-racism and cultural competency, promoting trans-language learning (i.e., purposefully using languages other than English or French in the school community), providing resources for language support programs, fostering partnerships with community organizations or institutions (e.g., universities) to offer joint-services, and organizing workshops on topics suggested by newcomer families. For example, one successful workshop idea invited a nutritionist to speak to newcomer families about where to grocery shop, easy recipes to make, and lunch ideas to pack for their children to take to school.

When working with newcomer students, academic achievement should not be the only focus. It is important to also consider holistic well-being, especially mental and emotional health. Creating peer support networks is another way of supporting newcomers in building community and working towards the goal of welcoming individuals from abroad into a safe, inclusive, and caring environment.

RESOURCES SUGGESTED BY PANELISTS

- [Centre d'accueil et d'admission](#) (Support program for registering children in school at CECCE)
- [Programme d'appui aux nouveaux arrivants](#) (Support program for newcomers)

To cite this document: Patel, S., Hopson, R.L., & Saeidpour, S. (2024). *Enhancing Equity in Ontario Elementary Education Symposium: Equity for Newcomer Students - Knowledge Mobilization Summary Report*. Toronto, ON. School of Early Childhood Studies, Toronto Metropolitan University.

For more information, visit: torontomu.ca/educational-equity-symposium/