From Welcoming to Belonging at **MELVINDALE HIGH SCHOOL**

University of Michigan
Community-Based Ethnographic Research Team

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Executive Summary

This research is based on an ongoing collaboration between **Melvindale High School (MHS) and the University of Michigan (U-M) School of Education**. This study explores how MHS seeks to establish a welcoming environment for newcomer migrant students, how students describe their first impressions and experiences at their school, and how various actors feel the process of initial welcoming can be improved. The scope of this study was articulated through dialogue with the U-M research team and MHS leaders, in order to shape a relevant inquiry for school actors. In this report, we integrate teacher, staff, and student voices conceptualizing the process and experience of welcoming. After contextualizing the study in relevant literature, we describe our research methods, which draw from interviews with teachers, staff, and students, as well as observations carried out in ESL Academy classes, informal school spaces, and initial phases of the onboarding process for newcomer students.

Our findings begin with a descriptive overview of the **onboarding process**, including practices observed and perspectives shared by staff who facilitate these initial school-family interactions and serve as the "first face" of the school. We demonstrate that actors involved in the onboarding process see their work as critically linked to honoring young peoples' right to education and the inclusion of newcomer and migrant families in schools and communities. This important work falls largely on three staff members across MHS and Central Office. The increased enrollment of EL students at MHS has led to more intense workloads for these actors, stretching their capacity and in some cases limiting the quality of these interactions.

Newcomer students' perspectives illustrate shared challenges attributed to language barriers, feelings of isolation, emotional weight, and a perceived inability to ask for help. These challenges are mutually reinforcing, so that real and perceived barriers can prevent young people from accessing necessary supports and building relationships with teachers and peers, prolonging feelings of isolation. According to students, there is not a clear distinction drawn between onboarding and what follows. That is, "first impressions' appear to be continually evolving retrospectively, through the lens of present experiences and conceptions of social and academic inclusion.

Executive Summary

Despite challenges cited by newcomer students, there is a strong sense of determination to excel in their studies and to extend support to others navigating an unfamiliar educational landscape. Students also point to ways they feel actively supported and cared for by those around them, which can mitigate feelings of sadness and otherness.

We highlight four practices which MHS actors (teachers, staff, and administrators) draw upon to create and uphold a welcoming environment for newcomers in which they are supported academically and socially. We characterize these practices as intentional and consequential to newcomer students' experiences. These include: **translanguaging, honoring students' cultural identities and backgrounds, showing care, and leveraging synergistic relationships across formal instructional spaces and informal and extracurricular spaces**. Together these intentional practices offer a portrait of how school actors at MHS work together to extend welcoming beyond onboarding, into everyday interactions.

The report closes by identifying **three principal areas for growth**:

1) **reducing barriers that drive newcomer isolation**
2) **distributing onboarding responsibilities across actors, and**
3) **increasing professional learning opportunities that respond to EL and newcomer student needs.**

Specific recommendations are offered for each of these areas of growth, bringing together our analysis with teacher, staff, and student perspectives on how to further meet the needs of newcomer students and help them feel a greater sense of belonging, both during their initial transition and throughout their time in school.

Background + Research Context

A Partnership Between MHS and U-M

This collaboration aims to build an equitable, reciprocal, and sustainable partnership between Melvindale High School (MHS) and the University of Michigan (U-M) School of Education. Initial discussions took place in 2018 between Ryan Vranesich, the Principal of MHS, and U-M Professor Michelle Bellino to build the vision for a research-based partnership. **Our conversation centered on questions of equity and inclusion in a diversifying school and community context. The foundation of our collaboration remains rooted in a commitment to creating schools that are welcoming and inclusive for newcomer students and families with diverse identities and experiences.**

We piloted this partnership in winter 2020, in the context of a "Community-based ethnography" class. As part of their coursework, graduate students conducted participant observations and interviews with staff members at MHS. However, data collection ended abruptly during the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic as public schools shifted to remote instruction. Findings from this exploratory project are documented in the report "Supporting recently arrived students: Lessons learned from MHS" (Bellino et al., 2020, p. 11). The report highlighted three key themes:

1) MHS is a positive and welcoming work environment where teachers can access needed resources while experiencing freedom and flexibility to meet students' academic and social needs. Adding support staff and increasing opportunities for teacher collaboration arose as important sources of support that could be enhanced.

2) Quick, decisive action and flexible management of material and immaterial resources are hallmarks of MHS's approach to supporting newcomer students. Striking a balance between MHS's decisive actions and reflecting on those decisions could allow for the formalization of successful strategies while strengthening efforts to support students' success.

3) The perspectives of those who feel less included suggest ways MHS might reflect on its current programs and practices. While continuing to support newcomer students' academic and social needs, opportunities exist to build a stronger sense of unity across EL and non-EL student groups.

In fall 2021, as MHS resumed in-person instruction, Principal Vranesich and Dr. Bellino felt ready to renew the collaboration with a new group of fourteen graduate students. We had an opportunity to reflect on the previous experience and make adjustments. For example, we realized that a more defined project scope would give the study a clearer sense of purpose and link more explicitly to a particular area of practice within MHS. The collaborative project is embedded in a more time-intensive, introductory research methods class, an interdisciplinary group of fourteen graduate students. Given this affordance, we outlined a more ambitious data collection timeline, described in more detail below.

Our goals for this collaboration are multiple. U-M graduate students gain an opportunity to design and practice qualitative research methods in the context of an authentic school space, supporting graduate students' learning of concepts and skills. Meanwhile, the research inquiry is constructed collaboratively, centering on issues of importance to MHS. Guided by Sara Lawrence Lightfoot's (1986) work on asset-based inquiry in schools, we aim to identify strong practices and supports in place for EL students. Our hope is that the research generates an opportunity for MHS participants and leaders to reflect upon current practices, as well as identify areas of strength and openings for continued dialogue and improvement. We appreciate how these sentiments are echoed as MHS faculty, staff, and administration seek feedback for positive change in the school.

Research Focus

We made efforts to design elements of the study according to MHS's stated priorities. In September 2021, MHS Principal Ryan Vranesich and Katie Lewis (ESL Instructional Interventionist/ESL Coordinator) met with the research team. As part of this meeting, they introduced us to the school's changing demographics, the ways they have adapted instruction to accommodate a growing EL population, and their current onboarding process for new families. They expressed a particular interest in examining how the school could "create an excellent first impression" and "a welcoming environment from the moment students enter MHS, with a particular emphasis on newcomer and migrant students" (9.16.21).

In this report, we integrate teacher, staff, and student voices conceptualizing the process and experience of welcoming. We aim to present perspectives on everyday practices at MHS, including and extending beyond the initial onboarding experience. At times, we struggled to maintain our focus on the onboarding process, recognizing that the work of welcoming is ongoing and may endure throughout one's entire high school experience. According to students, there is not a clear distinction drawn between onboarding and what follows. That is, "first impressions' appear to be ever-evolving, in tandem with present experiences (re)shaping reflections of initial interactions retrospectively. Thus dual conception of welcoming and belonging is echoed through educators' perspectives as well. For example, Principal Vranesich considers what welcoming means in the context of MHS:

> *"So when I say welcoming...how quickly can we get you to feel a positive feeling and like an openness to knowing that … you can come in here and learn? You can come in here and start to meet people and build relationships. Like how quickly can we remove the fear?...These are kind of hard things to verbalize, like when I'm saying...it's like such an emotional thing, you know it's like I want them to feel something in their heart. (11.1.21)"*

In this excerpt, welcoming is conceptualized as helping students transition to MHS, but also something deeper that extends beyond first impressions. We draw from the definition offered by Selimos & George (2018):

> *the mandate of welcoming is to engage immigrants and residents in the cultivation of belonging… [which] we argue begs an exploration of how newcomer youth experience the social domains that make up their daily life. Welcoming requires the cultivation of substantive positive encounters and interactions between youth and residents that resonate with the everyday elements that comprise social inclusion: access, recognition, and engagement (pp. 73-74).*

In this report, we adhere to MHS's language of "newcomer" and "EL" (English learner). We use other terms to reference the ESL Academy, other school-specific discourse, and to reflect participants' wording. Throughout, we attend to how welcoming is understood, enacted, and experienced by various of members of the community.

Review of research on migrant and refugee young people in schools

Research shows that newcomer youth "face steeper odds" when compared to other migrants or children of immigrants (Hopkins et al., 2013, p. 286); specifically, they are more likely to live in poverty, endure stress related to family separation and trauma resulting from migration, face language barriers, and discontinue high school (Louie, 2005; Suarez-Orozco, 2009, 2010; Bajaj et al., 2017). In many ways, schools stand as sites of protection against these challenges; in other ways, schools can magnify societal tensions and reproduce trauma through "everyday ruptures" (Hamann & Zuñiga, 2011).

