

ABSTRACT

Title of Capstone: **EXPLORING HOW PERSONALIZED SUPPORT
CAN FOSTER POSITIVE GRADUATION
OUTCOMES FOR OLDER NEWCOMER
MULTILINGUAL LEARNERS**

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System Leadership-TESOL/Dual Language Education,
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Older newcomer multilingual learners (MLs) often face unique barriers that impact their ability to navigate high school and attain a diploma. Rooted in improvement science, this qualitative study explores how ongoing support sessions with a trusted adult can foster participation among older newcomer MLs as they work toward positive graduation outcomes. Five professional school counselors (PSCs) engaged older newcomer MLs in ongoing support sessions. During these sessions, PSCs used a personalized graduation roadmap and a support session tool designed to foster student participation. Findings suggest that engaging students in ongoing support sessions promotes participation in their educational journeys. This study aims to promote mindful and intentional educational practices that support positive graduation outcomes for older newcomer MLs, thereby contributing to more equitable and inclusive educational experiences.

**EXPLORING HOW PERSONALIZED SUPPORT CAN FOSTER POSITIVE
GRADUATION OUTCOMES FOR OLDER NEWCOMER MULTILINGUAL
LEARNERS**

by

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Capstone submitted to the Faculty of the Graduate School of the
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2026

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Section 1

Preface

As a former public school student who faced significant challenges in earning a high school diploma, I am deeply committed to promoting positive educational experiences for the students I serve and supporting them in achieving their academic goals. In my twenty years as an educator for multilingual learners (MLs), I have witnessed incredibly resilient, resourceful, and hardworking individuals who face many barriers and obstacles as they work to earn a high school diploma within well-intentioned but misaligned systems and structures. Over the past ten years, I have served MLs at the high school level and have spent much of this time working with older newcomer MLs in non-traditional high school models, comprehensive high-needs and high-priority high school settings, and flexible programs. I have seen non-traditional educational models for MLs dissolve due to loss of funding and momentum, and flexible programming fluctuate in accessibility and availability. Inconsistent support and practices create additional barriers and challenges for older newcomer MLs as they navigate educational systems that are not designed to meet their unique needs.

In my research, I aim to explore tangible ways school systems can make changes to create equitable and inclusive educational experiences and support positive graduation outcomes for older newcomer MLs. I will conduct my study in the Chestnut Hollow School District (CHSD), located in a large metropolitan area in Maryland. Through this study, I plan to work with school stakeholders to promote intentional, mindful practices that support older newcomer MLs in successfully navigating their high school experiences and ultimately earning their diplomas.

Dedication

To my family and friends, thank you for your love and support. You encouraged me when I felt discouraged, lightened the load when things felt too heavy, and pushed me when I needed a boost. Thank you for knowing exactly what I needed to feel loved and supported.

To Briar Lou, thank you for your unconditional love and kindness. You never left my side as I read and wrote for countless hours. You kept me grounded and illuminated my path. You were pure love and light. I share this capstone with you.

To the participants who volunteered for my study. I cannot thank you enough for taking the time to explore this topic with me. I feel incredibly lucky and privileged to have taken this journey with you. I am in awe of your wisdom, insight, dedication, and passion to support your students. How lucky I was to have had the opportunity to work with each one of you and be a part of your team.

To my colleagues and mentors, thank you for engaging in countless hours of conversations and empathy interviews. You shared your valuable time, insights, feedback, and resources. I am so grateful for your kindness and willingness to share so much with me. Your diverse perspectives guided my work and expanded my thinking.

To my advisor, Dr. Jones, thank you for your incredible guidance and support. Your encouraging words, wisdom, and expertise were invaluable. What a privilege to have had the opportunity to work with you during an incredibly important time of my life.

To my committee, thank you for taking the time to read and discuss my study with me. I am so grateful for your guidance and support.

This work is dedicated to my students, whose unwavering strength, resilience, and courage inspired this journey. I am continuously in awe of your determination and spirit. Please

know that you are worthy and deserving of every goal and dream you aim to accomplish. I remain committed to advocating for the inclusive and equitable educational experiences you deserve.

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Introduction

A high school diploma is a significant milestone in a student's educational experience, creating pathways to college and career opportunities. Students who achieve a high school diploma are more likely to attain and sustain employment, earn higher wages, and experience positive physical and mental health outcomes (Cable et al., 2020; Sugarman, 2019). High school graduates are also more likely to pursue higher education at the college and university levels (National Center for Education Statistics, 2023).

The impact of not achieving a high school diploma can have long-lasting adverse effects on an individual and society as a whole. Research indicates that students who do not earn a high school diploma are at greater risk of experiencing economic hardship, health issues, and social consequences (Lansford et al., 2016; Rumberger, 2011, 2013; Vable, 2020). Those who do not attain a high school diploma limit their job opportunities and access to higher education. Additionally, they tend to earn less than those with a high school diploma and have more difficulty maintaining steady employment. Individuals without a high school diploma are more vulnerable to substance abuse and incarceration (Lansford et al., 2016). They are also more likely to depend on government assistance (Lansford et al., 2016).

The challenges of attaining a high school diploma are evident among MLs, who have historically experienced lower graduation rates in U.S. schools (Office of Language Acquisition [OELE], 2023). There is a substantial gap in graduation outcomes when comparing MLs and their never-ML peers' graduation rates on a national, state, and district level. When examining subgroups, newcomer MLs who enter the U.S. educational system in high school graduate at a much lower rate than other ML subgroups. Many students within this group are older newcomer MLs who encounter unique barriers and challenges as they navigate their high school experience

(Sugarman, 2017, 2019). This study's problem of practice (PoP) is that older newcomer multilingual learners in CHSD graduate at lower rates than their peers. School systems must work toward creating systemic structures and procedures that promote inclusive, equitable, and intentional educational practices to support positive graduation outcomes for older newcomer MLs.

Descriptions of Terms

- Multilingual learners (MLs) are students who speak more than one language.
- A never-ML is a student who has never participated in an English Language Development (ELD) program.
- An ELD program is aligned with state and federal mandates and creates supports and systems to address MLs' English language development across content areas in grades K-12.
- Newcomer MLs are students who have recently arrived in the United States (U.S.). The U.S. Department of Education's Office of English Language Acquisition (OELA) (2023) defines newcomer MLs as immigrant adolescents who have lived in the United States for less than three years and are in the process of acquiring English.
- Older newcomer MLs are students who enter the United States two years "off track" in age and credit accumulation (New York City Department of Education, 2012, p. 4).
- Immigrants live "in a country other than their birth country" (Bolter, 2019, p.1).
- Refugees are individuals who are forced to flee their own country and seek safety in another country. They are unable to return to their own country because of feared persecution as a result of who they are, what they believe in or say, or because of armed

conflict, violence, or serious public disorder (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees [UNHCR], n.d, para. 1).

- Students identified as having limited or no formal education (SLIFE) are those who have missed six months or more of formal schooling before entering the U.S. school system and are over seven years of age (MSDE, 2022).
- Unaccompanied minors are individuals under the age of 18 who do not have a parent or legal guardian available to care for them in the United States.

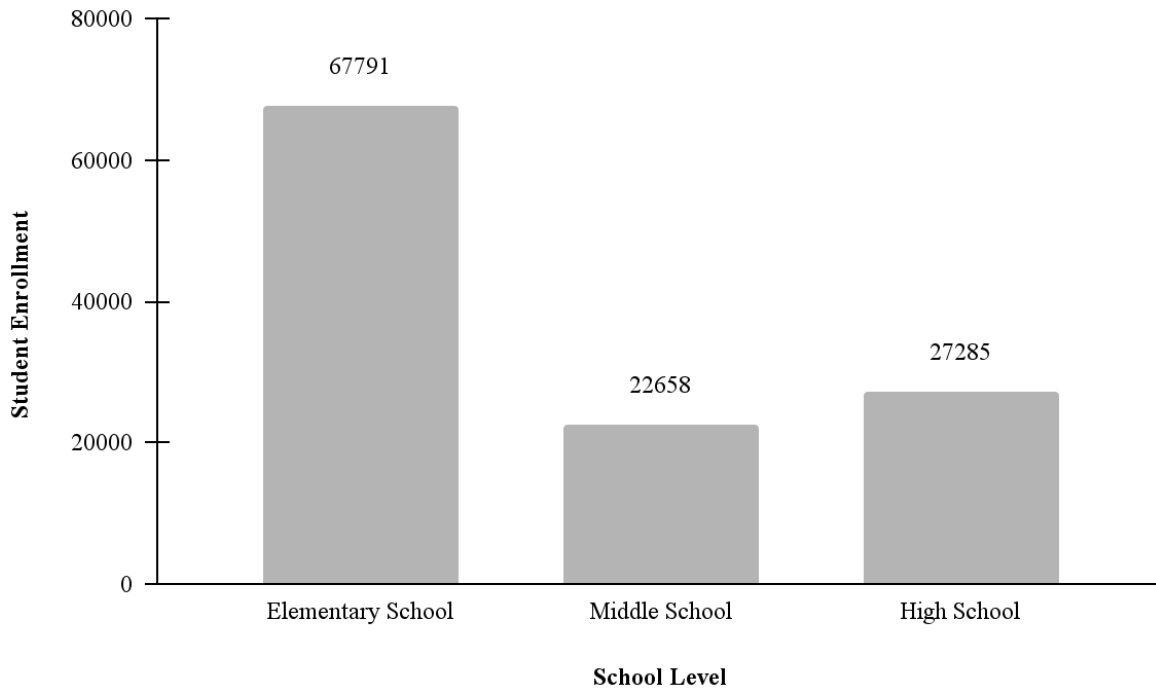
Background

Multilingual Learner Enrollment Trends

The number of MLs enrolling in the United States' school system continues to increase annually. In 2021, approximately 5 million MLs were enrolled in K-12 public schools, which comprises 10% of the student population (National Center for Educational Statistics, 2024). The National Education Association (2020) predicted that by 2025, one out of four children enrolled in U.S. schools will be an ML. Maryland ranks among the top ten states with the highest percentage of MLs enrolled in the public school system (Irwin et al., 2024), with 117,734 MLs enrolled in grades K-12 (Maryland State Department of Education [MSDE], 2024). In the 2023-2024 school year (SY), 27,285 MLs enrolled in Maryland public schools were in grades 9-12 (MSDE, 2024). As shown in Figure 1, nearly a quarter (23%) of MLs in Maryland public schools were high school students.

