

BOARD BRIEF

Date: November 12, 2021

BOARD INFORMATION: X
MEETING PREPARATION: _____

FROM: Bethany Nickerson, Ed.D., Executive Director, Office of English Learner Services

THROUGH: Terri H. Mozingo, Ed.D., Chief of Teaching, Learning, and Leadership
Gregory C. Hutchings, Jr., Ed.D., Superintendent of Schools

TO: The Honorable Megan Alderton, Chair, and
Members of the Alexandria City School Board

TOPIC: Update on Afghan Student Population and Support

2025 STRATEGIC PLAN GOAL:

- Goal 2: Instructional Excellence
- Goal 3: Student Accessibility and Support
- Goal 4: Strategic Resource Allocation
- Goal 5: Family and Community Engagement

SY 2021–2022 FOCUS AREA:

Focus Area 1: Social, Emotional, and Academic Learning (SEAL)

FY 2022 BUDGET PRIORITY:

Professional Learning and Cultural Competency Training for All Staff and Partners

SUMMARY:

During the 2021–2022 school year, 128 new students from Afghanistan have been enrolled in ACPS across 12 schools. These recently enrolled students bring our total Afghan student population to 493, representing 9.3% of the English learner (EL) population and 3.2% of the total student population. Of the Afghan student population, 48.7% have identified Dari as a language spoken at home; 40.8% identified Pashto; 9.3% identified Farsi and Persian; and the remaining 1.2% is a combination of Tonga, Uzbek, and Dargwa. The Office of English Learner Services (EL Office) ensures that background information on Afghan history and culture and professional learning opportunities around understanding and supporting newcomer students, including the Afghan student population, are being shared with staff.

BACKGROUND:

As a result of the August 31, 2021, deadline set by the United States for military withdrawal from Afghanistan, the resettlement of Afghan refugees in the United States has increased significantly through late summer and early fall. On September 9, 2021, the Virginia Department of Education (VDOE) held a forum to discuss the impact on Virginia, which was attended by Chief of Teaching, Learning, and Leadership Dr. Terri H. Mozingo and Executive Director of English Learner Services Dr. Bethany Nickerson. At the meeting, State Superintendent Dr. James Lane reported that 35,000 Afghan refugees are expected to resettle in Virginia, making it the largest resettlement for the state. Of that number, an estimated 6,000 to 7,000 are expected to be school-age.

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The EL Office hires temporary, bilingual personnel during peak student registration periods to assist the EL Welcome Center with registration and assessment. To enhance communication and welcome our newly arriving Afghan families, the EL Office has hired a multilingual English/Dari/Farsi speaker who was raised and educated in Afghanistan and has been a resident of Virginia for many years. She has been a tremendous asset in helping to register our Afghan families, explaining requirements and the school system, helping families feel as comfortable as possible in this new environment, and connecting them with community resources. Many families that identify Pashto as their home language also understand Dari.

To assist schools in preparing for new students from Afghanistan and other countries, the EL Office has created and distributed the attached *Welcoming Newcomers* guidance document. It conveys that when newcomers feel safe and welcome, they can better focus on learning and adjusting to their new environment. It also defines newcomers into the different groups of immigrants: refugees, asylees, students with limited or interrupted formal education (SLIFE), and unaccompanied minors. The document suggests ways to welcome newcomers, provides helpful links and includes specific information for Afghan students.

To further meet the needs of the newcomer Afghan population, the EL Office is collaborating with the Department of Student Services and Equity to integrate trauma-informed instruction with the EL best practice of culturally responsive teaching and learning. In addition, the EL Office is working with the Family and Community Engagement Office to remain informed and gather more information and resources for our Afghan population. The VDOE Title III Office and the Office of New Americans have also provided helpful guidance and links to resources. Furthermore, the Alexandria City Government has an informative website that includes resources on how the community can support the recently arrived Afghan families: [Resources, Programs & Services For Immigrants and Refugees](#).

RECOMMENDATION: The Superintendent recommends that the School Board review the information in this memo and attachment.

IMPACT: The dissemination of information on Afghan history, culture, and the current refugee resettlement circumstances promotes equity by helping our community to learn about this student population within ACPS.

ATTACHMENT: *Welcoming Newcomers*

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