



BRIDGES TO ACADEMIC SUCCESS

Bridges to Academic Success supports newcomer students with building language, literacy, and mathematical skills to access rigorous content and thrive in school.



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OVERVIEW

Bridges to Academic Success is an innovative, multidimensional approach to supporting the academic achievement of newcomer students. The Bridges model is grounded in the belief that newcomers bring valuable resources, such as life experiences, home language, and cultural knowledge that enrich schools and communities. The model is designed for students who have been in US schools for three years or less, are multilingual learners, and may have had interrupted or inconsistent schooling in their home country.

Bridges curricula and frameworks are informed by extensive research on language, content knowledge, numeracy skills, and literacy development for newcomer students and Students with Limited or Interrupted Formal Education (SLIFE) with developing literacy and numeracy skills. All components of the model are designed to meet newcomer students' language, literacy, academic, and social-emotional needs.



Bridges to Academic Success, a project of the Center for Advanced Study in Education (CASE) at the Graduate Center, City University of New York (CUNY), consists of researchers and content developers, language and literacy teachers, and school administrators in secondary schools throughout New York State. To date, Bridges has served over 15,000 students and 1,800 educators. Bridges offers literacy, Spanish home language, math curricula, professional learning, and instructional coaching targeted at improved academic results for multilingual learners. [Bridges Website](#) ▶ [Bridges Overview](#)

What Makes This Model Innovative?



High Expectations with Unlimited Opportunities

Bridges builds upon the strengths of newcomer students, differentiates instruction to support English language skills, and offers engaging, rigorous content to prepare students for success in secondary school and beyond.



Rigorous Learning

Students engage in rigorous learning units that facilitate conceptual understanding and critical thinking with grade-level content while simultaneously developing literacy and language skills.



Connection & Community

Bridges builds connection and community by creating welcoming classroom environments, facilitating collaborative groupings, honoring the cultural assets of each learner, and developing social-emotional skills.

DESIGN

Goals

The Bridges model provides educational services to newcomer students who enter US schools with limited academic skills, including low levels of literacy and numeracy in their home language. The overarching vision is to develop the skills to thrive in school and to participate meaningfully in society.

Academic Content Knowledge and Skills

Learners develop content knowledge, conceptual understanding, and critical thinking skills, enabling them to engage with secondary-level content and access opportunities to develop their academic skills beyond graduation.

Language and Literacy Skills

Learners develop robust language and literacy skills in English and their home languages and build the skills needed to comprehend complex texts.

Social-Emotional Skills

Learners develop social-emotional skills such as relationship building, self-management, and social awareness, helping them feel a sense of belonging and develop the skills to be successful in secondary school and life.

Experience

Bridges to Academic Success is designed as a comprehensive approach to building language, literacy, and content skills for newcomer students. The key components of the model are the following:

- Culturally and Linguistically Responsive Instruction
- Social-Emotional Learning
- Foundational Skill Building
- Integrated Language and Content Development

Culturally and Linguistically Responsive Instruction

A core component of the Bridges model is culturally responsive instruction. Learners are recognized for the strengths and expertise they bring to the learning space. Bridges teachers deeply know and honor their students by affirming students' culture, language, and ethnic and racial backgrounds. The foundation of the Bridges classroom is a culture that allows students to bring their full selves into the classroom through home language connections and culturally responsive thematic units of study.

Home Language Connections: Home language supports include resources to help students make connections to their home language and further develop their literacy and language skills in their home language. An example of intentional home language support is found in the design of the classroom environments, which display translated language in labels and anchor charts.

►[Classroom Environments Support Home Language](#) Students use their home language as a cognitive tool for learning by annotating and naming words in their home language, accessing dictionaries and translation apps, and reading texts in their home language. Students are strategically partnered with other students who speak the same home language, and students have access to staff who speak their home language.