In ethnographic studies of refugee youth transitioning to American high schools, researchers have identified that education exist as a place of hope for students and families in transition. These hopes are often accompanied by high expectations. Individually, refugee students wrestle with complex emotions, such as navigating the feeling that they are one of the few "fortunate" people to have the opportunity they have, and thus have "a moral obligation to those left behind to make the most of their educational opportunities" (McWilliams & Bonet, 2016, p. 160). Thus, excelling academically can be tied up with a sense of obligations to family members and communities in one's country of origin, as well as to new communities in the context of resettlement.

Meanwhile, **schools are the nexus for young people negotiating how they fit into American society, as well as how they and their country of origin are seen by US citizens.** A number of educational studies document the tensions felt by migrant students in developing transnational identities, affiliations, and aspirations. These commitments can be difficult to maintain, given explicit and implicit ways that national identity construction is embedded in school structures and curriculum (Rubin, Abu El-Haj, & Bellino, 2020). Decades of qualitative research set in US schools have demonstrated that migrant students' linguistic, cultural, and affective connections to their countries of origin are frequently ignored or outright rejected (e.g., Hamann & Zuñiga, 2011; Rodriquez, 2020). Gitlin and colleagues (2003) find that acts of welcoming aimed at migrant students can simultaneously reinforce "unwelcoming" when they are underpinned by assimilationist notions that migrants have to "overcome their cultural deficits" (p. 92). Writing about LatinX student experiences, Rodríguez (2020) characterizes immigrant youth experiences of school as sites of "unbelonging" (p. 497; also see Jafee-Walter and Lee, 2018). Collectively, this work underscores the need for educators to

recognize the cultural and linguistic assets that migrant and refugee youth carry, while acting as"border brokers" (Sepúlveda, 2017), bridging knowledge, skills, and networks of care that are relevant across borders, rather than solely within a particular national context (Hamann & Zuñiga, 2021).

Schools serving large populations of migrant and newcomer young people have honed a set of practices aimed at educational equity, supporting students' academic and socioemotional wellbeing. Bajaj, Bartlett, Mendenhall, and other colleagues have explored schools embedded in The Internationals Network, positing four tenets of "critical transnational curriculum": embracing diversity as a learning opportunity, translanguaging, including opportunities for civic engagement and active participation, and supporting multidirectional aspirations (Bajaj & Bartlett, 2017). In a multiyear investigation of Canadian schools with high newcomer refugee student populations, researchers highlight universal design, differentiated instruction, as well as trauma sensitivity and "conflict awareness," i.e., an understanding of the conflict contexts from which students are arriving (Stewart & Martin, 2018). Though these studies are centered on meeting the needs of newcomer and EL students, the practices identified have relevance to all learners in that they place value on diversity and cultural wealth in the community, foster greater student involvement in their learning, and allow for deeper connections to students' lived experiences (Yosso, 2005).

Extracurricular opportunities have also emerged as an important space within schools for attending to migrant and newcomer students' experiences. In Abu El-Haj's (2007) study of Palestinean American youth, she found that engaging in activities outside formal learning spaces offered students a space to reflect critically on the meaning of democratic citizenship, particularly during a time of heightened Islamophobia. Mendenhall and Bartlett (2018) found that extracurricular opportunities helped newcomer students

> *to feel more comfortable in their new country, to make new friends, to learn to interact with people from different backgrounds, and to manage stress that they were experiencing as a result of their new circumstances or that they felt at home as parents and other caregivers were also struggling to acclimate to their new surroundings (114).*

Social support can be fundamental to developing a sense of connection and belonging for young people, particularly during adolescence. Wills and Shinar (2000) define social support as when others "can listen sympathetically when an individual is having problems and can provide indications of caring and acceptance" (p. 88). Adolescents see their peers as a source of emotional, informational, and foremost, social support (Bokhorst et al., 2010; Hombrados-Mendieta, et al., 2012). The role of social support may be one reason that non-formal spaces such as extracurricular activities continue to emerge as important to migrant students' sense of belonging at school. They may also constitute spaces where students have greater opportunities to exercise their autonomy, supporting Gozdziak's (2015) finding that "successful integration [of migrant students] depends on the *empowerment* of immigrant youth" (p. 72).

Research Context

Changing Demographics at MHS and Adapting to Need

In 2012, at the start of the civil war in Yemen, Yemeni families began moving to the MelNAP School District, leading to an influx of newcomer students to MHS. For over a decade, the Republic of Yemen has been torn apart by armed conflict and unrest, forcibly displacing millions of Yemenis who continue to seek asylum in other countries. Famine has exacerbated already fragile conditions, leaving young people particularly vulnerable. Children growing up in these conditions are at risk of becoming involved in forced labor recruited into armed forces, or other forms of exploitation. School access is precarious. Many times, school buildings are rendered unusable after being destroyed by airstrikes (funded by the US and other imperial powers) or occupied by soldiers (UNICEF, 2019), thus schools are sites of physical violence for many Yemeni children and are not experienced as protective spaces.

Coming from different contexts– also impacted by violence– growing numbers of young people have left their homes in Central America and Mexico to seek security, reunify with family members, and access higher quality educational opportunities. Most recently, MHS welcomed their first Venezuelan student, joining the nearly 6 million Venezuelans displaced from their homes globally due to a protracted economic and humanitarian crisis. Though large numbers of young people and families fleeing these contexts register for asylum, the conditions of conflict and insecurity in their countries of origin are less likely to be recognized as eligible for asylum in the US. We cannot honor the complexity and diversity of experiences within each of these national groups here, however we posit that there are likely important experiential and status differences between migrant students that impact their sense of long-term security and belonging.

Per our conversations with Principal Vranesich and Ms. Katie Lewis, the portion of ELs enrolled at MHS increased from 45% in 2017 to 72% in 2020.

Although MHS had always considered themselves a diverse school environment, the addition of multilingual learners in a short period of time necessitated dramatic shifts in school structure and personnel.

MHS leaders leveraged state aid towards the strategic building of an ESL program, and actively sought to hire bilingual teachers. The ESL program has expanded over the years as the newcomer population continued to grow. The ESL Academy in place today includes a three-tiered approach to instruction: English Language Development, Bridge, and Sheltered English Learning/Immersion. Teachers differentiate between students who are more advanced in their English proficiency and those who need basic reading, writing, and arithmetic instruction. This difficult distinction demands further responsibility from teachers. In response, MHS has adapted the Multi-Tiered Systems of Support framework to support students in various forms including interventions, screenings, assessments, and parent involvement, all of which are intended to directly address students' individual challenges and needs. Despite the diversity of students' academic and language proficiency, MHS still anticipates that students will graduate in four years, signaling the school's ability to rise to the challenge of meeting students' academic needs. MHS staff have also dedicated their energy towards welcoming efforts by incorporating cultural awareness, cultural

representation in classroom content, inclusion of family and parents, and a wealth of resources necessary to students' academic success.

The United States is heavily polarized, and immigration remains a polarizing issue nationally. Consequently, violent and obstructive rhetoric has presented migrants with hostile environments in which they are forced to contend with xenophobia, anti-Blackness, anti-immigrant racism, and Islamophobia. These hostile acts of unwelcoming complicate efforts taking place within schools to support migrant and newcomer students. This "ethos of reception" (Suárez-Orozco & Suárez-Orozco, 2004) shapes migrant experiences, both inside and outside of schools.

COVID-19: Upheaval and Exacerbation of Existing Inequalities

The global COVID-19 pandemic has been, in many ways, a shock to the system—healthcare systems, schools, and all aspects of civic life have been interrupted—with the impact most felt by minoritized students (Kendi, 2020). The pandemic illuminated ways the United States systematically harms minorities–a reminder that we must not simply return to normal, accepting conditions prior to the start of the pandemic (Love, 2020) As the pandemic continues through the "fourth wave," supports that were offered to families at the beginning of the pandemic have been removed. For example, in the city of Melvindale, water shutoffs have been re-instituted for families that cannot pay for utilities after the state moratorium on shut-offs was lifted (Suchyta, 2021). Additionally, as schools moved fully online in 2020, differential access to technology and online learning resources have meant students with less means had to learn outside their homes (Salinas, 2020). MHS, like many other schools, sent technological resources home in hopes of supporting students in their schooling; however, these supports are unable to address the greater technological inequities and needs for families with poor or unreliable internet access (Rutgers GSE, 2020).

MHS still faces COVID-related challenges as they have returned to in-person learning in fall 2021, including staff shortages for substitute teachers. In conversations with staff and teachers, we learned that support staff for EL students has often been pulled to help cover classes as needed. Additionally, the district has felt the impacts of the national school bus driver shortage, which has led to the suspension of bus transportation for students (Stein, 2021). Daily routines and the nature of everyday interactions have shifted. In addition to masking and social distancing, lunch is now scattered throughout the school building. Class instruction includes virtual components. Teachers and students are engaged in disciplinary discourse to ensure adherence to the school's mask policy. Administrators monitor seating arrangements and communicate regularly with concerned families about precautions and strategies aimed at mitigating spread. And there are collective efforts to ensure students' access to learning virtually during mandatory quarantines for infected individuals and close contacts. A source of frustration is that most of these actions–though critical to individual and collective safety–continue to disrupt teaching and learning. Fostering a welcoming school environment has become more challenging. The 2020 report written by the U-M team anticipated that, "the nature, practices, and meaning of 'welcoming' is likely to shift and take on new forms in online learning environments in the context of the global pandemic" (Bellino et al., p. 20). Though not the primary focus of our inquiry, we gain some insights into these shifts.

