Welcome to Our Schools Curriculum

The CCSD ELL Division is grateful for the generosity of The New York State Office of Temporary and Disability Assistance for providing us the rights to share their *Welcome to Our Schools* curriculum with our teachers. This curriculum was developed for New York Teachers of Refugee students. With this in mind, there are a few lessons that we will be offering adaptation suggestions to address the needs of Newcomer students living in Clark County.

When deciding what modules to teach, keep in mind who your students are and what they need to learn about being in a U.S. school. As they state in their materials, "Instructors should review the Modules and select the materials that would be most relevant to the refugee students (CCSD Newcomers) enrolled in their school system, and most useful when designing lesson plans and classroom activities." Also, you may have English-speaking students who do not qualify as ELLs who could benefit from the acculturation pieces of this curriculum. A student coming from England speaks a different English and can experience culture shock as they begin living in the U.S. Please use these materials, as they seem appropriate for these students as well.

Please review pages 4-8, Background for Instructors. As you read any of these materials, remember that the authors are in New York, and programs mentioned do not align to CCSD programs. Reading considerations are also attached for you to review before reading each module. We are providing these materials as a starting point for you to be able to develop lessons to meet the acculturation needs of your Newcomer students. Thank you for looking at these materials. The CCSD ELL Division welcomes your feedback on this curriculum as we are offering it to our schools for the first time this year. If you have any questions or need additional supports for your Newcomer students please reach out to our Division at (702) 799-2137. Also, please look at the materials and links specifically provided to address newcomer needs found on our website at ell.ccsd.net. Most schools have an ELL Student Success Advocate. These staff members receive additional training from the ELL Division and can also act as a resource for you.

CCSD CONSIDERATIONS

Introduction:

In this reading…

When it says …	Think…
refugee	newcomer
Refugee Academy	school site
academic coach	mentor

- **This curriculum was originally intended for refugees, a specific category of newcomer; please consider the unique experience of each newcomer.**
- **Videos are not available at this time.**

WELCOME TO OUR SCHOOLS

BUREAU OF REFUGEE AND IMMIGRANT ASSISTANCE

NEW YORK STATE OFFICE
OF TEMPORARY AND DISABILITY ASSISTANCE

REVISED 2011
ANDREW M. CUOMO, GOVERNOR

The Refugee School Impact Grant (RSIG) *Welcome to our Schools*, which includes Refugee Academy and Mini-Academy Curricula, Parent and Professional Development Programs, a Guide to Academic Coaches, a Guide to the Videos, and the videos *Refugee Student Interviews, Refugee Parent Interviews, A Day in Elementary School, A Day in Middle School and A Day in High School,* was developed by the New York State Office of Temporary and Disability Assistance, Bureau of Refugee and Immigrant Assistance (OTDA/BRIA).

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BACKGROUND FOR INSTRUCTORS

Although instructors may have experience working with refugee families that are settling in the United States, it is essential that during the Refugee Academy the instructors view the world of *school* through the eyes of refugee children. A new school is difficult enough for American students who know the system. Refugee children have to juggle multiple concerns as they try to adjust to schools that are fast-moving, well-established in their routines, and challenging to anyone who is new to the system.

Refugee children are vulnerable, both academically and socially. Once resettled in the United States, their ability to successfully navigate the school experience is dependent upon a number of factors such as age, culture, coping strategies, parental support, degree of interrupted schooling, and reception by the host community. The children may be living with new "families" who are relatives they never met before. They may be living with host families or guardians who are responsible for their care.

Some children have been exposed to extended violence in war zones and refugee camps while others have witnessed war-related events or death of family and community members. Studies of refugee children in a school environment find that exposure to war and persecution can result in significant delays in academic achievement. Depression, aggressive behavior, immaturity and physical ailments such as headaches and stomachaches are found to be common in the refugee school-aged population. All of these interfere significantly with the learning process. The students need attentive school staff, extra individual attention, and intensive support to tackle not only the academic concerns, but the social, emotional, material and health concerns as well.

Parental/guardian involvement in school is strongly associated with positive outcomes in academic performance and school behavior. In the case of refugee children, adjustment can be eased through parental involvement. Such involvement includes: creating a time and place at home to do homework; monitoring homework; encouraging and facilitating school attendance; alerting the school to problems or issues as they arise which may affect their child's performance or behavior; managing health care of the student; staying informed of student progress and grades; monitoring quality of school services; and communicating with teachers, including participation in parent/teacher conferences and the school Open House.

But many factors inhibit parental involvement in their child's education life. First, language serves as a major barrier. Refugee parents are unable to comprehend the telephone call that reports the child is absent from school (or is sick and needs to go home). They cannot understand notes sent home from the teacher. The homework is incomprehensible. They may be unaware of school events. Many do not participate in

important parent/teacher conferences because of their inability to understand English, or because of their discomfort around teachers and other authority figures. Furthermore, parents are often unaware of community resources or unable to access them, and need an advocate who can help them find ways to meet their own needs.

In addition, refugee parents lack understanding about the workings of American school systems and may find the institution and the educational process intimidating. They are unfamiliar with New York State education law, rights and responsibilities, and obligations. They are not aware of the range of opportunities in schools, including academic, extra-curricular, and vocational programs. Mandatory school attendance may be a brand new concept, and they may have little understanding of the school's expectations of them as partners in the education of their children.