Figure 1:

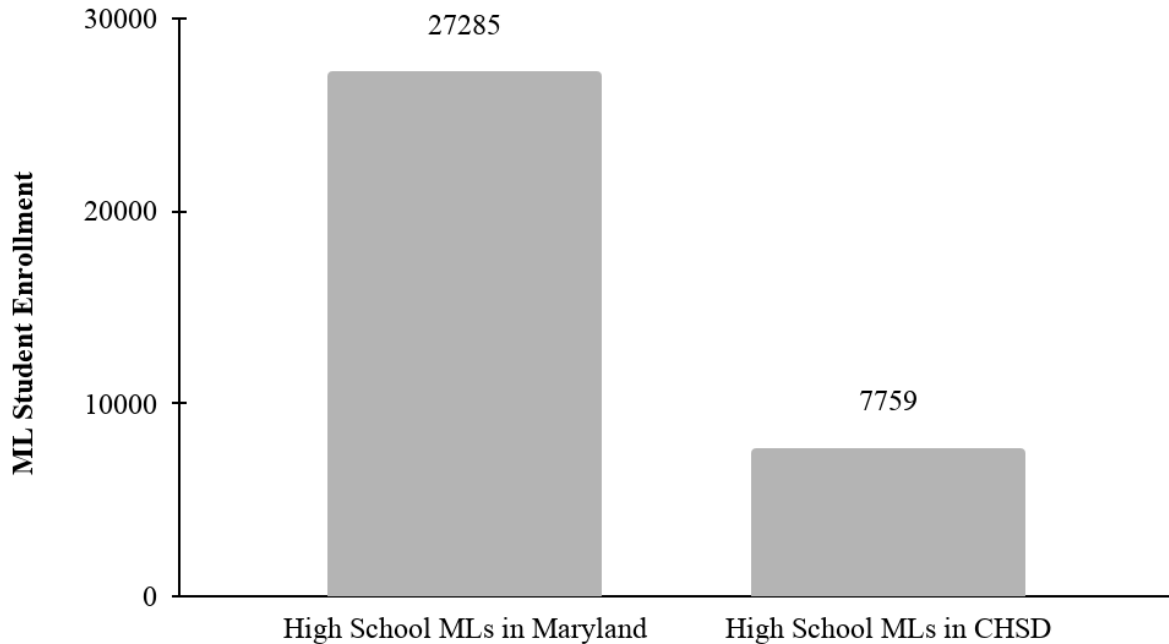
Number of MLs enrolled in Maryland public schools by school level in SY 2024.



On a district level, CHSD serves the largest number of MLs in Maryland, with over 34,000 students enrolled in grades K-12 (MSDE, 2024). CHSD MLs in grades K-12 comprise 30% of MLs attending Maryland public schools. Figure 2 shows that 7,759 MLs in grades 9-12 were enrolled in CHSD in SY 2024 (MSDE, 2024).

Figure 2:

Number of MLs enrolled in Maryland and CHSD high schools in SY 2024.

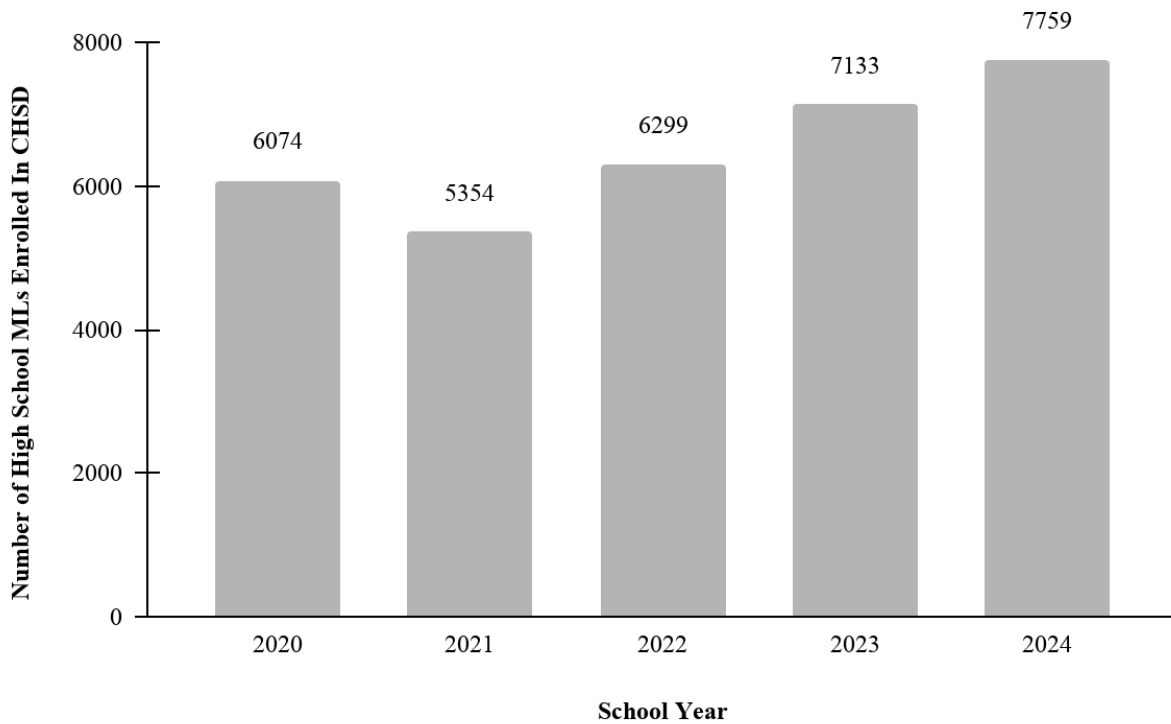


Number of MLs enrolled in Maryland and CHSD High Schools in 2024

CHSD high schools serve one of the largest percentages of high school MLs in the United States. Aside from a dip in enrollment, which could be due to the COVID-19 pandemic, enrollment for MLs at the high school level has increased each year. From SY 2020 to 2024, enrollment increased by 13%, with a 2.5% increase each year.

Figure 3:

Number of MLs enrolled in CHSD high schools from SY 2020 to 2024.



Note. Figure 3 illustrates the number of MLs enrolled in CHSD high schools from SY 2020 to SY 2024 (MSDE, 2024).

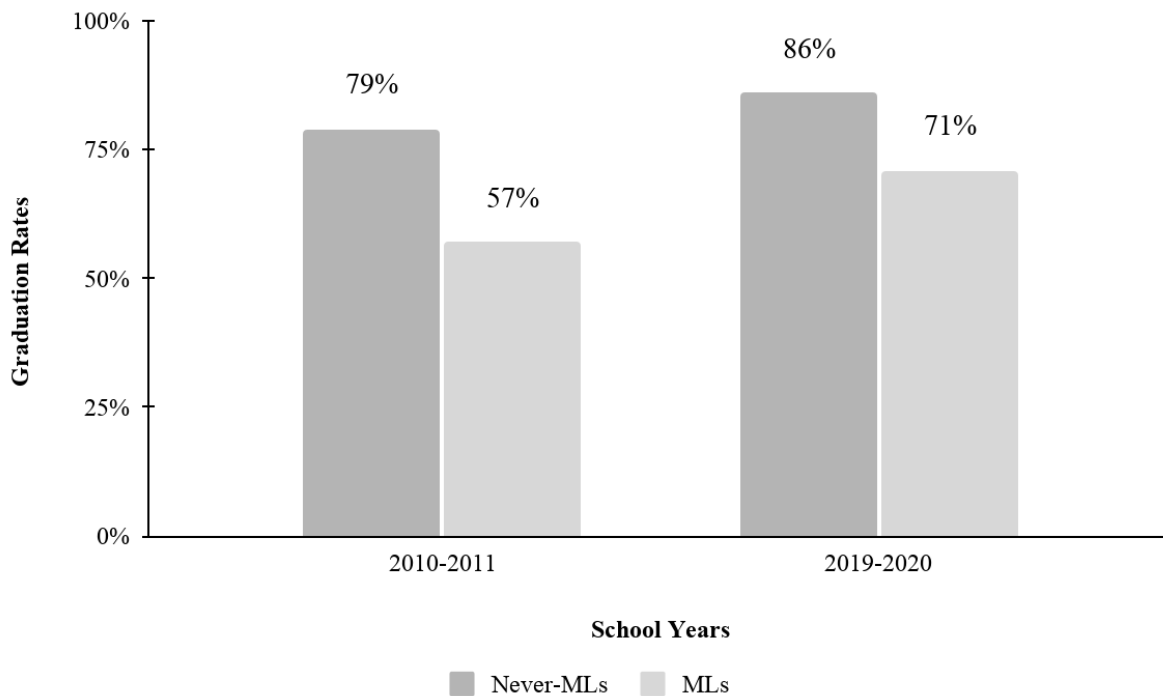
Multilingual Learner Graduation Trends

The challenges of attaining a high school diploma are particularly evident among MLs, who have historically experienced lower graduation rates in U.S. schools (U.S. Department of Education OELA, 2023). Figure 4 shows that in SY 2010-2011, 57% of MLs and 79% of never-MLs achieved a high school diploma. A decade later, high school diploma achievement increased for MLs and never-MLs. However, there remains a significant gap in diploma attainment among MLs. In SY 2019–2020, 71% of MLs earned a high school diploma compared

to 86% of never-MLs, a 14% and 7% increase, respectively (U.S. Department of Education OELA, 2023).