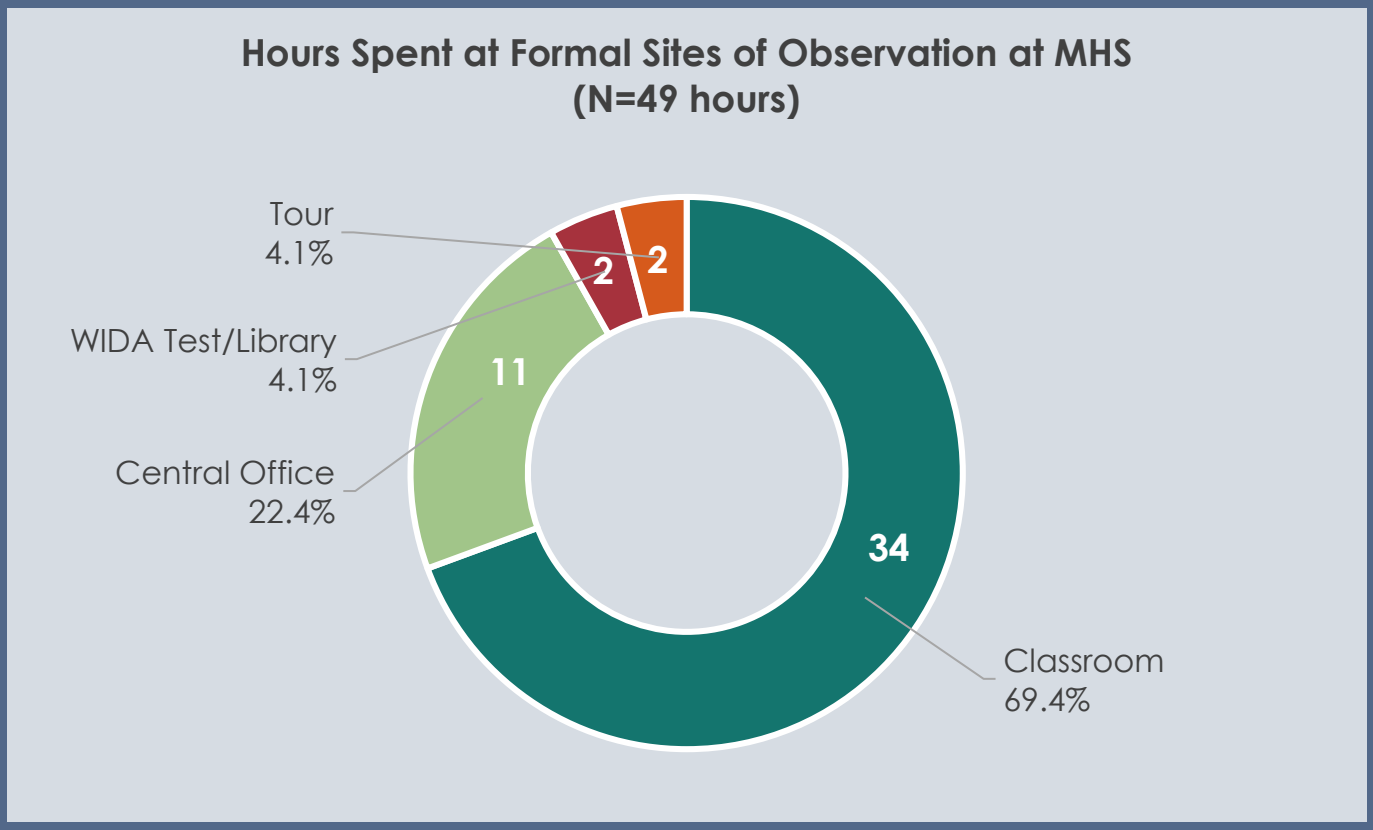
Research Methods

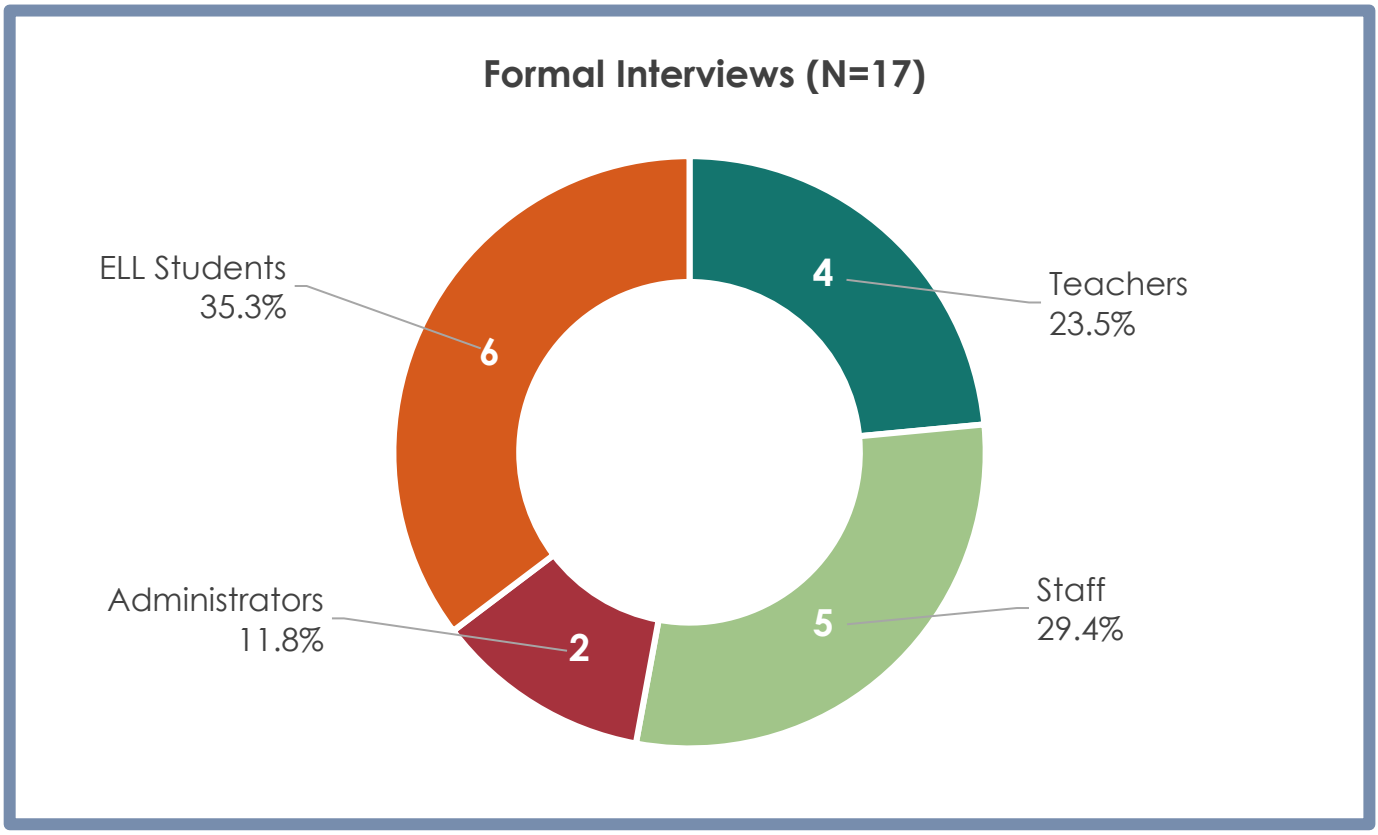
From September to November 2021, our team engaged in approximately forty hours of participant observation and conducted semi-structured interviews with MHS faculty, staff, and current EL students. The research questions were constructed with the goals of the MHS leadership team in mind and refined through an ongoing, progressive process that considered likely modes of data collection (Maxwell, 2013, pp. 14-15). Three inquiry questions guided our study:

1) **How do MHS teachers, staff, and administrators seek to establish a welcoming environment for new students?**
2) **How do students describe their first impressions and experiences at MHS?**
3) **How do these various actors feel the process of initial welcoming can be improved?**

Observation Sites

Observations took place in the classrooms of five teachers currently instructing English Language Academy and Bridge courses, public school spaces (hallways, library, lunchroom), offices, and during a student-facilitated school tour. By observing and participating in classes, meetings, and other routine elements of a school day at MHS, we hoped to better understand what it means to experience "the quotidian as well as the unusual occurrences" as regular members of MHS might recognize them (Sarroub, 2002, p. 2). We limited the duration of our data collection in order to ensure ethical and methodological preparation and reflection throughout all stages of this collaboration. We recognize that often an important dimension of ethnographic methods is long-term immersion in a particular setting. However, having a concentrated snapshot of the MHS context is a generative perspective (Lightfoot, 1983; Pink and Morgan, 2013). Our short visits were layered with consideration, discussion, and analysis outside of MHS. Participant observation provided common experiential ground from which we could better understand "local meaning," that is, the elements of MHS members' experience that they consider most valuable (Orellana, 2020; Emerson et al., 2011). Participant observation also facilitated our relationships with staff, teachers, and students, opening opportunities for informal interactions with members of the MHS community in naturalistic settings. These informal conversations included students, front office staff, support staff, central office staff, and teachers. Throughout, MHS actors generously shared their experiences and ideas with us. These dialogues allowed us to further contextualize our experiences in the school space and informed our development of interview questions aimed at responding to our research questions.