Thematic Language Arts Units: Students engage in thematic units of study centered around culturally responsive themes and ideas. Thematic units include topics such as power, identity, resources, and immigration rights. Students engage in these units of study to answer essential questions such as:

- Who am I? What makes us who we are?
 - Which aspects of our identity do we share with others?
 - What else contributes to our identity? How are we similar and different?
 - What are our roots?
 - What is power and how do people use it?
 - How do people make the world a better place?
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Social-Emotional Learning

Social-emotional learning is a cornerstone of the Bridges model. Students learn best and take risks when they feel a sense of belonging and safety. Social-emotional learning is facilitated by teachers cultivating a safe and welcoming environment, integrating social-emotional learning into academic content, and explicitly teaching social-emotional skills. Teachers integrate social-emotional learning into academic learning, facilitating students' development of social-emotional skills and applying those skills in the context of the classroom and academic work.

Safe and Welcoming Environment: Students engage in consistent routines and organization systems that allow them to access the support they need, including language materials and other students in the classroom, through the classroom setup and opportunities to engage with peers. Students take on meaningful jobs and roles to share responsibility for the classroom culture and environment. Teachers create a welcoming environment by modeling respectful, interested, and kind interactions. Students have space to share about their own cultural backgrounds and to learn about others' cultural backgrounds.

Integration of Social Skills in Academic Learning: Students engage in flexible small groups to support their academic learning and relationship building. Students collaborate and support each other's language and content development in small groups and centers. Students develop communication skills and oral language development through discussion with their peers. Students develop self-management and self-awareness skills in conjunction with their academic learning as they self-reflect on their progress and learning.

Social-Emotional Skill Lessons: Learners develop social-emotional skills aligned to the CASEL framework through explicit lessons focused on self-management, social awareness, and relationship building. [CASEL framework](#)

Foundational Skill Building

Across multiple contents, the Bridges programs teach foundational skills so that learners can develop the literacy and numeracy skills needed to access grade-level content. Learners are assessed in their home language to precisely determine their content skills and language needs.

Students practice and build foundational skills through small groups and centers. In math, students engage in centers-based learning to develop skills in basic numeracy, fractions, decimals, and ratios and proportions. [▶Math Centers-Based Learning](#) During the foundational literacy skills class, centers are focused on decoding on-level texts, independent reading, writing, and foundational reading skills. [▶Literacy Centers](#) Within Spanish home language classes, learners engage in whole-group and small-group instruction focused on foundational reading and writing skills.

Integrated Language and Content Development

Integration of language and content development is a core component of the Bridges model. In both literacy and math classrooms, teachers facilitate integrated learning through intentional language scaffolds, gradual release instruction, and explicit vocabulary work. Students make meaning of texts and build their language skills and content knowledge through strategies such as Read-Retell-Respond and the Language Experience Approach.

Gradual Release Instruction: Students experience a gradual release of responsibility model to support their learning of content and language. In lessons, the teacher uses familiar vocabulary to model the new content learning and highlights the relevant new language. Students then engage with their peers to socialize understanding of the task or strategy. With teacher and peer support, students practice concepts and language by using new language and sharing the meaning of keywords. As the learning continues, students engage in partner or group work focused on the content-based task and academic vocabulary. Students provide support to themselves, access resources in the classroom (visuals, sentence starters), and engage in feedback conversations with the teacher. After the collaborative learning time, students engage independently in the task by applying learnings from the lesson, independently leveraging classroom resources, and, when needed, leveraging the support and feedback from peers and teachers. [▶Gradual Release for Language and Literacy Development](#) In addition to content-focused lessons, students engage in the gradual release framework during lessons focused on explicitly teaching English language skills such as syntax. [▶Teaching English Syntax in an Integrated Unit](#)

Introducing and Interacting with Vocabulary: Introducing content and academic vocabulary is a key component of the integrated language and literacy approach. Students learn new vocabulary by first exploring images and identifying words in their home language. The teacher connects the images to the essential questions and explicitly teaches English vocabulary with visuals and comprehensible definitions. Students then translate the new vocabulary words in their home language glossary using peer and teacher support as needed. Students engage in the collaborative practice of new vocabulary with flashcards and tasks to categorize the words. Students then practice writing and orally reading the new vocabulary words by writing their own sentences connecting the vocabulary words to their lived experiences in their home countries. Teachers facilitate vocabulary development in both ENL/ELA and math classrooms. [▶Introducing and Interacting with Vocabulary](#)