Figure 4:

Graduation rates for MLs vs. never-MLs in U.S. schools.

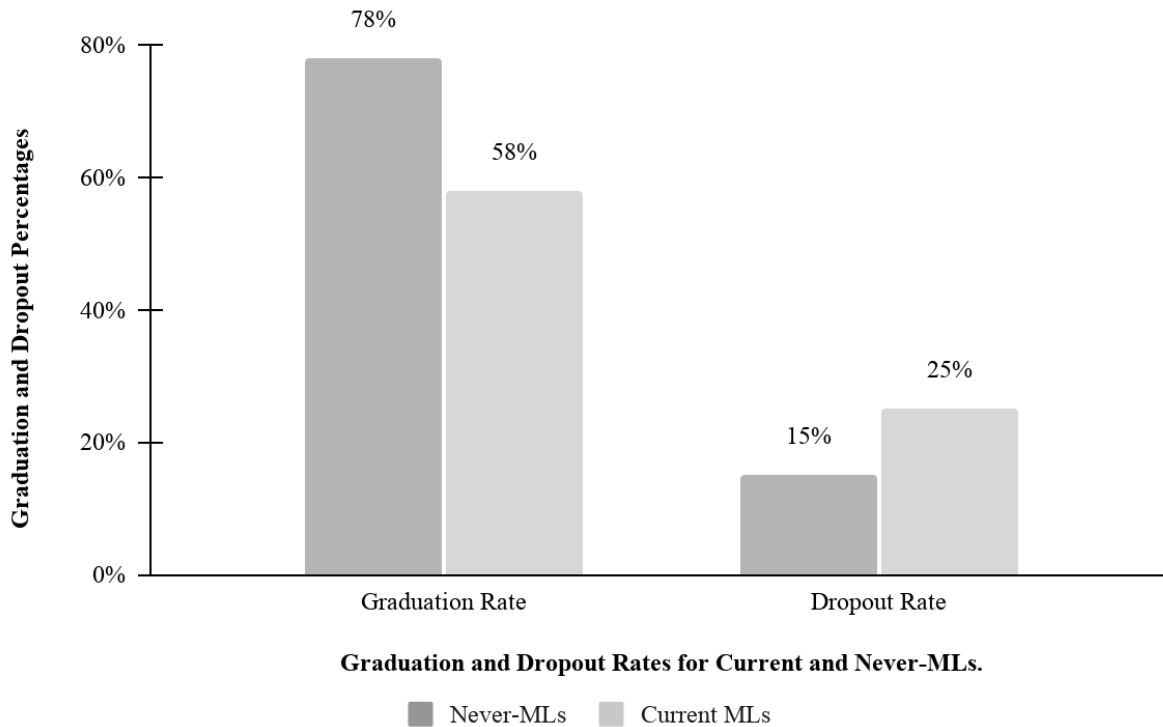


Note. This figure shows graduation rates for MLs and never-MLs in SY 2010-11 and 2019-2020 (U.S. Department of Education OELA, 2023).

The graduation gap persisted when comparing Maryland's graduation and dropout rates for MLs and never-MLs in SY 2021-22. MLs experienced lower graduation rates and higher dropout rates than their never-ML peers. Figure 5 shows that 20% more never-MLs graduated from high school than ML students; 10% more MLs dropped out of high school than never-MLs.

Figure 5

Maryland's 4-year Adjusted Cohort Graduation Rate (ACGR)¹ and dropout rate for MLs and never-MLs in SY 2021-2022.



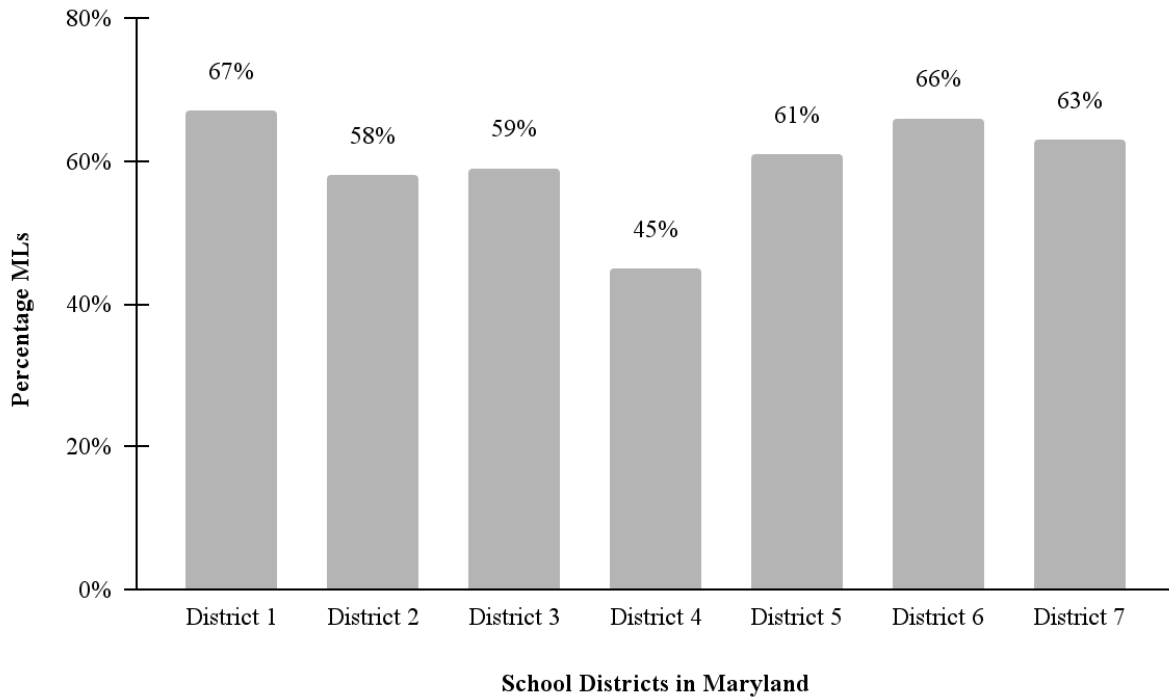
Note. This figure shows the graduation and dropout rates for MLs and never-MLs in Maryland in 2021. This graphic is adapted from MSDE (2025).

According to the U.S. Department of Education, Maryland's graduation rate for MLs in SY 2021-2022 was the sixth lowest in the United States (U.S. Department of Education OELA, 2023). When comparing graduation rates in Maryland districts with the highest number of MLs, Figure 6 illustrates that CHSD (District 2 on the graph) had the second-lowest graduation rate at 58% (MSDE, 2025).

¹ Maryland measures the number of students who graduate or drop out of high school within four years (4-year Adjusted Cohort Graduation Rate) and those who graduate high school in five years (5-year Adjusted Cohort Graduation Rate). These rates are adjusted based on students who enter into or out of the cohort.

Figure 6

Four-year adjusted cohort graduation rates for MLs in districts with the highest ML enrollment in Maryland public schools in SY 2021-2022.

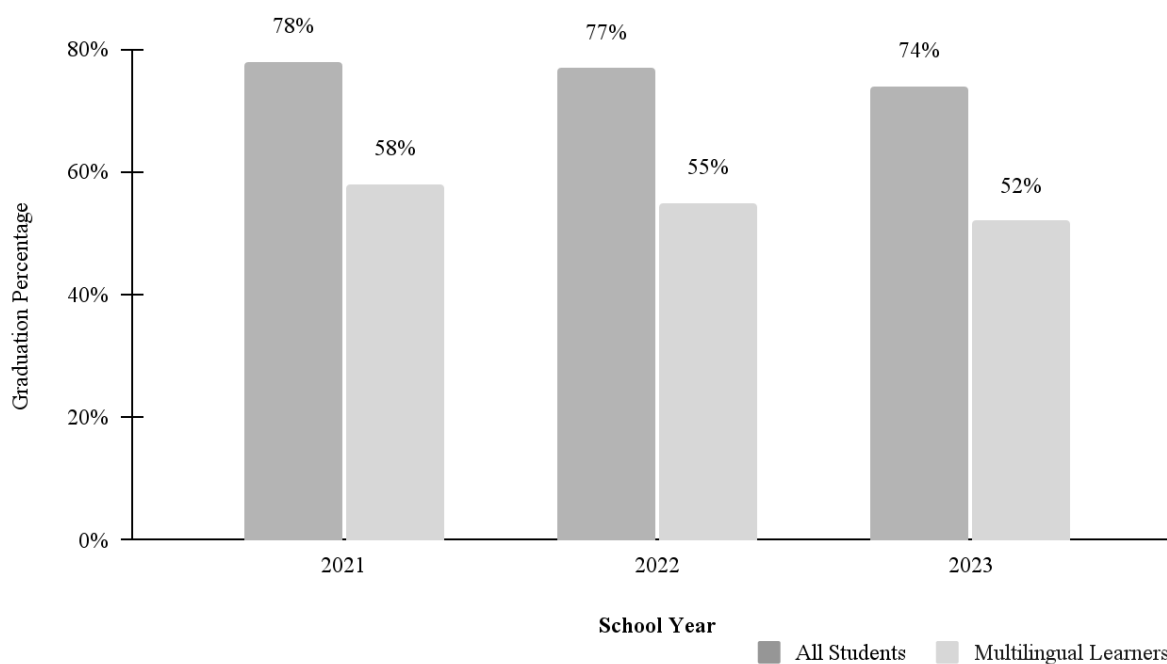


Note. Figure 6 breaks down graduation rates for MLs by seven districts in Maryland with the highest number of MLs enrolled in high school. Data was retrieved from MSDE (2025).

Although high school graduation rates for all CHSD students have consistently declined from SY 2019 to SY 2023, the rate of decrease for MLs is much faster than that of all students (MSDE, 2024). Figure 7 illustrates the decline in graduation rates over three years and the significant gap that continues to widen over time.

Figure 7

Four-year adjusted cohort graduation rates for MLs in CHSD from SY 2021-2024.



