

# 6 Things You Can Do To Welcome Newcomer Students at Schools

**This tip sheet is designed for parents, teachers, and the wider community who want to make their schools a more welcoming place for newcomers, including unaccompanied children.** It shares lessons learned and recommendations from KIND's vast experience helping unaccompanied children with their legal and social services needs, including helping them enroll and succeed in school. *For recommendations for administrators, school districts, and individual schools, or to learn more about unaccompanied children, [click here](#).*

**A positive educational experience shapes the lives of children and ultimately the communities where they live.** Newcomer children, including unaccompanied children, face many barriers in accessing and succeeding in school and can miss vital educational opportunities as a result. Everyone in the community can help to make newcomer children feel welcome and thrive. In turn, newcomer children and families have much to share about their own lives and culture that enriches the community and the learning experience. By working together, school staff, parent-teacher groups, students, and the broader community can help create an inclusive and supportive environment for all students centered on a culture of welcome.

1

## Host or participate in newcomer resource fairs and welcome events

Some school districts, such as those in the [Montgomery County, Maryland](#) district host newcomers resource fairs that offer information about school and county resources. The [Oakland International High School Learning Lab](#) hosts [welcome circles](#) for newcomers. The City of Dallas hosts an annual [Mayor's Back to School Fair](#) that distributes school supplies to children in need. Organizations like KIND host back-to-school events. Big or small, citywide, or just in your local school, these events can help newcomer children and parents learn more about their cities and neighborhoods, feel more comfortable interacting with school staff, and ensure that children have a good start to the school year.



2

## Encourage extracurriculars and support aftercare opportunities

Providing scholarships for aftercare programs, providing transportation, or connecting extracurricular activities to aftercare can make it easier for newcomer children to participate in afterschool events. Engaging newcomer students in extracurricular activities such as soccer or music helps them feel a part of their new school community beyond academics. Waiving fees for these activities such as the participation fee or cost of the uniform helps make these activities accessible to newcomer students. KIND staff have witnessed the positive impact of programs like [Soccer Without Borders](#), which partners with schools to use soccer as a vehicle for building inclusion, confidence, and personal growth.



3

## Learn more about welcoming ideas and opportunities

Initiatives designed to support welcoming schools are taking place across the country. For example, the Oakland Unified School District has created a Newcomer Toolkit with a wide range of resources for educators and created a [Learning Lab](#) to improve education for newcomers. Some school districts, like in Montgomery County, Maryland have a monthly call with service providers to discuss newcomers' needs, resources, and best practices. The [National Newcomers Network](#) offers resources and opportunities to join educators and community members in advocating for better policies in support of newcomer students. Organizations like KIND offer training and guidance on how to best support unaccompanied children in their new community - including in schools.



4

## Develop or support opportunities for mentor and peer support

Newcomer students often benefit from formal and informal mentoring from school staff, community members, or other students. A peer mentor can help newcomers navigate the campus, build relationships, and overcome social challenges. The PTA could work with school staff or the student council to develop and fund such programs. The value of peer support shines through in [this StoryCorps interview](#) with two teenagers originally from Dominican Republic.



5

## Maintain extra school supplies

Newcomer students often arrive mid-year, when back-to-school drives are long past. Where possible, PTAs could help buy extra supplies in bulk to ensure that children always have supplies no matter when they enroll. The PTA could lead a drive for donations or seek donations from organizations and companies to offer free school supplies to newcomer students and other students in need. Read about KIND's back-to-school drives [here](#).



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## Include everyone in welcoming

Groups like [Welcoming America](#) offer a wide range of ideas and resources for making schools more welcoming to everyone, focusing on building shared experiences. International nights, food festivals, and welcoming lesson plans that can help students and families learn from each other.



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