Read-Retell-Respond: An important strategy used in Bridges classrooms is supporting students in making meaning of a text through the Read-Retell-Respond protocol. In Read-Retell-Respond, students engage in a metacognitive process of interacting with text to build literal comprehension and academic content knowledge. The teacher first sets the purpose of reading and facilitates students to activate their schema on the topic through lived experience and past learning. Students interact with the text by annotating images and text as a scaffold for independent reading. After reading independently, students retell through partner retell in their home language and whole class retell activities, including dramatic reads and sharing understanding through concept maps. Students then respond to the text by sharing their own

insights and sense-making. [▶Read-Retell-Respond](#) The Read-Retell-Respond strategy is used both in ENL/ELA classrooms and has been adapted to support students in making sense of word problems in math.

Language Experience Approach: One of the key strategies for language and content development is the Language Experience Approach (LEA), which is designed to support students to consolidate content understanding and to represent their oral language as print. The Language Experience Approach begins with a shared experience such as an experiment, field trip, video, or text to help students understand the content. Students then engage with the focus question and English vocabulary through visual anchors and leveraging their home language. Students begin to make connections to the concepts, language, and print through informal conversations to express ideas and communicate their experiences. The core component of LEA is when the teacher transcribes students' oral language into written language to describe their experience of the content in academic vocabulary. With teacher facilitation, the students actively engage with their transcribed text through activities designed to build fluency, content-specific language, and make meaning of the content. Students gain content knowledge, language skills, foundational literacy skills, and metacognitive awareness about language.

[▶Language Experience Approach](#)

Supporting Structures

The Bridges model can be integrated into an existing school model as a means of systematically supporting newcomer students with developing numeracy and literacy in their home language. Implementation of Bridges is most successful when purposeful, strategic shifts are made to curriculum, school culture, adult roles, and scheduling.



**CURRICULA,
INSTRUCTION, &
ASSESSMENT**

The Bridges curricula are required for implementation of the Bridges model. Additionally, schools must integrate language and content development, differentiate based on students' needs, and encourage collaboration to support the development of newcomers and multilingual learners.

In Bridges classrooms, instruction is student-centered, encourages collaboration, and uses strong scaffolding, assessment, and differentiation techniques. Bridges programs are designed and tailored to support learners at various home language, literacy, and numeracy levels. [📖Bridges Program Offerings](#)

Newcomer students are assessed in their home language to determine which curricular approach is best suited to meet their needs.



SCHOOL COMMUNITY & CULTURE

Schools must encourage student collaboration and recognize students' lived experiences and expertise to foster a sense of belonging.

All members of the school community are recognized for their unique strengths, experiences, and expertise. Structures in place should intentionally support collaboration, encourage peer accountability, and ensure everyone is seen, heard, and known. Students leverage their peers as a resource through heterogeneous and homogeneous groupings. Students work together in group discussions, help each other translate, proofread each other's writing, and engage in collaborative projects.

Professional learning to deeply understand and support newcomers is critical to successful implementation of the model.

Teacher knowledge and skills are key to the success of the Bridges model. The key characteristics of a Bridges teacher include:

- A strong desire to work with multilingual learners and honor the resources, strengths, abilities, and perspectives they bring
- A genuine interest in students' home languages, cultures, and experiences
- Ability to build a classroom community that values and promotes mutual respect, curiosity, and diversity

[!\[\]\(642aa997563f9a325b310230bb5078b7_img.jpg\) Characteristics of a Bridges Teacher](#)



ADULT ROLES, HIRING, & LEARNING

Professional learning is grounded in the TESOL principles for exemplary teaching of multilingual learners. [!\[\]\(d0262bbe9d2356661a2e89321dfcc781_img.jpg\) TESOL Principles](#) Through professional learning, teachers build their capacity to understand the characteristics of newcomers and implement instructional and social-emotional strategies that accelerate learning for multilingual learners. The professional learning cycle consists of professional development and content training, job-embedded coaching by analyzing teacher practice and student work, and engagement in collaborative reflection. [!\[\]\(8572950e410320d7dd023da827ff014d_img.jpg\) Professional Learning Cycle](#) Professional learning is most effective when both teachers and administrators engage in the cycle together to build shared knowledge and capacity in supporting multilingual learners.