Note. This figure shows the graduation rates for all CHSD high school students and MLs from SY 2021 to SY 2023 (MSDE, 2024).

As high school enrollment of MLs in CHSD high schools continues to increase, their graduation rates decrease, and the graduation gap not only persists but also widens. These trends indicate the need to learn more about the MLs that CHSD serves in order to promote equitable and inclusive educational practices. It is important to explore ML subgroups, identify causal factors contributing to graduation trends, and identify and implement targeted and evidence-based interventions to stabilize and increase graduation rates while moving toward closing the graduation gap between MLs and their never-ML peers. When looking deeper at MLs and ML subgroups in high school, newcomer MLs tend to experience significant barriers and challenges in achieving a high school diploma.

Multilingual Learner Subgroups

Newcomer MLs are at a higher risk of dropping out of high school than other subgroups (Deussen et al., 2017; New York State Education Department Office of Bilingual Education and World Languages, 2017). Newcomer MLs in high school encounter unique challenges as they enter the U.S. school system and are tasked with meeting institutional monolingualistic ideologies and standards (Chang-Bacon, 2021; Rosa & Burdick, 2017). They are expected to complete grade-level courses successfully, meet English language proficiency goals, participate in state-mandated testing, and meet state-specific graduation requirements while adjusting to a new language, culture, and learning environment (Callahan, 2013; Rodriguez et al., 2020; Sugarman, 2019). Additionally, these students are tasked with acquiring a new academic language and content within four years of high school or before they age out² of the public school system. It is particularly challenging, considering that acquiring academic language in English typically takes five to seven years (Cummins, 1981; Orozco & Orozco, 2014). Sugarman (2017) argues that these students' challenges and stressors are unparalleled. Some newcomer students may experience social, emotional, physical, and mental health challenges due to traumatic events, family separation, reunification, economic instability, marginalization, and food and housing scarcity (Chang, 2019; Cohodes et al., 2021; Edyburn et al., 2024; Sugarman, 2019). Newcomer MLs may be more at risk of dropping out because of interrupted education in their home countries, difficulty accessing language in content area courses, and the practice of placing students in electives instead of core courses (Deussen et al., 2017; Sugarman, 2017). Other commonly cited reasons MLs drop out of high school include not having enough time to complete high school requirements, a lack of quality programming designed for MLs, and

² A student ages out of high school if they turn 21 years of age before the start of the next school year. Once the student turns 21 years old, they can attend school for the remainder of the school year, but will be unable to return the following year.

socioeconomic factors that require students to work and support themselves and their families (Manspile et al., 2021; Rodriguez et al., 2020).

Older newcomer MLs face particular challenges in achieving a high school diploma (OELA, 2023; Sugarman, 2017, 2019). Students may be older in high school because they were previously retained, enrolled in ninth grade beyond ages 14 and 15, or lived outside of the state or country without sufficient or transferable credits needed to enroll in the grade level expected at their age. Additionally, a student's age is more likely to impact their likelihood of graduating from high school. When a newcomer ML enrolls in high school beyond the typical age of their grade level, such as a 16-year-old who enrolls in 9th grade, they are less likely to graduate high school than those entering 9th grade at 14 years of age.

Older newcomer MLs experience additional obstacles with the expectation to complete all required coursework and graduation requirements before aging out of the public school system (Sugarman, 2017, 2019; U.S. Department of Education, 2023). In some instances, school leadership has denied older newcomer MLs the right to enroll in comprehensive public high schools due to their age, which violates their legal rights to free public education until 21 years of age (Sugarman, 2017, 2019, 2021). Sugarman (2021) partly attributes the lack of school system support for older newcomer MLs in achieving their high school diploma to the accountability measures that the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA)³ places on schools to graduate students within four years.

³ A U.S. federal education law signed into act in 2015 that provides states with more autonomy over their programming and includes an increase in accountability measures and data transparency.

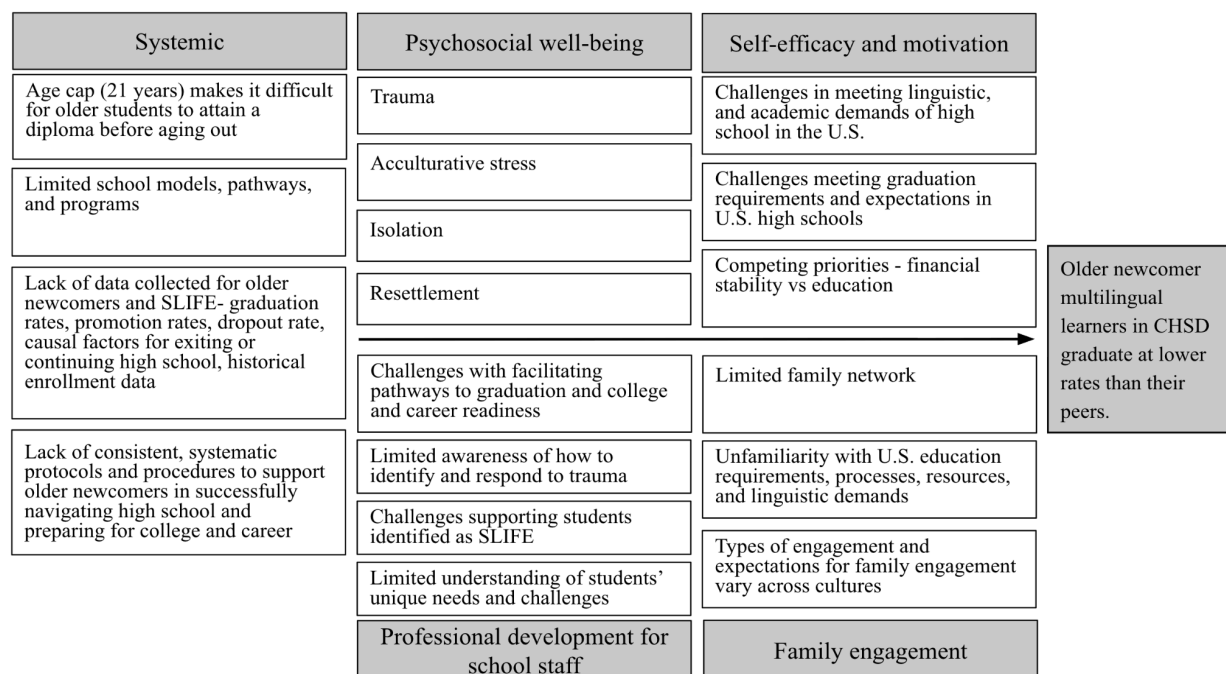
Causal Systems Analysis

Many factors contribute to negative graduation outcomes for older newcomer MLs.

Figure 8 displays five causal categories that the author explores to determine potential factors contributing to low graduation rates for older newcomer MLs. Causal factors include family engagement, self-efficacy and motivation, psychosocial well-being, systemic barriers, and professional development for school staff. Each causal factor includes several sub-factors. Each sub-factor offers a deeper look into the unique challenges, obstacles, and needs that older newcomer MLs encounter as they navigate their high school experience and engage in college and career preparation in U.S. schools.

Figure 8

A fishbone diagram exploring causal factors contributing to lower graduation rates for MLs compared to never-MLs.



Note. This fishbone diagram displays evidence-based causes that contribute to low graduation rates for older newcomer MLs.

Family Engagement

Family engagement fosters positive student educational outcomes (Barger et al., 2019; Curry, 2019; Epstein et al., 2018; Henderson & Mapp, 2002; Ishimaru, 2019; Jeynes, 2012; Potchnik et al., 2017; Ross, 2016). Still, challenges exist for immigrant families, particularly those of newcomer MLs, due to cultural, linguistic, and systemic barriers (Antony-Newman, 2019; Dreyden-Petterson, 2018; Greenburg Motamedi et al., 2021). Consistent family engagement can positively impact student achievement, motivation, and social and emotional well-being (Barger et al., 2019). The Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) (2015) emphasizes the importance of family engagement by including legislation and allocating funding toward increasing and enhancing family engagement initiatives and programming at the school level. The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services and Education (2016) defines family engagement as “the systematic inclusion of families in activities and programs that promote children’s development, learning, and wellness, including in the planning, development, and evaluation of such activities, programs, and systems” (p. 1). This approach to family engagement highlights the involvement of families in all aspects of the engagement process, from program and activity conceptualization to assessment and evaluation. MSDE (2016) describes family engagement as a partnership in which families, schools, and communities share the responsibility of working together to improve students’ educational experiences and outcomes (MSDE, 2016). National and local definitions of family engagement align with the overlapping theory of influence proposed by Epstein et al. (2018), which suggests that student success is shaped by interactions among family, school, and community, with the child as the central focus. Successful family engagement occurs when all stakeholders—families, schools, and communities—work together in various ways to support students as they navigate their education experiences.

There are many ways in which families engage in the school community, including, but not limited to, volunteering for school events, joining school-based committees, attending parent-teacher conferences, and helping their children with homework. Epstein et al. (2018) offer a research-based framework that includes six ways families, schools, and communities can collaborate to support student success. Types of involvement identified in this framework include:

(1) parenting—helping all families establish supportive home environments for children and helping the school understand its families; (2) communicating—establishing two-way exchanges using varied technologies about school programs and children’s progress; (3) volunteering—recruiting and organizing parent help at school, home, or other locations, including audiences for student activities; (4) learning at home—providing information and ideas to families about how to help students with homework and other curriculum-related materials; (5) decision making—having family members serve as representatives and leaders on school committees, and as advocates for their children and other children on school decisions; (6) collaborating with the community—identifying and integrating resources and services from the community to strengthen school programs and to enable students to serve the community (Epstein et al., 2018).

This framework is widely referenced in research and is often used to guide school systems in developing and enhancing their family engagement practices.

