

## CONVERSATION GUIDE

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

#### **Part 3. Practical Ideas for Helping Refugee Students Integrate into the School Setting** (with Christine Oliver, Calgary Board of Education)

*The goal of integration is that students from refugee backgrounds gain a sense of belonging, make friends, and participate fully in the life of the school.*

#### **Key understandings**

- Integration is a long-term process through which refugee students participate fully in their schooling, and the school community benefits from the sharing of culture and experience. It is a reciprocal process.
- To support successful integration experiences for students, school leaders can:
  - create an environment for understanding and acceptance
  - learn about the language, culture and experience of refugee students
  - forge connections with families through intake and orientation practices and parent workshops
  - build relationships with immigrant and refugee communities
  - strengthen communication and understanding through interpreters, settlement workers and cultural liaison workers
  - support staff through professional learning, trauma-informed practice and by encouraging teacher wellness
  - develop learning support teams to meet individual student needs
  - partner with community agencies to provide enhanced supports.
- Routines are the easiest way to create a sense of safety for students who have experienced trauma.
- Tone of voice and facial expressions can communicate that school is a welcoming, safe and hopeful place.
- Visual schedules, signs and graphic organizers can help English language learners follow routines and better understand expectations in the classroom.
- Some students require additional support because their social-emotional development was interrupted by trauma and their social networks (e.g. extended family and community) was disrupted or displaced. For example, teachers can help students develop strategies for calming themselves and managing conflict.
- For school staff, self-care is key to remaining healthy when working with students who have a history of loss, grief, stress and trauma.

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

- How do you currently communicate that school is a welcoming and safe place? What might you do to make that message more explicit for refugee students and their families?
- What is your school district currently doing to support teachers' professional learning as it relates to meeting the unique social, emotional and academic needs of refugee students? What additional learning opportunities might be most helpful?
- What additional community services might refugee students and their families need? How can schools help create a network of support for these families?

### **For more information**

- Visit Calgary Board of Education's website, *Teaching Refugees with Limited Formal Schooling* at: [www.teachingrefugees.com](http://www.teachingrefugees.com)