When possible, Bridges recommends a co-teaching model to effectively differentiate instruction and support student learning.



Daily schedules must reflect consistent time for multilingual learners to engage in targeted content and language development, including foundational literacy skills, where necessary.

SCHEDULE & USE OF TIME

Daily instructional time with the students is highly recommended in order to improve student outcomes. Schools that are best equipped to implement Bridges have a dedicated newcomer program for the first year of students' enrollment. Schools without a newcomer program leverage the curricula and frameworks in small group interventions or pull-out instruction in either English development, Spanish literacy, or math classes.



FAMILY & COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIPS

Families are key partners in supporting the growth of newcomers and multilingual learners.

Bridges strongly recommends that schools actively engage families in the learner's journey. As the child begins their journey, schools need to communicate the purpose, goals, and approach to the model to provide space to answer families' questions and concerns.

As the learner progresses through the year, schools should have structures and systems to regularly share students' progress.



SPACE & FACILITIES

Dedicated classrooms for SLIFE and newcomer classes help support a welcoming environment for students.

Bridges recommends that SLIFE and newcomer teachers with a dedicated class also have a dedicated classroom to build a welcoming and safe physical space. The physical environment is an essential support for students' development of language, literacy, and content learning, including visuals, anchor charts, and easily accessible physical materials.



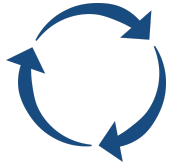
BUDGET & OPERATIONS

Budget implications depend on the state in which the school operates and the curricular program that is adopted.

Currently, Bridges' New York State programs are offered free to New York State educators as a part of the Bridges partnership with the New York State Education Department's Office of Bilingual Education and World Languages. The cost of training is also covered with these programs; however, schools must provide the cost of coverage or hiring substitute teachers so that their educators can participate in online training. Limited coaching is provided under the NYS partnership. Additional coaching can be purchased by the district for specific teachers.

CUNY Foundational Math and the upcoming Newcomer ELA/ELD Programs used in districts outside of New York State are licensed by CUNY to districts for an annual fee. The online course, *Developing Responsive Classroom Communities*, can also be purchased through a purchase order so that a district cohort of teachers can participate.

Math manipulatives and language and literacy texts must be purchased by the district or school. Bridges provides guidance on how to purchase the materials not provided with these programs.



CONTINUOUS IMPROVEMENT

Ongoing progress monitoring and data analysis are essential to continuously improve educator practice and student learning.

Bridges teachers and leaders engage in ongoing data analysis and student work analysis to monitor their students' growth. Educators analyze both student outcome data and portfolios in order to better help students accelerate their language, literacy, and content learning.

Bridges provides training and examples of transition plans to support schools in developing systems that will help their SLIFE and newcomer multilingual learners have access to more support across the school, both in and outside of Bridges classrooms.

IMPLEMENTATION

Supports Offered

[Bridges](#) offers the following support to help you implement their approach. [►Bridges Professional Learning Course Overview](#)

Curriculum & Professional Learning (NY State only)

Free to NYS Educators



Bridges program offerings include an integrated approach of curriculum with professional learning services. The following curriculum and professional learning programs are available for NY State educators. [►Bridges Program Offerings](#)

- Bridges-NYSED ENL/ELA Program (Integrated ENL/ELA and Stand-Alone ENL)
- Bridges-NYSED Spanish Home Language Arts Program I
- Bridges-NYSED Math Program for SLIFE & Newcomers

[Express Interest](#)

Curriculum & Professional Learning (National)

Cost associated

Bridges program offerings include an integrated approach of curriculum with professional learning services. The following curriculum and professional learning programs are available nationally. [►Bridges Program Offerings](#)

- Developing Responsive Classroom Communities for SLIFE & Newcomers Online Course



- Bridges-CUNY Newcomer ELA/ELD Program
- Bridges-CUNY Foundational Math Unit

[Express Interest](#)

School Partnerships

Cost Associated



Bridges to Academic Success partners with schools and districts to serve SLIFE and multilingual newcomer learners by providing curricula, programming, and professional learning or consultations. Collaborating educators participate in our professional learning and contribute further to communities of practice through these partnerships. School or district national consultation are available.