When considering the unique needs and circumstances of newly arrived immigrant families and how they develop family engagement practices in their children’s schools, Han and Love (2015) propose the Stages of Immigrant Parent Involvement model. This model includes four stages that immigrant families experience as they engage in their children’s school

community. In the first stage, newly arrived immigrant families are cultural survivors. Families may not appear as engaged in their children's school community in this stage of involvement because they must prioritize meeting basic needs, such as securing food and shelter. In the second stage of involvement, families are cultural learners, learning about the school system and engaging in school-based events. In the third stage, families are cultural connectors and support other families in engaging in the school community. They connect families to school resources and help develop others' capacity to engage in the school community. In the fourth stage, families become cultural leaders, advocating for other families and children. They may also engage in parent training and leadership opportunities within their school community (Han & Love, 2015).

While family engagement is recognized as a critical component of student achievement, it is essential to acknowledge that perceptions, experiences, and expectations of family engagement practices may vary across cultural and educational backgrounds (Antony-Newman, 2019; Dreyden-Pettersen, 2018; Greenberg, Motamedi et al., 2021). These cultural and educational variations impact how families of MLs engage with their children's school community and often pose barriers and challenges when fostering collaborations. Immigrant and refugee families may not be aware of the expectations and standard practices of family engagement in their children's new school environment because they are accustomed to the practices and norms that align with their background and experiences (Antony-Newman, 2019; Dreyden-Pettersen, 2018; Greenburg Motamedi et al., 2021). Engagement norms and expectations are socially constructed (Antony-Newman, 2019), and educational practices and engagement vary locally, nationally, and globally (Dreyden-Pettersen, 2018). These differences in family engagement practices and expectations, along with vast variations in practices, pose

challenges for newcomer ML families as they work toward building relationships with their school community to support student achievement (Greenburg Motamedi et al., 2021).

Immigrant and refugee families in the U.S. may be unfamiliar with school system requirements, processes, resources, and linguistic demands, which may impact their ability to engage in the school community in ways that meet the school system's expectations (Antony-Newman, 2019; Dryden-Peterson, 2018; Greenburg Motamedi et al., 2021). Families new to a school system may not be familiar with grading systems, graduation requirements, and attendance policies (Antony-Newman, 2019). Additionally, language differences between families and school stakeholders impact their ability to communicate with school staff, engage in school activities, and access resources and support (Antony-Newman, 2019; Cuevas, 2023; Greenburg Motamedi et al., 2021; Manpile et al., 2021; Niehaus, 2014).

Over the past ten years, more than half a million unaccompanied minors have immigrated to the U.S. (Alcaraz et al., 2024). Sixty percent of unaccompanied minors ranged from 16 to 18 years old (Alcaraz et al., 2024). These individuals often live with siblings, distant relatives, or other sponsors (OELA, 2023). Such family structures and dynamics have implications related to the capacity and ability to engage in the student's school environment, posing additional challenges in promoting family engagement, particularly when students live alone or with siblings.

Self-efficacy and Motivation

Older newcomer MLs entering high school face unique challenges that can impact their self-efficacy and motivation to continue their high school education and achieve a high school diploma. Bandura (1995) describes self-efficacy as the "belief in one's capabilities to organize and execute the courses of action required to manage prospective situations" (p. 2). The level of

self-efficacy an individual maintains can vary. The stronger the self-efficacy, the more likely an individual will persevere through challenging situations (Bandura, 1977). Bandura (1977) suggested that an individual's self-efficacy is influenced by “four sources of information: performance accomplishments, vicarious experience, verbal persuasion, and physiological states” (p. 195). Self-efficacy beliefs greatly influence motivation (Bandura, 1977), making individuals more likely to persevere through challenges and reach their goals. Students who experience low self-efficacy tend to lack confidence, question their abilities to overcome obstacles, and persist in achieving their goals. They may not feel confident that they will be successful in high school, which impacts their motivation, leading them to disengage and leave high school before achieving a diploma.

Motivation is an individual's movement toward achieving goals or reaching a specific outcome (Davidovitch & Dorot, 2023; Deci & Ryan, 2000). Deci and Ryan's (1985) Self-Determination Theory (SDT) posits different types and levels of motivation based on reasons and outcomes. Two common types of motivation are *intrinsic*, which refers to an action driven by inherent interest and enjoyment, and *extrinsic*, which pertains to an action taken for tangible external factors (Deci & Ryan, 1985, 2000, 2017).

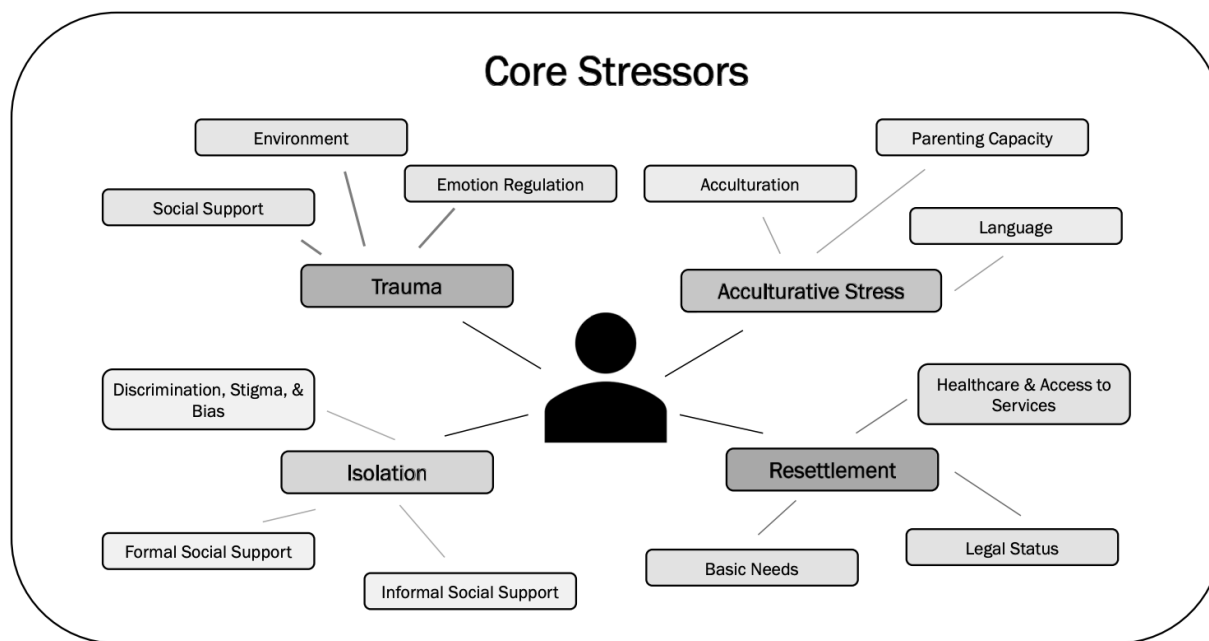
As older newcomer MLs adapt to their high school experience, they are tasked with accessing academic content in a language that may be new to them, developing English language proficiency, and meeting state and district requirements needed to achieve a high school diploma (Rodriguez et al., 2020; Walqui et al., 2016). Often, these students experience the added pressure of meeting all graduation requirements before they age out of the school system (Sugarman, 2017). Many older newcomer MLs are students with limited or interrupted formal education (SLIFE), so they enter high school under-credited and behind their native-English-speaking peers

in meeting academic goals and graduation requirements (Sugarman, 2017). When students struggle to meet these high school requirements and expectations placed upon them, they can experience frustration and loss of motivation to continue in their academic journey (Rodriguez et al., 2020; Suarez-Orozco, 2010; Sugarman, 2017). Many older newcomer MLs encounter extrinsic motivational factors that impact their ability to continue a high school education. Suarez-Orozco et al. (2010) found that newcomer students who struggled to achieve academic success in high school believed the financial benefits of working were more feasible and gave them a stronger sense of self-worth. Economic challenges and responsibilities at home often drive older newcomer MLs into the workforce before they can achieve a high school diploma (Manspile et al., 2021; Sugarman, 2017). Immigrants who have recently arrived in the U.S. typically face greater economic hardship than those who have lived there for more extended periods (Manspile et al., 2021). The strain of balancing school and work takes precedence over academic achievement due to the urgency to address physiological needs. According to Maslow's (1943) theory of human motivation, individuals must address their basic needs, such as food and shelter, before meeting a different set of needs. When older newcomer MLs must address their fundamental physiological needs, education is simply not the priority at that moment. In these circumstances, education may be perceived as a luxury, while survival is a necessity.

Psychosocial Well-being

The unique experiences and challenges that older newcomer MLs face can significantly impact their psychosocial well-being. Newcomer students in U.S. schools are incredibly linguistically and culturally diverse (Edyburn, 2024; OELA, 2023; Sugarman, 2017) and encompass varied subgroups, including refugees, asylum seekers, unaccompanied minors

(Edyburn, 2024), and students identified as SLIFE (Umansky et al., 2018). Students and their families leave their home countries for many reasons, such as poverty, war, and persecution (Cohodes, 2022; Edyburn, 2024; OELA, 2023). These students often experience challenges that can negatively impact their social, emotional, and mental health (OELA, 2023; Suarez-Orozco & Suarez-Orozco, 2024). These challenges may arise before, during, and after immigration, leaving lasting effects on their psychosocial well-being (Cardoso, 2018; Cohodes et al., 2021; Suarez-Orozco & Suarez-Orozco, 2024). The resulting stress can hinder academic success (Sugarman, 2017) and may contribute to disparities in graduation rates between newcomer students and their never-ML peers (Edyburn, 2024). Researchers at the Boston Children's Hospital Trauma & Community Resilience Center (BCH TCRC) (2021) created a framework identifying sources of stress that impact immigrants and refugees as they navigate a new country, language, and culture. As shown in Figure 9, these stressors include trauma, acculturation, resettlement, and isolation (Abdi, 2018; Brady et al., 2021; Davis et al., 2021; Ellis et al., 2020; OELA, 2023). Each stressor is accompanied by a set of domains that relate to the corresponding stress. For example, resettlement stress focuses on access or challenges in addressing foundational health, safety, and infrastructure needs. Isolation may be caused by discrimination, stigma, bias, or a lack of formal and informal support. Traumatic stress connects to an individual's environment, social support, and emotional regulation. Acculturative stress relates to acculturation, parenting capacity, and language (BCH TCRC, 2021; Davis et al., 2021; Ellis et al., 2020).

