

## CONVERSATION GUIDE

### **Creating Welcoming and Caring Environments for Refugee Students and their Families**

#### **Part 2. Brooks: A Community Story**

(with Kathleen Jensen, Grasslands Public Schools)

*Due to employment opportunities at a local meat packing plant, the city of Brooks has a diverse population of immigrants, refugees and temporary foreign workers. In some schools, up to 30 per cent of students are English language learners and 12 per cent of the high school population are refugees with limited formal schooling.*

#### **Key understandings**

- While the media often uses the word ‘crisis’ when reporting on the refugee story, it’s important to understand that it’s the refugees who may be in crisis, not the school system.
- Meeting the diverse needs of all students is complex work, and requires teachers to develop new skills and strategies.
- Students from refugee backgrounds need to:
  - acquire the English language as quickly as possible
  - fill in the missing gaps of their education.
- To do this, students need a learning environment that is safe and caring, and where they feel welcomed and valued.
- Community partnerships are essential to supporting refugee students and their families.
- Supports need to address the full continuum from early childhood to high school completion.
- In elementary school the focus needs to be on language acquisition and literacy. In the middle years, positive mental health strategies become important, as well as social activities and community engagement.

#### **Questions for reflection and discussion**

- How can a school community explicitly demonstrate hospitality?
- How do we as communities affirm and support newcomers when we do not fully understand their story or their needs?
- Consider the quote: “The culture and the education acquired before migrating have an impact on student performance ... but the country where the student settles matters more.” What are the implications of this statement for refugee students coming to Alberta schools?
- Which whole-school approaches and universal supports in your school could benefit refugee students? What needs to be enhanced to make them most effective for these students?