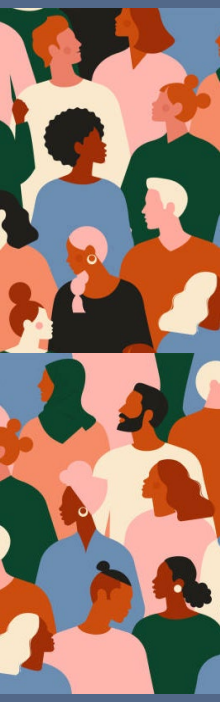




Formal Interviews

Adult interviewees were staff and administrators from MHS, staff from the district central office, and teachers identified as having worked with EL students at MHS. Adult interview participants were recruited via email and Google forms, and interviews were conducted in person or over Zoom. After passive consent was obtained from parents, we sent recruitment emails to student interviewees who were identified by the ESL coordinator as sufficiently fluent in English to navigate a sustained conversation and reflection of school experiences. Only one interviewee was successfully recruited this way, so other students were recruited for ad-hoc interviews while student researchers were on site, with the assistance of the ESL Coordinator. A third group of students was recruited based on the recommendation of teachers. We walked all student participants through an oral consent process prior to beginning interviews.

Interviews were conducted through a semi-structured approach, with team members collaborating to produce interview guides with ordered questions and question types to help direct conversations with interviewees (Patton, 2015; Kvale, 2006). We favored a semi-structured approach to interviewing in order to facilitate "partnership and dialogue" as the interviewer and interviewee "construct[ed] memory, meaning, and experience together" (Madison, 2020, p. 35). The purpose of these interviews was to collect direct narratives from members of the MHS community in response to our core research interests.



Analyzing and Coding Data

The interviews and fieldnotes we conducted generated over 300 pages of data, which we subsequently analyzed. For transparency and collaboration, we stored all of our field notes, memos, transcripts, and other artifacts in a shared Google Drive. Our team was divided into three to four person reading groups to engage in close, critical reading and offer regular commentary. Each member of the research team independently conducted initial coding through Nvivo and Google Docs using an iterative coding process, including "open" and "focused" coding of our own field notes and interview transcripts. We also documented our methodological insights and tensions in reflective and analytic memos. After two consensus coding meetings, we assembled a shared codebook with codes clustered around broad areas of school practice, such as onboarding and instructional strategies. We then examined themes within each of these categories, such as teachers reflecting on practices that supported or impeded newcomer inclusion in the school. Distinct codes emerged as we examined student data, such as loneliness, accessing supports, and academic aspirations. Practices aimed at showing or experiencing care resonated across all actors.

Study Limitations

While we hoped to garner interview data from conversations with thirteen students, we were only able to schedule interviews with six. This was partly due to difficulties recruiting students through email and time constraints around data collection. Notably, while one member of our team was able to conduct an interview in a student's first language (Spanish), no members of our team spoke Arabic. This was also a barrier during classroom observations and informal interactions as well, given the frequency of translanguaging practices as an instructional and relational strategy in the school. Since students were selected for interviews, in part, based on their English proficiency, the data excludes a valuable subset of students whose voices might hold particular relevance to understanding the onboarding process and experiences of welcoming. Future research can account for this limitation by introducing Arabic translation during interviews or by collecting expressive arts data.

Additionally, while the focus of our research questions explored the nature of students' initial interactions with MHS, our observational data was mostly collected in classroom settings, rather than those where initial onboarding meetings occur. This was intentionally done out of respect for the sensitive nature of students' and family's initial interactions with the school. Additionally, our school-based observations began just after peak enrollment; thus fewer students were engaging in onboarding processes. These conditions led us to rely heavily on participants' retrospective, self-reported testimony about their experiences with this process. Most of the students interviewed had been at MHS for at least two years. Perhaps due to this time gap, some students have limited memory of their thoughts, feelings, and experiences from their initial interactions with the school.

Finally, as noted previously, the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic affected the context and routines of schooling at MHS. While our findings acknowledge COVID's presence as an important contextual factor to our study, this report does not make definitive statements about the impact of the pandemic on the newcomer experience, potentially another site for future exploration.

Findings

Findings

Theme 1 – Onboarding: The "First Face"

We begin this section with a descriptive overview of the onboarding process, including practices observed and perspectives shared by staff who participate in this initial school-family interaction, specifically working with newcomer and migrant populations. **We demonstrate that actors involved in the onboarding process see their work as critically linked to honoring young peoples' right to education and the inclusion of migrants in schools and communities.**

Theme 2 – Student Experiences as Newcomers

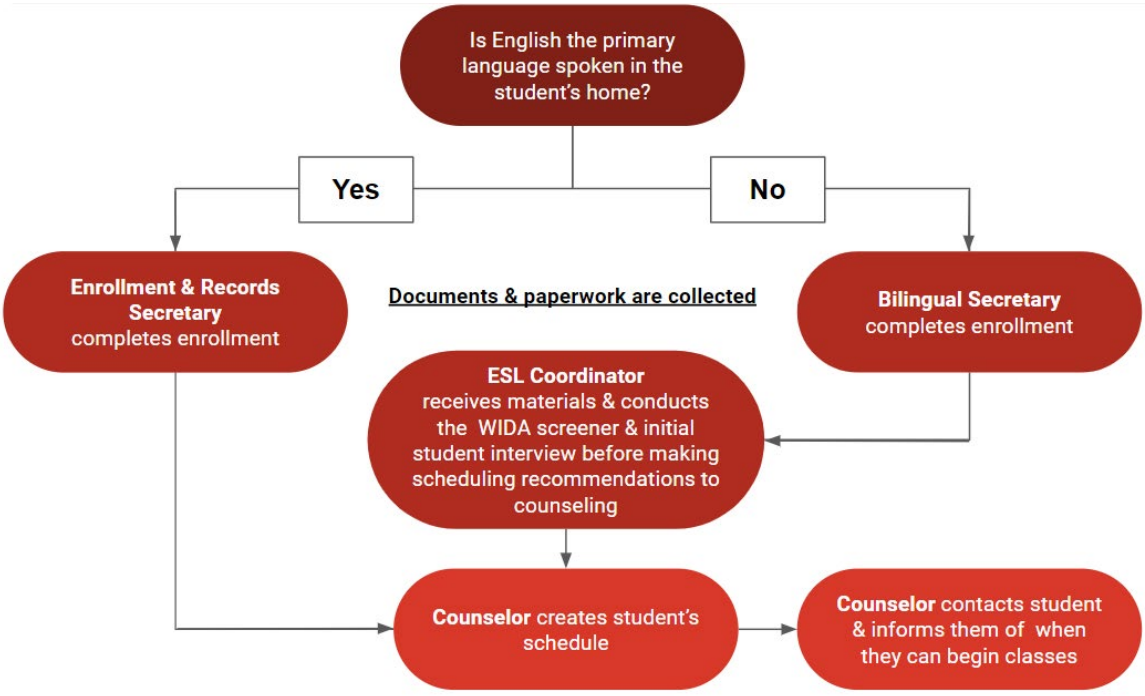
After describing the initial onboarding process, we turn to newcomer students' perspectives, as they reflect on their experiences to date at MHS. Across our conversations with newcomers, **we found shared challenges attributed to language barriers, feelings of isolation, emotional weight, and a perceived inability to ask for help. Despite these challenges, we also observed a strong sense of determination in newcomer students to surmount obstacles, learn English, and excel in their studies.**

Theme 3 – Intentional Strategies

Following this section, we highlight four practices which MHS actors (teachers, staff, and administrators) draw upon to create and uphold a welcoming environment for newcomers in which they are supported academically and socially. **We observed intentional practices such as translanguaging, honoring students' cultural identities and backgrounds, showing care, and leveraging synergistic relationships across formal instructional spaces and informal and extracurricular spaces.** Together these practices offer a portrait of how school actors work together to extend welcoming beyond onboarding, into everyday interactions.