Figure 9*The Four Core Stressors Framework*

Note. Image from The Refugee and Immigrant Core Stressors Toolkit (RICST): Understanding the Multifaceted Needs of Refugee and Immigrant Youth and Families Through a Four Core Stressors Framework (BCH TCRC; 2021; Davis et al., 2021).

Research has shown that interventions that address these factors can positively impact immigrant youths' psychosocial well-being (BCH TCRC, 2021; Davis et al., 2021; Tyrer & Fazel, 2014).

Trauma

Trauma is a significant stressor that can negatively impact immigrant youth. Davis et al. (2021) describe traumatic stress "as a potential response after experiencing an intense event that threatens or causes harm to a child's physical or emotional well-being" (p. 624). Traumatic events can occur before, during, or after immigration (Davis et al., 2021; Palacios et al., 2024;

Suarez-Orozco & Suarez-Orozco, 2024). Many older newcomer MLs are vulnerable to trauma and posttraumatic stress due to experiences with war, violence, abuse, malnutrition, and border detainment (Short & Boyson, 2012). Adolescents from the Northern Triangle (El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras) sometimes leave their home countries to escape abusive households, gang violence, and poverty (Cardoso, 2018). During migration, adolescents are susceptible to traumatic events, such as robbery, assault, kidnapping, and extortion (Torres et al., 2018). Newcomer adolescents who are detained at border crossings are at increased risk of witnessing or experiencing traumatic events within the facilities (Palacios et al., 2024). Post-migration⁴, these children are at risk of experiencing trauma related to family reunification and separation, legal concerns, and linguistic and cultural differences (Cohodes et al., 2021).

Acculturation

Newcomer MLs are vulnerable to acculturative stress. Davis et al. (2021) define acculturative stress as “stress that refugee and immigrant children and families experience as they try to navigate between their new culture and their culture of origin” (p. 624). Acculturative stressors might include experiences with family conflicts, adjusting to a new school environment, and challenges in forming an integrated identity (Davis et al., 2021). Acculturative stressors can negatively impact an individual's mental health. d’Abreu et al. (2019) suggest that acculturative stressors, such as struggles fitting into a new culture, learning a new language, and maintaining healthy relationships with family and care providers, can contribute to depression and post-traumatic stress.

⁴ “Trauma endured by displaced migrants following arrival at their destination” (American Psychiatric Association Council on Children, Adolescents, and Their Families, n.d., p. 3)

Isolation

Newcomer students may also risk feeling isolated, which can impact a student's social, emotional, and mental health (OELA, 2023). Stressors related to isolation may include a lack of trust, discrimination, harassment, and difficulty fitting in (Davis et al., 2021). A sense of belonging is crucial to a newcomer adolescent's psychosocial well-being. Several studies have found that students who lack a sense of belonging are more likely to drop out of high school (Boone-Hamilton, 2013; Rodriguez et al., 2020). Older newcomer MLs who live in the U.S. alone or with limited family structures and support may feel isolated and lack a sense of belonging in their school community.

Resettlement

Newcomer students may experience stress related to resettlement (OELA, 2023). Davis et al. define resettlement as “stress experienced as refugee and immigrant youth and families try to establish lives in a new place” (p. 624). Stressors related to resettlement include, but are not limited to, financial stress, meeting basic needs, finding housing, and access to healthcare (Davis et al., 2021). Older newcomer MLs, particularly those who are financial contributors to a household and have additional familial obligations, may feel the added stress of balancing these responsibilities (Juang et al., 2018). These additional stressors can hinder a student’s ability to focus and prioritize educational goals.

Psychosocial Well-Being and Graduation Rates

High school students who face psychosocial challenges are more vulnerable to substance abuse, unsafe behaviors, attendance issues, and dropping out of school (National Center for Chronic Disease Prevention and Health Promotion, Division of Adolescent and School Health, 2023). Although research is limited in the context of newcomer adolescents, studies indicate a

correlation between graduation outcomes and a student's psychosocial well-being. When examining why newcomer adolescents leave or consider leaving high school before achieving a high school diploma, Boone-Hamilton (2013) found that a student's sense of belonging was a contributing factor. Through their investigation on how family separation and reunification impact graduation outcomes for immigrant children, Gindling & Poggio (2008) found that children who were separated from their families during migration were less likely to graduate from high school. Children reunited with their parents in their adolescent years were at a greater risk of academic challenges and high school incompleteness (Gindling & Poggio, 2008). In a large-scale study, Porsche et al. (2011) found a correlation between childhood trauma, psychiatric disorders, and higher dropout rates. The study also identified higher dropout rates for immigrant students. Additionally, the dropout rate for immigrants depended on the age at which the child immigrated to the United States. Porsch et al. (2011) found an increase in dropout rates for children who immigrated to the U.S. in their adolescent years. When exploring how the role of exposure to violence impacted high school graduation, Diette et al. (2017) found that students who were victims of violence were less likely to graduate from high school than individuals who were not victims of violence. Morrow & Villodas' (2018) longitudinal study found that students with Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs; Feletti et al., 1998) were at a higher risk of dropping out of high school. These studies provide insight into the impact of a student's social, emotional, and mental health on high school graduation outcomes. When a student's psychosocial well-being is compromised, it becomes increasingly difficult for them to achieve a high school diploma.

Systemic

Older newcomer MLs encounter many systemic barriers while navigating their high school experience. They are tasked with meeting all graduation requirements (see Appendix A for Maryland's course requirements for high school graduation) within four years or before aging out of the public school system (Sugarman, 2017, 2019; U.S. Department of Education, 2023). This is especially challenging as they must acquire a new academic language in varied content areas within this timeframe, which generally takes five to seven years to accomplish (Cummins, 1981; Orozco & Oroszo, 2014). They face rigid school structures with inflexible scheduling and programming not designed or targeted to meet their needs (Manspile, 2021). The lack of data collected and segregated on this particular subgroup makes it challenging for school systems to identify and implement targeted supports to address their needs and facilitate positive graduation outcomes (Manspile et al., 2021; Sugarman, 2021). Additionally, school systems lack consistent, systematic protocols and procedures to support older newcomer MLs in successfully navigating their high school experience and college and career preparation.

In Maryland, students are entitled to a free and public education until 21 years of age and must be enrolled in school until they are 18. High school programs are traditionally designed to be completed in four years. Many newcomer adolescents have benefited from five to six years to achieve a high school diploma (Sugarman, 2017, 2019). When examining graduation rates for MLs across the U.S., Sugarman (2019) found that MLs who earned their high school diploma after five to six years had higher graduation rates. Less is known about particular subgroups who attended high school for five or six years. However, Sugarman (2019) hypothesized that older newcomer MLs and students identified as SLIFE might benefit from extra time in high school. Students identified as SLIFE often have literacy gaps in their home language and may need

additional time to develop their literacy skills. Upon entering ninth grade, students identified as SLIFE are often placed in numerous elective courses to support literacy and language needs and may require additional time to earn the credits necessary for graduation (Sugarman, 2019). Older newcomer MLs may require more time in high school due to work, financial, and familial responsibilities (Sugarman, 2019; Umansky et al., 2018). While newcomer students may benefit from a five to six-year high school program, older newcomer MLs who enter ninth grade at seventeen years or older cannot take advantage of this additional time, as they will age out of the public school system (Sugarman, 2017; Sugarman, 2021).

Compounding this issue, these students often face rigid high school structures with inflexible scheduling and programming (Manspile, 2021). Most state policies do not consider how graduation pathways might differ for older MLs (Sugarman, 2021). School systems that offer flexible models, pathways, and programs to support student graduation outcomes are not necessarily designed to meet the unique needs of older newcomer MLs (Sugarman, 2017). Some districts offer weekend and evening classes, while others provide year-round instruction to support older newcomer MLs. Still, practices are not universal (Sugarman, 2017), and accessibility to these programs depends on the school and school district. Furthermore, little is known about how effective these program models are in supporting positive graduation outcomes for older newcomer MLs.

Maryland offers three options for achieving a high school diploma for students who are no longer eligible to return to high school once they reach age 21. These options include completing a series of four General Educational Development (GED) tests, a National External Diploma Program (NEDP), and an Adult High School Pilot Program (Maryland Department of Labor, n.d). As shown in Table 1, each option offers a different pathway to achieve a high school

diploma. The GED path requires students to pass four content-area exams successfully. The NEDP is a self-paced, computer-based program with a portfolio component to demonstrate mastery of content areas and life skills. The Adult High School Pilot Program requires that students complete courses that align with Maryland’s graduation requirements. There are two Adult High School Pilot Programs, both of which are located in Baltimore.

Table 1

High School Diploma Pathways for Adults in Maryland

GED	National External Diploma Program	Adult High School Pilot Program
• Must be a Maryland resident • Must be 18 years of age or older to enroll • Must earn a minimum score in four content area tests: Reasoning through Language Arts, Science, Social Studies, and Mathematics, to achieve a high school diploma	• Must be a Maryland resident • Must be 18 years of age or older • Self-paced computer-based program • Courses cover academic content areas and life skills • Students create a portfolio demonstrating mastery of skills to achieve a high school diploma • Offered in most Maryland counties	• Must be a Maryland resident • Must be 21 years of age or older • Must complete a required amount of coursework aligned with Maryland graduation requirements to achieve a high school diploma • Offers postsecondary credits • A total of two high schools are located in Baltimore

Note. This table displays the characteristics of three adult high school diploma or equivalency pathway programs offered in Maryland. Information was adapted from “Ways Adults Can Earn a Maryland High School Diploma,” by the Maryland Department of Labor, n.d.

