



*Accelerating language, academic, and social-emotional learning for newcomer multilingual students.*

## **Bridges to Academic Success: Serving SLIFE and Newcomers since 2012**

### **Who we are**

Bridges to Academic Success is a project of the City University of New York (CUNY) with more than a decade of experience in supporting the emerging academic and social-emotional needs of Students with Limited or Interrupted Formal Education (SLIFE) and newcomer multilingual learners. The mission of Bridges to Academic Success is to advocate for newly arrived immigrants with developing literacy by providing culturally-responsive curricula, resources, and training to educators. Our vision is for all immigrant youth to thrive in school and to participate meaningfully in society.

Since its inception, Bridges has served approximately 15,000 students and over 1,800 educators, including teachers and administrators, who receive ongoing training and coaching on Bridges' innovative curricula to accelerate progress among newcomer English learners. Our school partnerships involve extensive collaboration with teachers and school and district administrators, enabling us to visit classrooms, coach teachers on their practices, and collect data for research purposes. Since 2020, we have expanded our reach by offering professional learning to districts nationally in order to support a wider range of SLIFE and newcomer multilingual students across the country.

The Bridges team is made up of specialists in the fields of linguistics, urban education, literacy education, arts education, administrative leadership, educational psychology, and public health, the majority of whom have also had teaching careers in classrooms. In addition



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to the core staff, the Bridges team also partners with lead teachers across the country, who have a significant role in providing feedback on the design and implementation of our programs. The Bridges Leadership Advisory, consisting of school and district administrators, provides professional insight on current school and district issues that inform our work. As a project of the Graduate Center, CUNY, we are also affiliated with the Center for Advanced Study in Education (CASE) and the Research Institute for the Study of Language in Urban Society (RISLUS).

### **Rationale for our work**

The most recent research has shown that within the total population of immigrants in 2018, approximately 47 percent (21.05 million) of the 44.8 million immigrants ages 5 and older were not English proficient (Budiman, 2020). In New York City alone, there are nearly 150,000 English Learners (ELs). The most vulnerable of these are newcomers, or recent arrivals, who make up 63.3% of all ELs (New York State Education Department: Office of Bilingual Education and English as a New Language, 2019). Many of these students come from countries undergoing political, economic, and social turmoil, and often experience the effects of former or current trauma once they are here. These students have the monumental task of simultaneously learning to read, write, and acquire knowledge in a new language, while often struggling to overcome social and emotional trauma.

Students whose circumstances have made it difficult to go to school consistently have limited academic skills and prior knowledge to rely on in their new classes, and these



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students often have little chance of succeeding in school. According to the New York State Education Department (NYSED), the dropout rate for ELs is alarmingly high at 27.5%, and the dropout rate for newcomers is even higher, at 38.4% (New York State Education Department: Office of Bilingual Education and English as a New Language, 2021). In addition, data collected by the National Center for Education Statistics (2023), shows that, in the 2019-2020 school year, the graduation rate of ELs was much lower than the nationwide rate (71% vs 87%, respectively).

## **Our Programs**

### ***NYSED-Bridges Partnership***

Through funding from the New York State Department's Office of Bilingual Education and World Languages, Bridges created one of the first year-long instructional programs for SLIFE with Developing Literacy in English as a New Language (ENL) and English Language Arts (ELA) to be used in New York State public schools. The scope of this work continues to expand, with both Math and Spanish Home Language Arts (HLA) programs now available for a broader continuum of SLIFE and Newcomers in New York State. For all subjects, Bridges provides instructional resources, professional learning for teachers and administrators, including coaching and a year-long learning cycle, as well as school and district consultations.

### *Impact on English Language Proficiency*



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Bridges students who attend class consistently make significant progress on the New York State Identification Test for English Language Learners (NYSITELL) and New York State English as a Second Language Achievement Test (NYSESLAT) (more information [here](#)). We use the Independent Reading Level Assessment (IRLA) to track the reading progress of Bridges students in the ENL/ELA program. Ninety-one percent of Bridges learners gained at least 1 reading level, and 13% gained four to five levels (more information [here](#)).

Testimonials are included below.

“ We are starting to see increased reading and writing fluency, independence, confidence, and enjoyment.” - *NYS ENL Teacher*

“ I am proud that I am learning more, that I am understanding more of the class and bringing home good grades. I am feeling better about the class. I feel like I am learning more than I learned in my home country.” - *Bridges student*

For more information on our impact in New York State, please visit our [website](#).

***Developing Responsive Classroom Communities for SLIFE & Newcomers:  
An Online Course for Co-Teaching Teams***

We offer a 6-module online course that is available through contract to districts across the United States. Designed for co-teaching teams, *Developing Responsive Classroom Communities for SLIFE & Newcomer Learners* trains schools on instructional and social-emotional learning strategies that can be applied to a variety of classroom



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environments, with the goal of creating a school-wide approach to serving newcomer learners.

The goal of the course is to promote EL learning equity at the school and district level by providing best practices, concrete tools, and a model for a professional learning community. This has proved vital as many schools have experienced historic growth in enrollment of ELs in recent years, but are unprepared to serve their social-emotional and language development needs with mainstream curricula. More information is available on the [Bridges website](#), this [flyer](#) and this [short video](#).

Testimonials from some of our district partners are included below.

*"This is probably the best SIFE PD I've attended. You provide actual usable techniques and materials for real students in real classrooms, in a variety of settings, not just theoretical ideas for one type of setting that is not realistic." -Teacher participant*

*"As a direct result of this work I have had multiple teachers indicate interest in learning more about SIFE students' needs and appropriate content scaffolds." -District administrator*

*"I wish everyone in my school could do this [course]." -Teacher participant*



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### ***The Bridges Newcomer Program: A National Project (BNP)***

In order to close the gap in newcomer education, Bridges is piloting a nationally available pilot newcomer program that holistically addresses the needs of this student population through targeted assessment tools, culturally-responsive curricula, and training in implementation and school-wide systems of collaboration for teachers and administrators.

The program addresses key phases that impact newcomer performance, from intake, ELA/ELD and foundational Math instruction, and transition to mainstream classrooms. The curriculum is aligned to a CUNY Newcomer Assessment, currently available only in Spanish, from a partner project; and includes tools for progress monitoring in English using our curriculum-embedded assessments and portfolio exemplars. The Bridges ELA/ELD Curriculum provides mini-lessons that support instruction of social-emotional skills, which are key to addressing our students' health and success in the classroom (CASEL, 2020; Farrington et al., 2012).

For more information about participating in the Newcomer Program pilot or any of our programs, please reach out to [info@bridges-sifeproject.com](mailto:info@bridges-sifeproject.com).

For books and research articles related to our project, please visit <https://bridges-sifeproject.com/research-and-presentations/>



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