THEME 1
Onboarding: The "First Face"

In our time at Melvindale, we were able to gain insights into enrollment, one of the earliest stages of student and family interactions in the district. Enrollment is the process through which families complete paperwork and submit required documentation so that their students can attend classes. The following diagram presents a streamlined representation of how students and families move through the registration process, and the individuals they interact with at each juncture:



Before newcomers can begin attending MHS, they first are routed to the Bilingual Secretary who collects documentation and paperwork. This position was created two years ago as a means to better serve the district's increasing population of predominantly Arabic-speaking newcomers and their families. Although the influx of newcomers has increased strain on the main actors in the enrollment process, school and district staff have found ways to meet students' needs, particularly through translanguaging, fostering synergies, and leveraging their collective knowledge of policies and supports to facilitate enrollment for families.

Prior to hiring a bilingual secretary, enrollment staff used informal strategies to fill in language gaps as best they could, such as memorizing key words and phrases in Arabic. Staff expressed uncertainty about how effective these strategies were for families. The now consistent presence of Arabic-speaking teachers and staff has been especially important in alleviating both the bureaucratic and socioemotional processes of enrollment for all actors. As one staff member shared, "I think it's easier on the parents when they're doing the enrollment, and it is. Then they have that person that they can assimilate with and who understands what they're talking about. 'Cause I used to have words written down, like from my enrollment pads. I just have

certain words, like birth date, birthplace and you know, address, birth certificate. So I knew how to ask, you know, I could just have the word written down and try to say it and then you know then they would kind of say 'Oh ok"' (Interview with staff, 10.27.21). An Arabic-speaking staff member affirmed this connection, stating, "I mean culture is strong. It ties people together, I feel. Being able to speak their language and communicate with them, I feel so honored. I feel like I am their voice, like if I don't speak out for them, who else is going to speak out for them? And I think [about] the kids…in a strange new country, in a strange new environment" (Interview with staff, 11.5.21). The staff we interviewed and observed shared a commitment to helping and advocating for newcomers; as we will later report, this sentiment also aligns with students' expressed desires to have adults and peers with whom they can communicate in their first language. While more support resources exist for Arabic speakers than other ELs, one staff member also shared that they utilize their limited knowledge of Spanish to support Spanish speaking ELs as well. When these efforts fall short, they utilize translation services available through ACCESS, a local social services organization.

Open and interconnected communication channels increase synergy amongst enrollment staff located in different spaces, namely linking school and central office. When staff meet barriers in communicating with families, they feel they can call on others in the building or the district for help (Staff interview, 10.27.21) and are met with affirming responses like, "I don't mind if you call me. I am more than happy to translate" (Staff interview, 11.5.21). As often as possible during the busy school day, faculty and staff work together to support each other in assisting students and families. This collaboration is essential as students and families often first encounter their new schooling system through enrollment. Understanding the weight of these interactions, enrollment staff are dedicated to establishing a sense of care and welcoming for newcomers, often during relatively brief interactions. One staff member noted that many newcomer families and students need assurance of their safety, especially after arriving from countries where they have experienced significant trauma and threats to their safety. Consequently, this staff member said that they wait at the door for newcomers' arrival, smile when they meet, and talk to students about their lives so they know someone is "interested in their well-being and their safety" (Staff interview, 10.28.21). Another expressed, "I love this school district...I feel like we do so much for our bilingual population, so much for our immigrants" (Staff interview, 11.5.21). Before students begin their first day of classes, there already is a network of support amongst staff intended to ease students' transition into their new schools. Though some of the actors in the enrollment process lose touch with students following registration, they begin laying a foundation for ensuring students and families feel welcome as they embark on a new journey in a new place.

Actors in these roles acknowledged this by noting that they were the "first face" or "first point of human contact" for students navigating the process of entering a new community (Staff interviews: 11.5.21; 11.15.21). They also spoke with pride about playing a critical role at a difficult juncture in families' transnational migration, with one actor noting enthusiastically, "To be honest with you, it's a very difficult position, but I love it. I love being able to help these families, I love being there for them and knowing that I'm needed" (Staff interview, 11.05.21). Importantly, the "difficult" nature of the position reflects areas of tension experienced by staff during the enrollment process. Namely, during the early months of the school year (August through late September), onboarding actors experience intense workload periods that are exacerbated by increasingly high enrollment and re-enrollment of newcomers, as well as difficulties that arise due to limited translators and resources available in families' home languages. We consider these challenges and potential steps for addressing them in the recommendations section.

THEME 2 – Student Experiences as Newcomers

In our dialogues with students, they focused on their earliest experiences as newcomers learning to navigate an American schooling context – a process rife with tensions between students' desires for academic and social advancement and the difficulties experienced amid linguistic and other barriers. From these discussions, we began developing a clearer understanding of newcomers' experiences and found a number of parallels in their reflections.

We find that:

1) **perceived or actual language barriers create a sense of isolation for newcomers accompanied by negative emotions,**

2) **help-seeking behaviors and self-agency can be difficult or require time to learn, and**

3) **newcomers have a strong internal motivation to improve their academic performance. Their collective comments demonstrate the importance of positioning welcoming as an initial step in a longer process aimed at achieving a greater sense of belonging.**

Feelings of Isolation and Language Barriers

Across our interviews with newcomers, each student signaled the importance of friendships and the hardships of not having close peer relationships when arriving at a new school. One student reflected, "I think what made it bad for me with the first days…it's because I didn't know anyone. So I think if I had friends in here, it would be much better, and I would not…[be] facing those challenges" (Grade 11, 11.18.21). Newcomers face a unique challenge in their desires to have supportive peer relationships—their inability to understand English speakers and English speakers' inability to understand them. As one student noted, "Like… for three months, I felt very bad, because I missed my friends, my family. And when I come to school, I don't understand anything, people talk to me, and I don't understand. I don't understand what you say, and it's very difficult. (Grade 10, 11.19.21). Specifically, in our discussions with native Spanish speakers, we learned these potential language barriers can become actualized, largely due to the lack of Spanish speakers in the building. As one student shared, "You know that when you enter classes, it is not your own language. I do not know whether to say that it is like another world, but you will not know, you will not understand. And you go into the school, everyone talks, and you won't understand" (Grade 9, 11.19.21). For another student, the realities of a language barrier hindered their participation in athletics. They explained, "I want to go to the volleyball team,

but on the first day, the coach talk to me, and I don't understand. And then I don't go anymore" (Grade 10, 11.19.21). Feeling they would face challenges understanding the coach, the student chose not to participate in an extracurricular activity, which could have brought them closer to the social connections and sense of belonging many newcomers need. While the previous student indicated the linguistic challenges presented in their misunderstanding of others, another student shared a contrasting experience, noting, "It's my first time in America, so, yeah, I didn't know anything about the English and only a little bit of English. Right. So I was like, I understand them, but I can't tell them anything. I understood" (Grade 10, 11.19.21). Juxtaposing these students' reflections demonstrates a two-way tension for newcomers attempting to communicate meaningfully with their peers and build relationships both in initial encounters and ongoing interactions. Even so, newcomers are working hard to improve their English skills so that they have access to more expansive social, academic, and extracurricular horizons.

In addition to naming a sense of isolation as common in their experiences, newcomers also attached concerns about communication to specific emotions, namely sadness, fear, embarrassment, and otherness. One student reflected, "So, the first time I came to Melvindale, I was scared. I was really scared that I, when I met an American student, and he start to talk to me, how am I going to respond to him?" (Grade 11, 11.18.21). Another noted, "I was excited...to start speaking English, but I was...embarrassed...like if I start speaking English they'll look at me; they'll see me [as someone] who doesn't speak English" (Grade 11, 11.18.21). Another describes the experience of their first three months at school by saying, "Every time I go, I cry. I feel sad" (Grade 10, 11.19.21).

These reflections point to an intersection of separation and isolation for immigrant students that carries impactful emotional implications for these students. Though these students expressed an interest in developing their English proficiency and interacting with native English speakers, language barriers created apprehension around social interactions.

Moving to a new country comes with the burdens of separating (spatially) from networks of friends and family. Meanwhile, arriving in a new place where students have not yet formed peer relationships and may struggle to build them contributes to further isolation.