[School Partnerships Overview](#)



[Express Interest](#)

Reach

300

Schools

15,000

Students

1,800

Educators

35

Home Languages

Impact

Bridges has demonstrated it is effective at improving academic, language, mathematical, and literacy skills for newcomers. [Bridges Impact Flyer](#)

Bridges students make significant growth in language acquisition and literacy progress.

- Between 2016 and 2023, Bridges ENL/ELA students demonstrated significant growth in language and literacy as shown by 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). One hundred percent of students demonstrated improvement on English proficiency exam scores, and 66% of students gained one or more language proficiency levels. [State Test Data: English Proficiency Tests](#)

- Between 2016 and 2023, 90% percent of Bridges learners gained at least one reading level, 60% grew two or more levels, and 11% gained four to five levels in the Independent Reading Level Assessment (IRLA).

Bridges students made statistically significant improvements in curriculum assessments

- In 2022–23, Math students made an average improvement of 45 points per unit from pre- to post-assessment.
- From 2021 to 2023, 96% of ENL/ELA students improved their scores from pre- to post-assessment in at least one assessment set. Eighty-four percent of ENL/ELA students improved their scores from pre- to post-assessment in all the assessment sets provided to them.

Bridges students report the Bridges program is valuable and supportive.

- In the ENL/ELA course, 90% of students agreed/strongly agreed with the statement “This work has value for me.” Ninety-five percent of students agreed/strongly agreed with the statements “I can set goals for myself” and “I can ask others for help when I need it.”
- In the Math course, 100% of students agreed/strongly agreed with the statements “This work has value for me” and “I can ask others for help when I need it.” Ninety-three percent of students agreed/strongly agreed with the statements “I can set goals for myself,” “I can work to achieve my goals,” and “My ability and competence grow with my effort.”

Students share that their Bridges experience increased their confidence and sense of belonging.

- *“I have two teachers...they taught me very well. All that I know now, they teach me. We now work in groups, and we work together. When we’re together, I feel that I am learning more.”* – Bridges Student
- *“At first, when I came to school, I didn’t understand many things, but with the help of my teacher, I have been able to learn many more things. For example, I can already use words like “but,” “both,” and “and” in my sentences and paragraphs. In my country, I was very bad at school, but here I feel that I am learning much more.”* – Bridges Student
- *“What I really liked about this program is that they give a lot of images in the problems...they give us a lot of explanations.”* – Bridges Student
- *“It helps us a lot to work in groups because when one does not know, the other knows. [Bridges Math program] is good, and the activities, the problems, everything, the explanations are good.”* — Bridges Student

Contact

General Interest

For interest in curricula and/or professional learning series:

info@bridges-sifproject.com

Lisa Auslander

For interest in our national partnership or consulting:

lisaaus@bridges-sifproject.com

RESOURCES



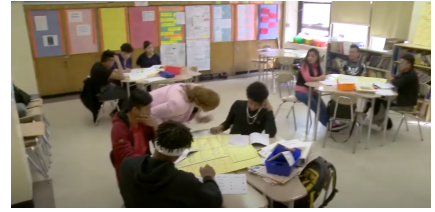
[Bridges to Academic Success Website](#)

Website for the Bridges Programs.



[Bridges Overview Video](#)

See the Bridges model in action at International Community High School.



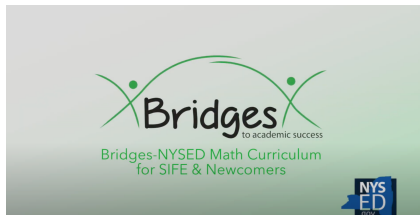
[Classroom Environments Support Home Language](#)

Video on how the classroom environment supports home languages.



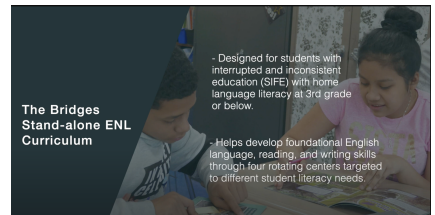
[CASEL Framework](#)

Social-emotional skills framework from CASEL.