It is unknown if and how these programs are tailored to support linguistic needs, nor is there data on their impact on immigrant populations new to English. Most importantly, students

must withdraw from high school to participate in these options, so they are no longer classified as public school students.

To support students in achieving a high school diploma within four years on the district level, CHSD provides several opportunities to enroll in additional online or in-person credit-bearing courses outside the students' standard high school day. These courses are typically offered to help students recover credits they did not earn when they previously attempted them. Depending on available funding and resources, some schools offer an Educational Online Program (EOP), a blended model where students engage in both classroom and online learning. This blended programming with an online course platform is not necessarily tailored to meet older newcomer MLs' unique linguistic, cultural, and social needs. Some CHSD high schools provide an Extended Day Program (EDP), offering additional in-person, credit-bearing courses taught by teachers outside of the standard school day. These classes typically meet before or after regular school hours. CHSD also provides additional daytime courses during the summer months to support student progress. Annual fluctuations in funding for these programs result in inconsistent course availability, which varies by high school and academic year. Additionally, students who prioritize taking advantage of additional course offerings outside of the school day are those who have typically failed courses and need to retake them in order to stay on track for graduation. This criterion for additional courses doesn't fully align with older newcomer MLs, who may not need to retake failed courses, but could benefit from taking additional courses due to their age-related time constraints. CHSD offers several semesterized⁵ high school models in which students can accelerate their learning and recover full-year credit courses. These models are typically designed for students who need to recover credits they did not earn on their first

⁵ Semesterized refers to an academic model in which full school year courses are condensed to half of a school year, allowing students to earn credits more quickly.

attempt. Semesterized models are also utilized to support students who have challenges achieving grade level promotion or were mandated to attend a non-traditional program due to their behavior within their boundary school⁶.

Other notable programs in CHSD that have been dismantled due to a lack of funding and momentum include several evening semesterized high school models offered in different parts of the district and an evening GED pilot program specifically for MLs. The lack of data on how these programs impact graduation outcomes for older newcomer MLs makes it challenging to determine their effectiveness or appropriateness for this subgroup.

Data collection and desegregation practices are insufficient when identifying school support for MLs (Sugarman, 2021). A lack of data collected and disaggregated on older newcomer MLs, including graduation rates, older newcomer subgroups⁷, promotion rates, dropout rates, causal factors for low retention and graduation, and historical enrollment data, makes it challenging for school systems to identify and implement preventive supports, systems, and protocols that target the unique needs of older newcomer MLs and support positive graduation outcomes (Walqui & Chu, 2015). Many school systems have implemented dropout prevention metric systems, including indicators such as ninth-grade promotion, attendance, behavior, and academic performance, to identify students who are at risk of dropping out of high school. However, little is known about how these indicators align with ML subgroups (Deussen et al., 2017; Sugarman, 2019). This gap in the literature and data collection practices at the national, state, and local levels makes it challenging for school system stakeholders to implement systems to support older newcomer MLs and to establish consistent practices and protocols to facilitate positive graduation outcomes.

⁶ The public school students are assigned to attend based on their address of residence.

⁷ MLs who are also identified as students with special needs, students identified as SLIFE, students with transferable credits, and students with non-transferable credits.

School systems often lack consistent, systematic protocols and procedures to support older newcomer MLs in successfully navigating high school and preparing for college and a career. The way in which older newcomer MLs are supported at the school-based level varies by school and staff member. Greenburg Motamedi et al. (2021) suggest helping older newcomer MLs develop a graduation and postsecondary plan when they enroll in high school to ensure successful high school completion and transition into college or a career. It is also crucial to take the time to help students understand the complexities of the U.S. school system, which can be quite different from the school systems in their home countries. Older newcomer MLs entering U.S. schools may not be familiar with graduation requirements as well as district and school-based resources and support systems. This lack of familiarity can impede their ability to effectively navigate their new educational environment.

Professional Development for School Staff

To promote student success, educators must engage in professional development tailored to the specific needs of the students they serve (Short & Boyson, 2012). There is a limited understanding of newcomer adolescents and how their needs may differ from MLs as a general classification, which is often reflected in professional development offered in schools (Umansky et al., 2018). In a study of several district practices on professional development for school staff, Umansky et al. (2018) found that there were opportunities to connect content to language instruction and explore instructional models for MLs, such as the Sheltered Instruction Observation Protocol (SIOP). However, professional development addressing needs more specific to newcomer adolescents was limited (Umansky et al., 2018). School staff often lack professional development in critical areas specific to challenges older newcomer MLs face, such as supporting students identified as SLIFE, identifying and responding to students with trauma,

facilitating pathways to graduation, and preparing students for college and career readiness (Umansky et al., 2018).

Many newcomer adolescents entering high school are identified as SLIFE and have literacy and content area gaps in their home language (Sugarman, 2017). Teachers at the secondary level are not typically equipped to provide instruction related to foundational literacy skills and often find it challenging to meet students' language, academic, and literacy needs (Short & Boyson, 2012; Sugarman, 2017). Increasing professional development opportunities to explore strategies for supporting students as they continue to develop their literacy, content knowledge, and language acquisition may reduce barriers to achieving academic success.

Newcomer adolescents are also vulnerable to trauma and post-traumatic stress due to their immigration experiences (Davis et al., 2021; Palacios et al., 2024; Suarez-Orozco & Suarez-Orozco, 2024). These traumatic experiences impact students' psychosocial well-being and directly impact their ability to achieve academic success and, ultimately, a high school diploma (Feletti et al., 1998; Sugarman, 2017). Many educators lack the “knowledge, skills, and lived experiences for addressing some of the barriers to learning that newcomer students face,” which can impact student success (Berliner, 2019, p.28). When school staff lack understanding of newcomer adolescents' challenges, needs, and backgrounds, it can lead to discriminatory practices and perpetuate negative stereotypes and attitudes toward students (Greenburg Motamedi et al., 2021). These negative perceptions can create additional challenges for students already grappling with social, emotional, and mental health challenges (Greenburg Motamedi et al., 2021). An inability to recognize signs of trauma and provide support for students' social, emotional, and mental health needs creates additional barriers for students and impacts their academic success.

Working with students to create their personalized high school graduation plans and prepare for college and careers is critical in supporting students' academic success and postsecondary plans (Manspile, 2021; OELA, 2023; Rumpf, 2020; Sugarman, 2017; Umansky, 2018). However, educators often need help to support older newcomer MLs in creating feasible graduation plans and pathways toward college and career readiness (Sugarman, 2017; Umansky, 2018). Unclear graduation pathways impact MLs' ability to successfully achieve a high school diploma (Manspile, 2021; Sugarman, 2017). This lack of understanding of how to create tailored graduation pathways and support college and career readiness for older newcomer MLs suggests a need for increased professional development around these areas of need. Rumpf (2020) stresses that any staff member responsible for “enrolling, graduation planning, instruction, and assessment must be trained to address the unique needs of immigrant students” (p. 193). It is essential for school staff responsible for supporting MLs in creating graduation and postsecondary plans to have the tools and resources they need to perform this responsibility successfully.

Theory of Improvement

Older newcomer MLs face significant barriers and challenges in attaining a high school diploma. There is a substantial gap in graduation outcomes when comparing newcomer MLs and their never-ML peers' graduation rates. The problem of practice for this study is that older newcomer multilingual learners in CHSD graduate at lower rates than their peers. The aim is to increase graduation rates for older newcomer MLs to 29.5% by the end of the 2028-2029 academic year. A 1.5% annual graduation rate increase is aligned with the national graduation rate for MLs over ten years (U.S. Department of Education OELA, 2023). If the school system implements systematic and targeted support to foster student participation, then the graduation

rates for older newcomer MLs may increase. As shown in Table 2, increasing graduation rates by 1.5% per school year for older newcomer MLs will facilitate an upward trajectory toward closing the graduation gap between older newcomer MLs and their never-ML peers.

Table 2

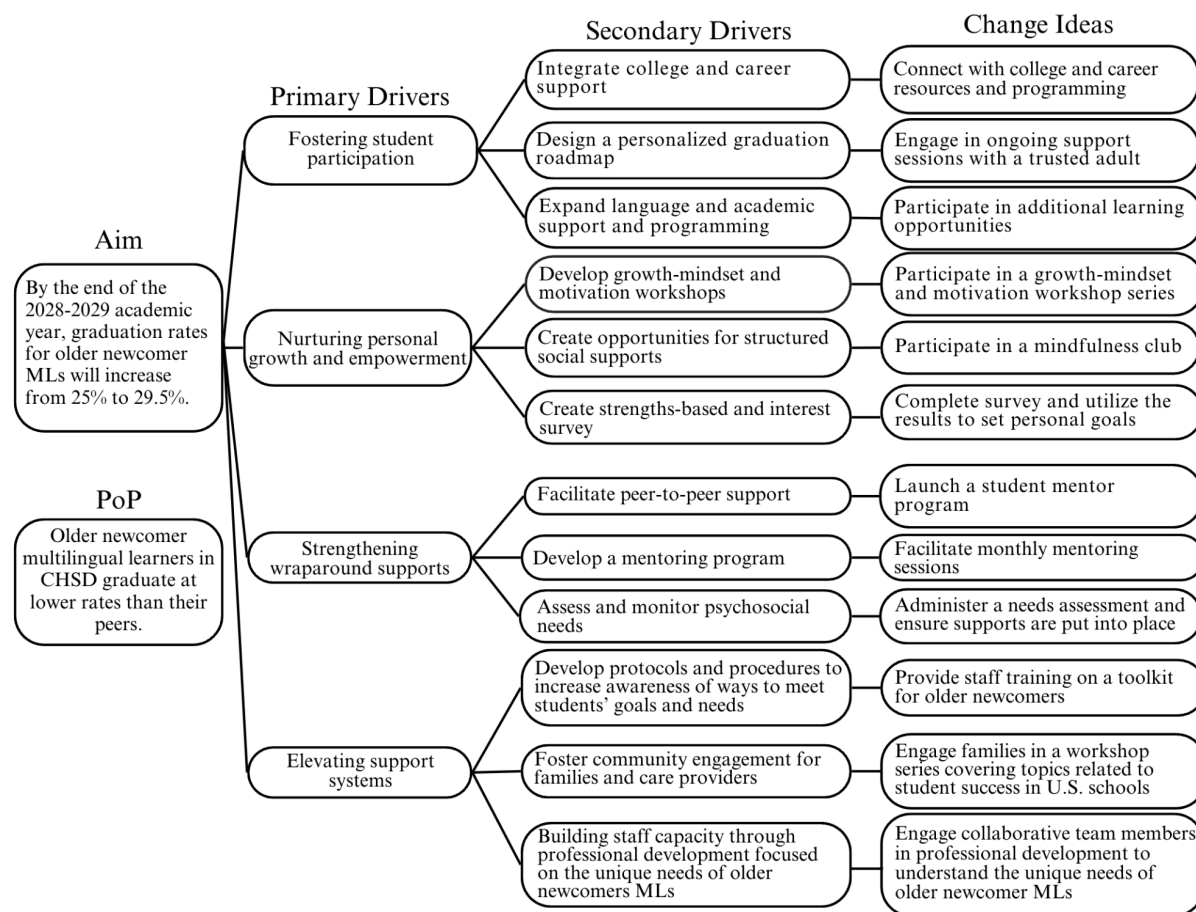
Target Graduation Rates for Older Newcomer Multilingual Learners (SY 2025-2029)