Perceived Inability to Ask for Help

The final thread binding the difficulties newcomers faced in transitioning to their new school is their perceived inability to access help, particularly due to language barriers. One native Arabic speaker recalled feeling "scared" about the prospect of asking help from their teachers. They shared, "I was like, 'What about teachers? What if I don't have Arabic teachers? How can I like...ask questions? ...I want to ask, but I couldn't" (Grade 11, 11.18.21). Without assurance that their teachers would speak Arabic, the student foresaw obstacles to advocating for the help they would need. Returning to the more nuanced reflections differentiating experiences among Spanish speakers and Arabic speakers, a native Spanish speaker corroborated this experience, noting, "When I have a question or something, I'm sitting quiet because I don't know how to explain to them" (Grade 10, 11.19.21). Though we see parallels in students' concerns about accessing help, for Spanish speakers, especially without the support of Spanish-speaking peers or teachers, an inability to access help shifts from potential to actual. **Many newcomers feel unable to ask for the support they need or want, potentially impacting student learning.**

Surmounting Obstacles: "We Were Like That When We Came Here"

Though newcomers faced a range of challenges, they also shared how they are focused on their futures and actively working to improve their English proficiency. For example, one student reflected, "Every day, I think about my future. Like, I'm really interested, like in my education and in my future. Same thing. We were like that when we came here" (Grade 11, 11.18.21). Other students echoed this sense of dedication; one noted that their favorite class is ELA because they "love to learn more English" (Grade 10, 11.19.21). Another stated that they "try to improve [their English] every day" (Grade 10, 11.19.21). An additional student expressed that, "Everything is in English here, but it is good for you to learn more" (Grade 9, 11.19.21). Collectively, these students remind us that despite overcoming exceptional economic, social, political, and educational hardships, newcomers are dedicated to excelling academically, and understand educational success as linked to future opportunities. Moreover, they make efforts to establish this self-motivation as individualized, as something they brought with them "when they came," before entering MHS. Every day, these students are striving to fulfill their hopes (and their families' hopes).

Helping newcomers achieve a sense of belonging is a vital step in acknowledging their assets, past and present, and amplifying their possibilities in and beyond schools.

THEME 3 – Intentional Strategies

Translanguaging

As soon as one enters the MHS building, there are visible markers of the value placed on multilingualism. Signs are displayed inside classrooms and throughout school spaces to welcome students, direct them to sections of the building, and orient them to rules and norms, with text in English, Arabic, and Spanish. Teachers, staff, and administrators make active efforts to communicate with students in both formal and informal settings, moving between English and ELs' native languages, even when their knowledge is limited to integrating single words or phrases. We observed acts of translanguaging as a regular classroom practice. Teachers include Arabic and Spanish in assignment instructions, class activities, and as a mode for student engagement and collaboration. For example, during a lesson on parts of speech, the teacher displayed a slide including the definition of *noun* in English, Arabic, and Spanish. She then called on a student volunteer to read the Arabic portion. Every student in attendance was a native Arabic speaker, likely benefitting from the opportunity to hear the definition in their native language. Luisa was the only Spanish speaker in the room. Nonetheless, the teacher called on Luisa to read the Spanish portion of the text aloud to the full class. She then checked with Luisa to see if the translation was good, and Luisa agreed that it was (Classroom Observation, 10.22.21). This instance shows the ways that **native language usage can support students' language learning and academic instruction, while also placing value on diverse linguistic assets**. Despite that Luisa was the only student who would understand the Spanish language text, the teacher embraced this moment to incorporate Luisa's voice and linguistic assets into the lesson. Encouraging Luisa to share transformed this moment into a significant act of care. We observed similar instances in other classrooms, with teachers inviting students to engage in translanguaging during group work. After outlining a task, the teacher addressed the class, inviting them to "Talk to your friends at your table. You can talk in Arabic, English, whatever you know." (Classroom Observation, 10.14.21).

Native language usage can support students' language learning and academic instruction, while also placing value on diverse linguistic assets

Honoring Students' Cultural Identities and Backgrounds

Apart from translanguaging methods, we have observed various ways in which instructors and others at MHS seek to acknowledge students' cultural identities. Significant examples include Culture Day, which is already in its fourth year, the establishment of an informal teatime for Yemeni newcomers, and the newly established Diversity Club, which promotes student

togetherness and recognition of distinct identities and experiences. At times, teachers struggled with ways to honor newcomers' backgrounds in authentic ways while not contributing to further isolation. For example, Nora Alata reflected,

> "I ran a coffee/tea club in which students brought tea and sweets. Then we'd sit down, listen to music, and talk about different topics—what's bothering us, and solutions. I would love to bring that back, but not only them and isolate them [Yemeni newcomer students], have other students join them, and talk more. To speak more with other kids.(10.22.21)."

We observed several instances where teachers made explicit efforts to connect their lesson to students' cultural knowledge or critical reference points. For example, during a lesson focused on prohibition in the US, the teacher began, "The subject of class today is the prohibition era," then prompted students to consider the substance legality differences between the US and Yemen with alcohol and Khat (a plant similar to chewing tobacco). One of the male students described it as "like energy drink," saying that there weren't any adverse side effects to it. A girl from the back row responded that it was "bad for your teeth," which the teacher latched onto in terms of some of the negative consequences. One of the two male students in front commented that khat farming takes up a lot of water and space. (Classroom observation, 10.25.21). The questions posed by the teacher created an opportunity for students to consider the content of the lesson through a comparative lens, drawing on cultural knowledge familiar to many newcomers in the room. Simultaneously, this interaction positioned newcomer students as experts capable of teaching others, a dynamic this teacher valued, as they reflected, "I think being a good teacher is also being a good learner, and showing kids how to learn... So kind of putting yourself on their level, like 'look like I respect your culture, I know and appreciate that you're here. What can I learn from you?' You know, 'what can you teach me?'" Along with the larger welcoming gestures that are frequently seen at MHS, we draw attention here to these everyday interactions, which students referenced as practices that made them feel seen and heard in their school.

Showing Care

Another practice that was apparent across our observations and conversations with faculty and administration was a dedication to showing the students that the adults at MHS care about them. When referencing welcoming new students, one administrator noted, "I try to go in and give them that same warmth that I want the teachers to give. I say, 'I'm so happy you're here. You have no idea how lucky we are that you ended up here. And please let me know [if you need anything], and here's my office.'" (Administrator, 11.01.21) Another administrator phrased it differently, stating that when interacting with students, "You've got to make sure that they know that they're loved and respected" (Administrator, 10.28.21). This dedication to ensuring that students feel cared for was also reflected in the ways that teachers organized their classes. One teacher explained, "[W]e try to be respectful and kind to each other in that classroom because everybody deserves to be treated with dignity and respect" (11.10.21). These statements reflect a shared commitment to kindness, respect, appreciation, and an openness to helping students as ways of demonstrating care.

Some of the aspects of showing care manifested themselves in large and small ways within classrooms. Attempts to demonstrate care included small acts of conscientiousness, such as how one teacher responded to students' reactions to turning on a light: "When the teacher turns on the lights after showing something on the projector, the whole class groans and one student says, "ah my eyes!!" The next time the teacher flips the lights on, they give everyone a 1-2-3 warning." (10.26.21). Although an act such as giving a countdown before turning on a light can seem mundane on the surface, there is respect for students' wishes and needs implicit in the act. The teacher demonstrates to the students that when they express a desire, the teacher takes it seriously and acts accordingly. Teachers also demonstrated care for students by explicitly stating their appreciation for them. At the end of class, one teacher told the students, "Thank you so much for your wonderful work. Give yourselves a round of applause. I loved the way you worked" (11.07.21). Here, the teacher vocalizes her gratitude for the students' work in such a way that communicates the teacher's love and appreciation for the students, as well as encouraging the students to appreciate themselves.

Taking Advantage of Synergies

We observed synergistic relationships among members of the MHS community that served to create a welcoming environment, and which educators actively leveraged in order to enhance social and academic dimensions of schooling for newcomer students. MHS staff actively drew upon one another's personal and professional skills to better support student welcoming. As a staff member put it, "if I need help, I usually find somebody who can translate for me…We get a lot of parents that'll come in… I can try to help them as much as I can, but I can't always—so sometimes I'll grab a teacher if they're available, or support staff will come and help me" (Staff, 10.27.21). Such collaborative relationships were also observed among teachers, who reflected on how they actively collaborated with co-workers with skillsets that complemented their own. For example, one teacher talked of setting aside a day to plan classes with another teacher who had more experience teaching ELs (10.22.21). Similarly, another Arabic-speaking teacher talked of how she helped non-Arabic speaking teachers translate key words and concepts that came up frequently in class from English (Teacher, 10.29.21). In this way, MHS staff and teachers took time out of their busy schedules to help one another in their efforts to better support various aspects of the student experience.

Finally, these synergistic relationships were observed among teachers and students, as well as among students themselves. For example, we observed an advanced MHS student supporting an ESL teacher in classroom instruction. The teacher openly praised the student for supporting other students' English learning. They added that the student served as a role model for other EL students. The teacher made this clear, addressing the class to share, "our goal is to become him" (Class Observation, 11.10.21). Synergies were also present at the student-to-student level, mostly with regards to translanguaging. Students were supportive of each other's learning, teaching words in English as well as in their own native languages (e.g., Spanish students teaching Arabic students words in Spanish).

It is important to note that none of these synergistic interactions were forced upon staff, teachers, or students by administration. Interviews with MHS actors revealed that they saw these synergistic relationships as "organically grown" (Teacher, 10.22.21). One staff member referred to "the Melvindale family" (Staff, 10.28.21). Synergistic relationships emerge from, and are sustained by, a strong culture of care and support.

