

POLICY BRIEF

NEWCOMER STUDENTS IN OREGON SCHOOLS

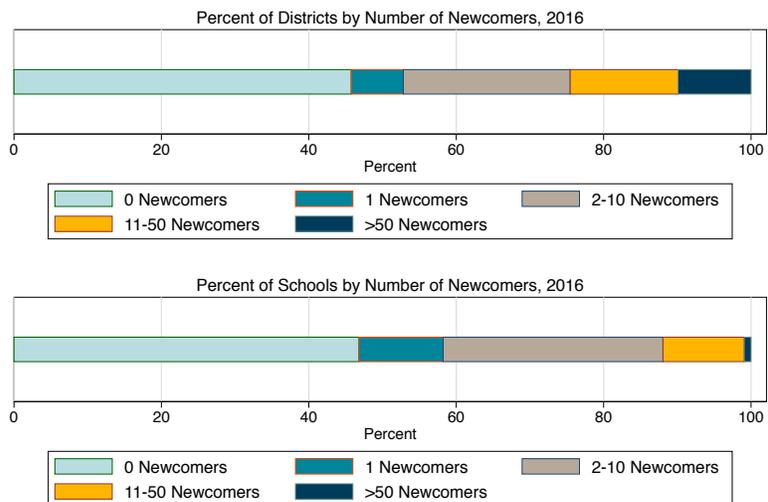
Who Are Newcomer Students?

We define newcomers as students who are classified as English learners (ELs) and also meet the federal definition for immigrant students—individuals between the ages of 3-21, born outside the United States, and enrolled in U.S. schools for fewer than three academic years.

Characteristics of Newcomer Students in Oregon

In 2015-16, there were 6,095 newcomer students in Oregon, representing approximately 1% of all K-12 students. The most common home languages spoken by newcomer students were Spanish (42%), Arabic (9%), Chinese (5%), Vietnamese (4%), and Somali (4%). Approximately three-fourths of newcomer students were economically disadvantaged. One in ten newcomers had interrupted or limited formal education.

Figure 1. Distribution of Newcomers by District and School



Most Newcomer Students Are Concentrated in a Small Proportion of Oregon Districts and Schools

As shown in Figure 1, newcomer students in Oregon are concentrated in a small proportion of the state’s districts and schools. In 2015-16, nearly half of all Oregon districts and schools enrolled no newcomer students. In addition, the majority of districts and schools that did enroll newcomer students served very small populations. On the other hand, a small number of districts and schools served large numbers of newcomer students. Specifically, twenty-one districts (10% of all districts) and thirteen schools (1% of all schools) enrolled more than 50 newcomer students.

In the small number of districts and schools serving large numbers of newcomer students, targeted supports and specialized programs may be feasible. However, there are unique challenges to meeting the needs of newcomer students in low-density contexts.

Different Newcomer Groups Experience Very Different Contexts of Reception

Immigration researchers have demonstrated that features of the communities that receive immigrants, including economic, social, political, and legal features, powerfully shape immigrant outcomes (e.g., Portes & Rumbaut, 2006). These features of host communities are referred to as *contexts of reception* (Portes & Böröcz, 1989). Educational institutions are an important element of contexts of reception for immigrants.

To explore aspects of educational contexts of reception, we analyzed characteristics of schools attended by different newcomer groups. As illustrated in the table below, there are substantial differences in the characteristics of schools attended by newcomers of different home language backgrounds. For example, Somali-speaking newcomers typically attended schools with higher proportions of ELs, higher proportions of economically disadvantaged students, and lower proportions of students scoring proficient on the state math assessment. In contrast, Chinese-speaking newcomers typically attended schools with lower proportions of ELs, lower proportions of economically disadvantaged students, and higher proportions of students scoring proficient on the state math assessment.

Median School Characteristics for Newcomers of Different Home Language Backgrounds, 2016

	Median school % EL	Median school % same home language	Median school % economically disadvantaged	Median school % proficient in math
Spanish	17%	13%	60%	34%
Arabic	15%	1%	56%	42%
Chinese	8%	1%	34%	56%
Vietnamese	12%	1%	60%	35%
Somali	22%	1%	97%	25%

Policy Implications

- Newcomer students are concentrated in a small number of Oregon districts and schools. These districts and schools may need additional funding and support for meeting newcomers' specific needs, particularly for students with interrupted or limited formal education.
- Many Oregon districts and schools serve very small numbers of newcomer students. Existing research on best practices for newcomer students often focuses on policies and practices that are not feasible in these low-density contexts. Regional education agencies may have a particular role to play in providing technical assistance and centralized support for these districts and schools.
- There is substantial variation in the characteristics of schools typically attended by particular newcomer groups. Thus, supports provided by districts, regional agencies, and the state should look different based on the needs and characteristics of each school and their newcomer population.

References

- Portes, A., & Böröcz, J. (1989). Contemporary immigration: Theoretical perspectives on its determinants and modes of incorporation. *International Migration Review*, 23(3), 606-630.
- Portes, A., & Rumbaut, R. G. (2006). *Immigrant America: a portrait* (3rd ed.). Berkeley, CA: University of California Press.