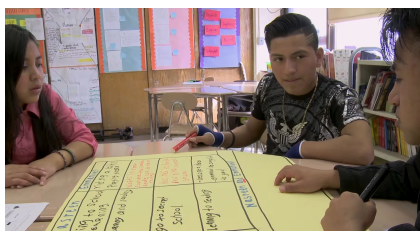
[Math Centers-Based Learning](#)

Video of math centers.



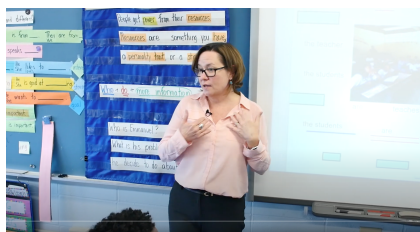
[Literacy Centers](#)

Video of literacy centers in a stand-alone ENL classroom.



[Gradual Release for Language and Literacy Development](#)

Video of the gradual release approach for language and literacy classes.



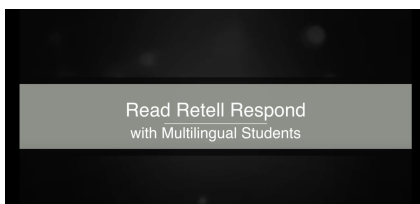
[Teaching English Syntax in an Integrated Unit](#)

Video of teaching English syntax in an integrated unit.

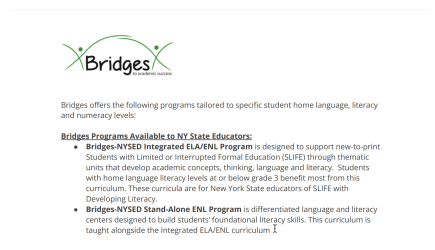


[Introducing and Interacting with Vocabulary](#)

Video of the process for introducing vocabulary.



[Read-Retell-Respond](#)



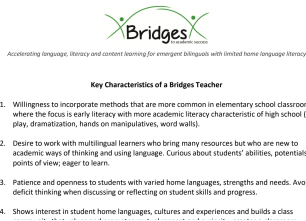
Video of the Read-Retell-Respond method.

[Language Experience Approach](#)

Video of the Language Experience Approach method.

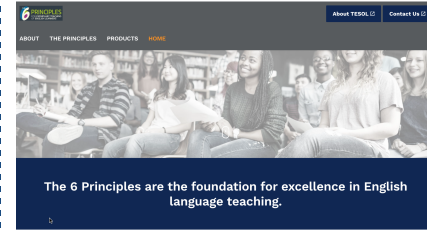
[Bridges Program Offerings](#)

An overview of Bridges program offerings.



[Characteristics of a Bridges Teacher](#)

Document with key characteristics of a Bridges teacher.



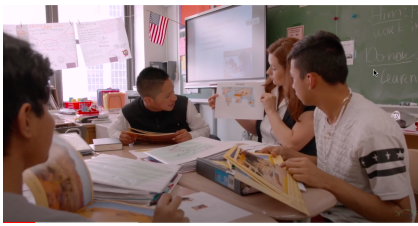
[TESOL Principles](#)

Webpage to TESOL's six principles for excellence in English language teaching.



[Professional Learning Cycle](#)

Webpage detailing Bridges' professional learning cycle.



[Bridges Professional Learning Course Overview](#)

Video overview of the Bridges Professional Learning Course.



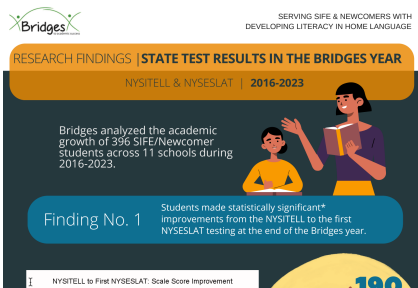
[Bridges School Partnerships](#)

Overview of partnerships between Bridges and individual schools.



[Bridges Impact Flyer](#)

Document on Bridges' outcomes and impact.



[State Test Data: English Proficiency Tests](#)

Document on Bridges state test data findings.