Areas for Growth + Related Recommendations

Our experiences with teachers, staff, administrators, and students have shown us many of the ways actors across MHS seek to build and maintain robust support networks to meet the multifaceted needs of newcomer students. Simultaneously, they have shown us where these support networks could be intentionally grown to further meet the needs of newcomer students and help them feel a greater sense of belonging, both during their initial transition and throughout their time in school.

Three areas of growth we identified are:

1) **reducing barriers that drive newcomer isolation,**
2) **distributing onboarding responsibilities across actors, and**
3) **increasing professional learning opportunities that respond to EL and newcomer student needs.**

RECOMMENDATION 1: Reducing Barriers that Drive Newcomer Isolation

As discussed above, **real and perceived language barriers impede a sense of newcomer belonging, particularly in students' first days, weeks, and in some cases months at the school. In turn, these barriers contribute to challenges in forming close peer relationships, apprehension around social interactions with students and staff, and difficulty identifying and accessing needed supports.** To expand the peer and support networks, we propose the following interconnected recommendations.

Establish a Peer Mentorship Program

Studies show that young people turn to their peers as vital sources of emotional, informational, and social support in high school settings (Bokhorst et al., 2010; Hombrados-Mendieta et al., 2012). MHS has been engaging the expertise of students in support roles through the student instructional aids in the Education Foundations class. This existing foundation could be leveraged toward what one teacher described as "a mentorship program…with, you know, people who speak the same language as you, maybe like upperclassmen, kind of like a buddy system" (Teacher, 11.1.21). Connecting more established students at MHS– particularly those who have navigated the transition of being a newcomer themselves–with (soon) arriving newcomers who share a native language could represent a significant expansion of the existing support structures at MHS geared toward reducing the initial feelings of isolation experienced by newcomers. **Student interviews demonstrate that any efforts MHS can make to reduce the time for newcomers to make their first friends would go a long way in establishing a sense of connection at the outset. Peer networks have also emerged as central to orienting newcomer students to existing supports, as well as social and academic opportunities at MHS**. The establishment of a peer-peer mentoring program, and a process-oriented study aimed at understanding how it is functioning towards intended goals could be a fruitful site for future MHS-U-M collaborations.

Hire More Spanish-Speaking Support Staff

There is recognition amongst staff that Spanish-speaking ELs are a minority that could be better served if additional resources were in place. **Spanish-speaking newcomers in particular identified an inability to access help in classes stemming from language barriers that exist between them, their peers, and their teachers.** Though our observations show teachers' efforts to address these gaps through translanguaging practices, hiring additional Spanish-speaking support staff to assist with in-class instruction could facilitate students' understanding of course content and participation in class.

Formalize Connections to Existing Support Networks

In light of students' expressions of sadness and isolation and newcomers' high risk for PTSD, trauma-informed practice could help teachers, staff, and counselors show care for students. The social workers within MHS serve to provide socio-emotional support to students, however, there does not seem to be a standard around communicating to students and families about social work resources. This may lead to a lack of clarity on how students can access social workers; additionally, it risks perpetuating stigma around mental health. One social worker indicated the importance of "letting students know that the social workers are here...a lot of them do not [know about social work supports]." (10.29.21). For newcomer populations at MHS, this is exacerbated by the absence of an Arabic-speaking social worker, although Ms. Omar stands out as a support teacher with a background as a social worker who could lend support in this area. Connecting all newcomers with one of the social workers or support staff members who speak their native language through routine check-ins, even via email, for the first month after students' arrival could provide newcomers with socio-emotional support in navigating feelings of isolation and other issues they face. Meanwhile this practice could standardize how MHS connects newcomers to social work resources, and reduce stigma by normalizing these interactions. An additional resource that might assist newcomer students is a list of teachers and staff who speak their native language, along with room numbers and contact information.

Research cited above demonstrates that participation in extracurricular activities is a critical opportunity for newcomers to create strong social networks, and often allows for increased interactions across diverse student groups.

MHS has numerous student clubs, sports teams, and other activities that support students' interests; however, the means by which newcomers connect to extracurricular opportunities are often disjointed. One teacher believed that students hear about extracurricular activities through "the informal-like grapevines" (11.01.21), which can make it difficult for newcomers who do not yet have informal networks in place. Our observations of school spaces show that school clubs and extracurricular activities were advertised exclusively in English, which might prevent newcomer ELs from recognizing these as potential spaces for participation. Translating or integrating Arabic and Spanish linguistic markers into these signs could visibly demonstrate that newcomers are welcome in these spaces and formalize how they learn about these opportunities.

RECOMMENDATION 2: Distributing Onboarding Responsibilities

Onboarding staff play a key role in welcoming students and their families into the district and school. This important work falls largely on three staff members across MHS and Central Office, charged with documentation, initial assessment, and placement. The increased enrollment of EL students at MHS has led to more intense workloads for these actors. Katie Lewis noted this in processing how the student population has changed over time: "The capacity of the program has grown enormously, [but] my capacity is the same" (Interview, 10.29.21). Collectively, actors noted a seasonality to the work, noting that enrollments are highest at the start of the school year. One staff member voiced, "The pressure is unbelievable, and I work such incredible hours during those [busy] times," (11.05.21). Furthermore, because of the immediate need to finish onboarding so that students can begin classes on time, the onboarding process is often rushed. One staff member described the rush as "this race through the beginning of the year. It's like you're on a merry-go-round waiting for it to stop, like slow down at least. And that's pretty much the whole month of September until we hit Count Day and then it's like, oh, I can breathe" (10.27.21). This rush adds to the workload experienced by staff involved in the onboarding process and can result in errors such as families referred to Central Office "because they had a name that was Arabic, but there is no Arabic spoken in the home" (Staff interview, 11.5.21).

Paperwork Positions Onboarding Staff as Ad-Hoc Problem Solvers

Paperwork processing is one area that creates more work for onboarding actors. Likewise, it is challenging for families. As one staff member noted, "Our families tend to struggle with things like enrollment paperwork...filling it out and doing it the right way. And literacy; so like not being able to sign their name on a document that asks them to sign their name… all these, very tiny, little details that you kind of take for granted" (10.29.21). **Obtaining the state-required documents to establish residency in the district appears to be the most difficult part of the process for families. As such, enrollment staff serve as a resource for families navigating the challenges of obtaining documentation in their names, a common barrier to enrollment for immigrant families** (Evans et. al, 2020). Because completing paperwork is a time-consuming process, enrollment staff acknowledged that they are "supposed to" advise families to fill out enrollment forms at home or with assistance from ACCESS, a community organization. However, even in situations where staff referred families to external supports, they still assumed responsibility for helping families identify someone who can help them complete the enrollment paperwork. As one actor summarized:

> *It's not like we say, 'Hey, go wherever you need to go. [We say] do you have a family member that can fill it out? Do you have a neighbor that can help you fill it out? If not, here's the number for ACCESS.' I can think of a situation where I had to actually make an appointment for a person at ACCESS* (11.05.21).