At the same time, American schools are not usually linguistically or culturally equipped to meet the special needs of refugee children. The schools struggle with language barriers and lack of information about the cultural background and history of the students. While most schools welcome refugee children, they are often anxious about communicating with the refugee children and their families. Teachers find that strategies, policies and expectations that accommodate the needs of their current students do not always work well for refugee children. School districts do not usually have the resources and are not set up to provide intensive orientation or to tailor curriculum and educational services to the specific and varying needs (academic, language, behavioral, cognitive) of the refugee student population. Schools find age-appropriate grade level placement challenging for students who lack a background of formal schooling or who have experienced significant interruptions in their education. Refugee children are often left on their own to master a new language, decipher expectations, and figure out how the American school system functions.

Recognizing the backgrounds of the refugee students, the Bureau of Refugee and Immigration Affairs has created a *Welcome to Our Schools* program that consistently emphasizes three themes in the Refugee Academy curriculum:

- **Expose students to all aspects of the American educational program so that they are familiar with how education works in their new country.**
- **Encourage students to take advantage of the multiple benefits of an American education.**
- **Reassure students that they will successfully adjust to their new schools.**

Instructors in the Refugee Academy should never assume that refugee students, no matter what their age and background, have basic knowledge about what school is like in America. For example the following scenario is typical of an American elementary classroom and the perspective of a refugee student:

In a recent fourth grade class, the teacher announced that it was time for recess. The students moved quickly to grab their jackets, hats, and gloves, and put on their boots. Then they lined up, talking excitedly, and headed outside to play.

A new refugee student sat in her seat, afraid to move. She had just come from living in a series of villages, where "school" was the occasional gathering of children with very strict adults who punished them if they spoke. Classes were often disrupted by violence or the urgent need to escape to a refugee camp or hiding place. She often fled with the clothes on her back and no shoes, holding tightly to the hand of her older sister.

She did not know what recess was, and had no idea where the students were going and if they would ever come back. She could not understand why the students were talking so loudly, risking corporal punishment from the teacher. She watched as the children piled on layers of unfamiliar clothing and then willingly went out into the cold. She watched out the window as they ran laughing around the playground and then settled in groups that played with balls and ropes.

The teacher asked her if she would rather color than go outside, and handed her a box of crayons.

She did not know what it meant to "color" and did not know what to do with the "crayons." It was all so confusing and discouraging when everyone else seemed to know exactly what to do.

For refugee students, deficits in *basic* knowledge and experience can have a profound affect on learning and skill development. Instructors in the Refugee Academy should always keep in mind that most of the refugee students, even those who have experienced forms of education in their native countries, are "brand new" at learning in school.

NEVER ASSUME THAT REFUGEE STUDENTS:

- Know what they are supposed to do with a crayon, pencil, scissors, glue, or paintbrush.
- Will be willing to store their backpacks in a locker, out of sight.
- Know that when they get on a bus they will be able to come back home.
- Have seen a picture book.

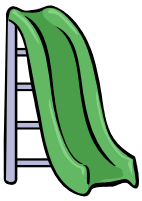
- Understand that a clean body includes clean clothes.

- Understand that every day the entire body should be clean.
- Desire to “fit in” by abandoning their traditional culture.
- Are convinced that the teacher will be nice and helpful, and not hurt or threaten them.
- Are comfortable wearing shoes, underwear, socks, and other unfamiliar clothing.
- Are living in healthy, sanitary conditions, now that they are no longer in their native countries.

- Are smiling and nodding because they understand teachers, not because they have learned that a smile and a nod pleases teachers.
- Have used rest room facilities, let alone public rest rooms with multiple stalls.
- Understand that a gang is not an accepted form of an American family.
- Are healthy, just because they appear to be healthy.
- Understand that a fire drill means that they will be safe.
- Are eating lunch every day.
- Have access to breakfast.
- Have had a chance to discover talents that they didn’t even know they had.
- Are living with people they know, even if they are relatives.

- Are able to communicate with their parents about school.
- Have parents who believe that it is acceptable to be involved in their child’s education.
- Are developmentally at their chronological age.
- Are being treated well by their peers and not getting teased.
- Know what it means to be “on time.”
- Have difficulty in school because of their backgrounds, when they could have a learning disability or health problem.
- Have experience sitting at a desk all day.

- Are used to large crowds of people.
- Are used to adults talking to them individually.
- Can adapt quickly to the routine of changing clothes for gym class.
- Are permitted by their families to participate in all school activities.
- Trust the Academic Coaches, or any other adults, especially those in uniform.
- Have ever seen playground equipment or participated in a game or sport.



- Have ever watched a video.
- Have established a morning routine that is not stressful.
- Are allowed to interact with the other gender.
- Will automatically connect with peers from their native country.
- Do not harbor ill will against peers from their native country, based on past history of civil wars and violence.
- Interpret nonverbal cues in the same way as their American peers and teachers.
- Have forgotten their past, or "moved on."
- Do not want to talk about their past.
- Want to talk about their past.
- Welcome their new lives, even if it means leaving friends and relatives behind in their native countries.
- Think that they are safe in school.

AND NEVER ASSUME THAT REFUGEE STUDENTS:

- Are having difficulties in school solely because of language barriers, when they actually may be overwhelmed and exhausted from their new school routines.
- Are participating in school activities because they are comfortable and no longer afraid, when they are actually hiding how they really feel.
- Are so far behind that they will never catch up, when they can actually adjust quickly if they receive reassurance and guidance.