

A Strategic Plan for Welcoming Low German Students into Your School

Welcoming students and their families takes some preparation. The following is a general strategy that can be implemented over time and adapted to your school's specific circumstances, resources and needs.

Within the whole school

- a) **Student volunteers:** Establish a team of Low German speaking student volunteers who take new students on a tour of the school (highlighting washrooms and other important locations).
- b) **Welcome book:** Provide new students with a visual welcome book to the school. Include photos of the school with simple labels; including student's classroom, photos of all teachers who will be interacting with this student, office, gym etc. with simple identifying sentences under each picture. Encourage the student to take this booklet home and share with the family.
- c) **Welcome Buddies:** Create a Welcoming Buddy group of 5 students. Assign each student to one day per week to support the new student. This buddy group should be given strategies to engage the student outside the classroom in play, in the school yard, as well as in the classroom with books.
- d) **Bus Buddies:** Assign a bus buddy for the newcomer's first few weeks of school to help ensure the student gets to the bus on time.
- e) **Announcements:** Make an announcement welcoming the student to your school.
- f) **Student interviews:** If the school has student reporters, have them interview the newcomer (and all other newcomers) and prepare a brief report to let the student body get to know the person.
- g) **Inform all staff:** Use the school email to inform all staff about the newcomer. This ensures the lunchroom and bus duty teachers are aware of the student and their level of English.
- h) **Unstructured times:** If socializing seems difficult for the student, structure one day a week where the student plays board games with others his age during unstructured times (recess, lunch) and/or assign one or two playground buddies.
- i) **Share their abilities:** As the student adjusts to the school, continue to increase the Low German student's visibility in the school by sharing their writing and artwork in school publications and in hallway displays and encouraging their involvement in leadership positions (student volunteers, the Welcoming Buddy group and other opportunities). Meet with parents and, when applicable, highlight the above mentioned successes.

Within the classroom

- a) **Prepare ahead:** Immediately alert the receiving classroom teachers and custodian so that a desk learning space can be prepared for the newcomer as there is nothing more overwhelming than arriving in the new class and having to stand in front of the class for long periods of time while a teacher scrambles to find a desk. Remember that for many Low German students from Latin America, placement in the classroom is indicative of age and ability. It may be best to initially pick a neutral, middle space.
- b) **Class placement:** Where possible, place students in classes with other Low German speaking students.
- c) **Translation:** Immediately give the classroom teacher a list of Low German interpreter contacts and immediately consult with ESL personnel to arrange a home visit or a parental visit to the school with the interpreter present. (Link: checklist initial classroom observations-1)
- d) **Specialized literacy programs:** Establish a specialized literacy program for Low German speaking students that runs half days, after which students are integrated back into regular classrooms. It can be multi-aged (i.e., grades 4-6).

- e) **Visual timetables:** Prepare a visual timetable for the student with pictures representing subjects. In consultation with the ESL teacher, place alternate activities in duotangs to correspond to subject areas with the corresponding subject visual on the duotang. This helps establish faster student independence. Peer buddies can help student get started/stay engaged. Try not to oversimplify concepts while still assisting to overcome language barriers.
- f) **Share their expertise:** Help classmates be aware of the new student's value in the class by identifying something the new student can teach the class (a craft, food preparation, singing, hands on tasks etc), or share a unique experience, making the student an expert in something. Encourage discussion/exercises that demonstrate the similar and different skills each student has, highlighting how much more we are all alike than different. Take opportunities to use the newcomer's experiences and/or skills as talking points. Engage the class in activities that help develop empathy towards the newcomer's experience.
- g) **Be flexible:** Include the student as much as possible, adding visuals to lessons, including hands on activities, and engage in parallel programming when regular goals are unachievable. Adjust assessments so that the pressure of written curriculum is alleviated. Helpful resources include a computer and books on tape or CDs. Use real-life items and situations to explain concepts. Remember that Low German speaking children often excel at group work. Capitalize on this!

Working with parents

- a) **Homework:** Before sending any homework home, explain to the parents why what you are sending is important. The students should be able to work at this independently. It should not require new learning/teachings. If the parent discourages homework, respect this and use other options such as creating a homework club at school, partnering the student with others to complete daily reading, modifying assignments or have students complete homework with ESL teachers.
- b) **Get to know the parents:** Many Low German speaking parents will feel intimidated by the Canadian school system if they have not been educated in it. It is important to help them feel valued and to provide opportunities for involvement. The best way to begin this process is to meet with them along with a translator. Invite them to school or request a home visit to introduce yourself. When you are able to have a translator present, the parents will benefit from knowing their name beforehand as it may provide a clue that this person will know their language and culture.

Other suggestions:

- a) Consider planning regular get-togethers that have limited agenda and encourage parents to ask questions.
- b) Host regular coffee hours with a limited agenda encouraging parents to ask questions.
- c) Encourage students to invite their parents to come to visit class.
- d) Invite families to share recipes, photos, experiences (connect to seasonal/themed events at school)
- e) Host afternoon sessions with high school students and other members of the Low German community who have continued on in school in various formats
- f) Try to get parents to volunteer in breakfast program
- g) Always provide babysitting for parent and/or family events