Leveraging Community Wealth and Linguistic Resources

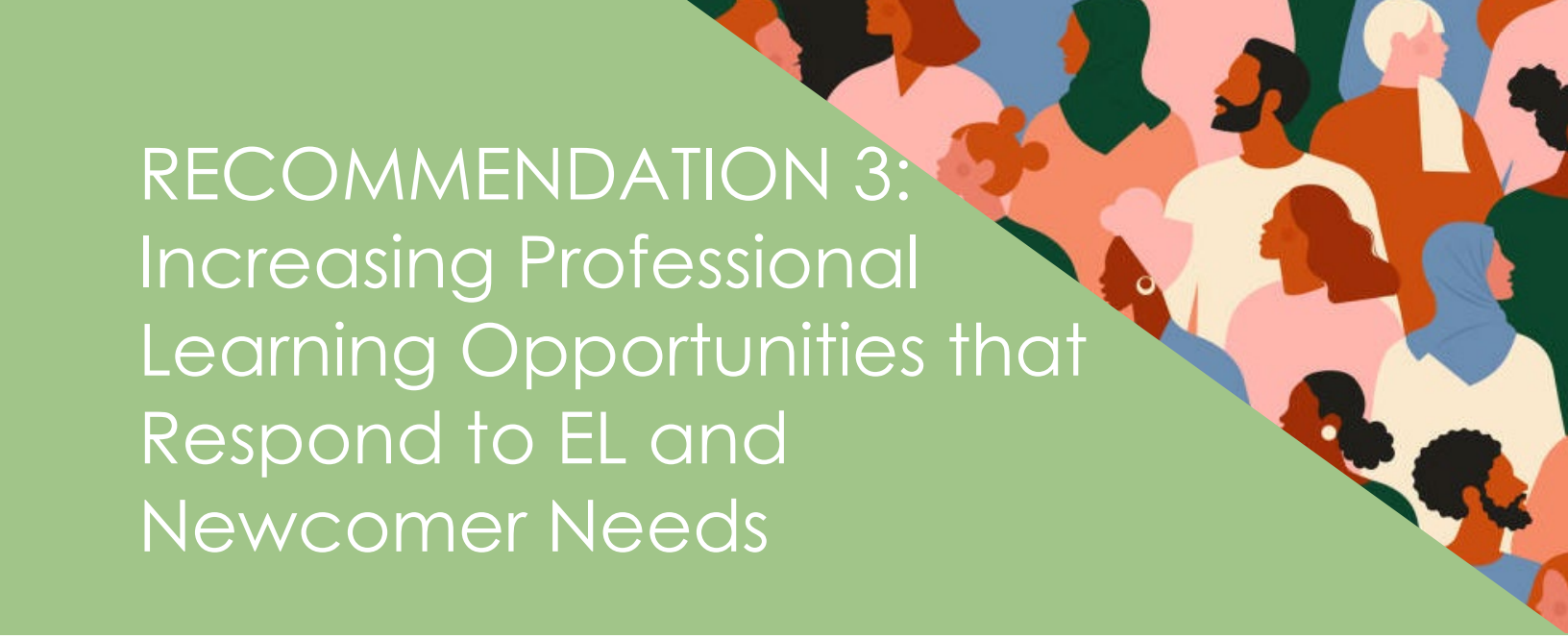
A final challenge we observed during the enrollment process lies in limited language resources for onboarding staff to draw upon. One staff member applauded the district's choice to hire a bilingual Arabic-speaking secretary two years ago, characterizing this move as "stabilizing" the enrollment process for Arabic-speaking families (11.05.21). Meanwhile, Spanish translators appear particularly difficult to schedule as their assistance is limited, especially for the quick, ten-minute walk-ins that are prevalent during the enrollment process. One staff member explained they are resorting to self-study of Spanish to overcome the obstacles in finding consistent Spanish translation resources that they need. They note, "Usually I can call somebody [who speaks Arabic], but Spanish speaking, if Spanish translating support is busy, 'cause they're busy a lot... that's a hard one to get." (10.27.21). However, though Arabic translation support is easier to obtain at MHS, Arabic-speaking staff are often asked to engage in translation work in addition to their regular teaching or staff responsibilities. **Staff have found informal means through which to mediate their ability to communicate with newcomer students and families in their home languages, but additional language expertise could alleviate the workload and role pressure experienced by onboarding actors.** As the district considers hiring a second bilingual secretary to support enrollment, one option is to seek a Spanish-speaking hire to increase the wealth of Spanish-speaking staff in the district.

Multilingual communities possess rich linguistic wealth (Yosso, 2005), which MHS already honors as a valuable resource for supporting enrollment. In relation to providing translation resources for Spanish-speaking families, one actor noted,

> *You know, sometimes magically, there's just somebody else in that office that just pops up. Like the other day, there was a Spanish speaking parent that came in, and it just so happened another Spanish speaking parent was sitting in there, so they were able to help ask [a] question.* (Interview with staff, 10.27.21)

During peak enrollment periods, we recommend that MHS recruit additional multilingual resources from within the community. MHS could recruit bilingual community volunteers to host a "paperwork clinic." The purpose of this clinic would be to provide families with broad support for completing enrollment paperwork or gathering documents prior to arriving at the school or district office to register. We imagine that such events could present opportunities for the school to build relationships with new families and community partners, while strengthening existing ties.

Finally, we observed that enrollment paperwork and document lists are only available in English, which likely increases the need for translation services when enrolling newcomer families. We suggest translating enrollment paperwork and document lists into both Arabic and Spanish and posting both sets of translated documents on the district's website. This will allow families or community partners working with families to preview the materials before arriving to enroll, which may reduce time spent interacting with enrollment staff and the need for translation. We acknowledge that these materials will not increase accessibility for all families. As such, providing translated materials on the district web site is a strategy that should augment, rather than replace, current practices.



RECOMMENDATION 3: Increasing Professional Learning Opportunities that Respond to EL and Newcomer Needs

In our interactions with MHS teachers and staff, professional development arose a number of times as both a point of strength and an area for growth. **Several actors acknowledged that they had insufficient knowledge about student's backgrounds and previous schooling experiences, as well as high-leverage practices for supporting ELs. Others expressed concern that Arabic teachers and staff were serving as important conduits for cultural knowledge, but the staff as a whole needed a deeper understanding of students' conditions in countries of origin and the migration experience.** During a shift in classes, one teacher commented to another that they knew little about students' past experiences in Yemen—about their politics, government, laws, or national history (Classroom Observation, 10.7.21). In some cases, this gap in awareness of students' previous experiences and current situations has led to misunderstandings or misaligned expectations. For example,

> *"certain teachers don't take into account that...these students don't have [certain materials], so they'll go, 'You need to have a binder by tomorrow,' and they're like, 'Oh, I can't get a binder by tomorrow,' you know, so just… educating teachers so that we don't make assumptions about what our students have and don't have. I think that could go a long way."*

Training that highlights trends in students' family circumstances could help teachers make more responsive plans and requests.

Another barrier to professional development is that district trainings are sometimes too broad and not tailored to the needs of newcomers at MHS. Reflecting on this subject, a staff member shared, "We have district-wide PD, and sometimes things like 'cultural awareness' are scheduled.... The ones that we've gotten haven't always been super relevant to…our student population or our needs" (10.29.21). Trauma-informed instructional practices were rarely mentioned, though these practices seem to be more routinely integrated at the middle school and could be extended to the high school context.

Long-term visions for instructional coaching and EL improvement are sometimes set aside due to the demanding and immediate needs of running the ESL program. The ESL Instructional Interventionist is expected to "work with teachers" and "build [teachers'] capacity for working with English Language Learners." However, these elements of the position are often overshadowed by more immediate needs that involve scheduling, testing students' English proficiency, analyzing students' transcripts, and other day-to-day tasks. Some of these tasks overlap in distinct ways with the onboarding process and can cut into the potential for more informative conversations with newcomers students

upon arrival. Reflecting on her position, Katie Lewis explained, "I think that if we took a wider lens...we could split those positions. I think we could say we could use an instructional coach, and we could use an ESL coordinator because I don't have the capacity to do both of those things super effectively" (10.29.21). If the role were split, the Instructional Coach could spend more time with teachers, building capacity, reflecting on practices, and planning for long-term growth. Meanwhile, the ESL Coordinator could focus on the day-to-day tasks of running the ESL program, enhancing the onboarding conversations that take place around initial language assessments.

Importantly, teachers place value on the professional learning opportunities they have through instructional coaching; in some cases, they directly vocalize a need for additional supports. One teacher, citing their lack of experience working with ELs, shared, "I personally feel insecure about my effectiveness" (11.10.21). Though this teacher felt they had gained significantly from internal coaching sessions with Katie, they shared ongoing challenges in managing instruction, particularly around differentiating for students with different levels of exposure and fluency. Freeing up additional time for instructional coaching could allow for more ongoing support, particularly for newer teachers and to support classrooms with students enrolling mid-way through the school year.

Another area for growth around professional learning opportunities is to increase the number of teachers who actively work with the instructional coach. When asked how many teachers work with Katie Lewis on instructional coaching, she estimated it was 12-18 of MHS's 45 teachers, with varying degrees of regularity. She reasoned that this was because teachers in General Education classes did not necessarily see themselves as ESL teachers. However, "an English learner is an English learner until he or she passes with a proficient score on the WIDA" (10.29.21). One teacher emphasized the applicability of ESL instructional strategies to other classes, explaining,

> "...a lot of those strategies are things I use anyway because they're just good teaching practices, such as, you know, repetition, and when you're introducing new vocabulary or new concepts that you've got to have visuals and put it in different contexts and have them repeat, and so—and that's just good teaching. That's something that I think everybody should be doing in every class, regardless."

MHS teachers reflected on the value gained through observations in other classrooms, pointing to the importance of structured time for peer coaching and collaboration. Many MHS teachers already do this informally. Carving out formal time to work together can boost participation for those who are currently less active in seeking out help. Additionally, highlighting and elevating existing effective teacher practices can create learning opportunities for the rest of the faculty.

CLOSING

Even before the onset of COVID and the ongoing accumulation of pandemic-related stressors, educators working closely with migrant students in a climate of increased immigration enforcement found themselves "stressed, overworked, and not sure who to trust" (Sanchez, Freeman, & Martin, 2018). These impacts have been sharply felt by those working in Title I schools, where migrant students are most likely to enroll (Gándara & Ee, 2021). In our review of relevant literature documenting refugee and migrant young people's experiences in US schools, we found abundant scholarship documenting the harmful effects of anti-immigrant racism in the form of xenophobia, anti-Blackness, and Islamophobia on school efforts to build community, students' learning and sense of safety in schools, and teacher wellbeing and capacity to support students. In light of this pattern and **the urgent need to create inclusive, equitable, and just school communities and practices, we advocate for continued efforts to understand what makes MHS a "belonging kind of place," for whom, when and where, and how we can widen the path from welcoming to belonging.**

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