SY 2025-26	SY 2026-27	SY 2027-28	SY 2028-2029
25%	26.5%	28%	29.5%

Note. This table displays the author’s aim to increase graduation rates for older newcomer MLs by 1.5% annually.

Driver Diagram

The author created a driver diagram to explore ways to support positive graduation outcomes for older newcomer MLs. This diagram includes a broad view of key leverage points and change ideas that have the potential to work toward addressing the problem of practice and meeting the aim. The author utilized personal experiences, literature, and empathy interviews to construct a driver diagram that addressed causal factors within the fishbone. As shown in Figure 10, the driver diagram includes four primary drivers: fostering student participation, nurturing personal growth and empowerment, strengthening wraparound supports, and elevating support systems. Each primary driver is connected to secondary drivers and specific change ideas, which are actionable interventions to support positive graduation outcomes for older newcomer MLs.

Figure 10*Driver Diagram*

Note. This driver diagram displays the aim, the problem of practice, primary drivers, secondary drivers, and change ideas for addressing graduation outcomes for older newcomer MLs.

Fostering Student Participation

Older newcomer MLs face many obstacles as they navigate their high school experience, impacting their ability to reach their goal of achieving a high school diploma (Sugarman, 2017). Students who actively participate in their educational experience are more likely to achieve academic success and graduate from high school (Appleton et al., 2008; Plasman, 2018; Wang & Fredericks, 2018). Fostering student participation is critical in supporting positive graduation

outcomes for MLs (Rodriguez et al., 2020). Some ways to foster student participation include integrating college and career support, designing a personalized graduation roadmap, and expanding language and educational support and programming. Change ideas for fostering student participation include connecting with college and career resources and programming, participating in ongoing support sessions with a trusted adult, and engaging in additional learning opportunities.

Nurturing Personal Growth and Empowerment

Nurturing personal growth and empowerment encourages older newcomer MLs to reflect upon themselves as individuals and learners. Each secondary driver includes ways students can explore their assets, interests, and strengths to grow and empower themselves as they navigate high school. Ways to nurture personal growth and empowerment include developing a growth mindset and motivation workshop (Yeager et al., 2019; Zhu et al., 2019), creating opportunities for structured social support, and engaging in strengths-based and interest survey opportunities (U.S. Department of Education, 2023). Change ideas connected to nurturing personal growth and empowerment, encourage students to engage in activities that create space for self-reflection. Change ideas include participating in a growth-mindset and motivation workshop series, engaging in a mindfulness club, completing a survey, and utilizing the results to set personal goals.

Strengthening Wraparound Support

Strengthening wraparound support includes key components to support students' psychosocial needs. The unique experiences that older newcomer MLs face can impact their psychosocial well-being, so creating opportunities to address their health and well-being is essential. Some ways to help a student's psychosocial well-being in high school include

facilitating peer-to-peer support (Jenner et al., 2022; U.S. Department of Education, 2023), developing a mentoring program (Castro-Olivo et al., 2023), and assessing and monitoring psychosocial needs. Change ideas include launching a student mentor program, facilitating monthly mentoring sessions, administering a needs assessment, and implementing psychosocial support.

Elevating Support Systems

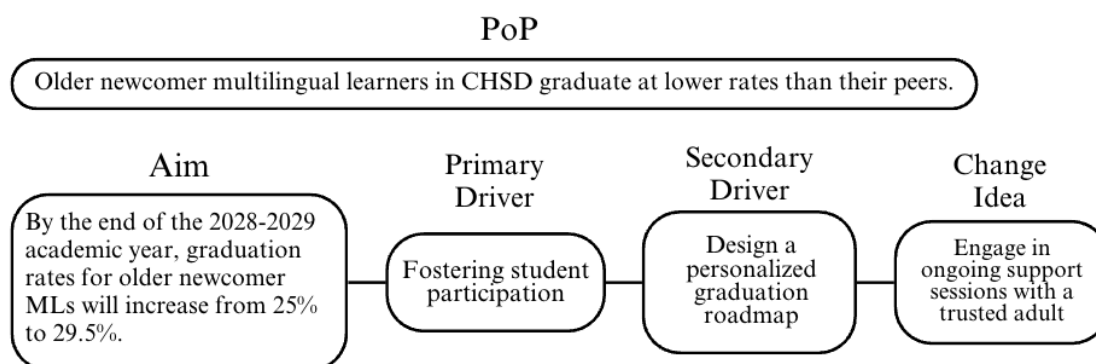
To increase graduation rates for older newcomer MLs, it is essential to elevate support systems to promote student success by developing protocols and procedures that raise awareness of ways to meet students' goals and needs (U.S. Department of Education, 2023), fostering community engagement for families and care providers (Short & Boyson, 2012), and engaging staff in professional development specific to older newcomer MLs (Sugarman 2017, 2019, 2021). Change ideas for each driver include providing staff training on an older newcomer ML toolkit, engaging families in a workshop series covering topics related to student success in U.S. schools, and engaging collaborative team members in professional development to understand the unique needs of older newcomer MLs. Many federal and state toolkits related to supporting MLs are available for school systems to utilize and reference when creating and enhancing programming for their school systems. The New York State Education Department Office of Bilingual Education and World Languages (2019) developed a state-specific toolkit for increasing graduation rates for MLs. CHSD would benefit from having a systematic toolkit aligned with the district's policies and procedures that staff could utilize to support older newcomer MLs.

While each primary driver has the potential to support positive graduation outcomes for older newcomer MLs, this study will focus on fostering student participation. As shown in

Figure 11, fostering student participation through the design of a personalized graduation roadmap and engaging in ongoing support sessions with a trusted adult may contribute to positive graduation outcomes for older newcomer MLs.

Figure 11

Key Components of the Driver Diagram



Note. This illustration shows key components extracted and adapted from the comprehensive driver diagram to be explored and addressed in the study.

The author proposed designing a personalized graduation roadmap and engaging students in ongoing support sessions with a trusted adult to foster participation among older newcomer MLs. Designing a personalized high school graduation plan is essential in supporting students' academic success (Manspile, 2021; Rumpf, 2020; Sugarman, 2017; Umansky, 2018). OELA (2023) suggests that a personalized plan can ensure students are on track for graduation and prepared for postsecondary endeavors. A personalized graduation roadmap is a tangible resource to help students visualize their high school journey from start to finish. The personalized graduation roadmap can be used to help students set short and long-term goals, identify academic interests, and ultimately take ownership of their own academic plans. A roadmap can be a visual

snapshot of a student's high school journey, so they have a deeper understanding of graduation requirements and the timeframe needed to achieve their high school diploma. This is particularly important for older newcomer MLs, whose timelines may vary depending on their age and the credits they earned prior to entering a school in the U.S.

Supportive relationships with trusted adults can promote students' academic achievement, engagement, and motivation to actively participate in their educational journey (Crawford & Valle, 2016; Suarez-Orozco et al., 2009). Trusted adults can include any school staff member with whom a student feels comfortable seeking guidance and support. Due to their educational background, expertise, and scope of practice, professional school counselors (PSCs) are well-positioned to build trusting relationships and foster student participation (Crawford & Valle, 2016). Fostering student participation includes creating an intentional space for older newcomer MLs to engage in discussions about their high school journey. The school environment may be unfamiliar to older newcomer MLs, so it is important to dedicate time for students to understand key components of high school, such as graduation requirements, course options, timelines, and resources available to help reduce challenges and barriers toward achieving a high school diploma and college and career preparation. By fostering participation, PSCs can create opportunities for older newcomer MLs to ask questions, voice concerns, express interests, set goals, and, ultimately, take the lead in their educational journey.

Section 2

Methods

Older newcomer multilingual learners in CHSD graduate at lower rates than their peers. These students face a multitude of unique challenges and barriers that hinder their progress towards achieving a high school diploma. There is much to explore about this specific subgroup of MLs, particularly in identifying viable, sustainable, research-based practices that promote equitable and inclusive educational opportunities.

Guided by improvement science, this study aimed to identify ways to increase graduation rates for older newcomer MLs. More specifically, PSCs engaged older newcomer MLs in ongoing support sessions using a personalized graduation roadmap (see Appendix B) and a support sessions tool (see Appendix C). The personalized graduation roadmap was an interactive, one-page document designed to be used with students to discuss graduation requirements, create a graduation timeline, and explore academic resources to support students' high school experience. The support sessions tool included guiding questions and prompts for each support session, along with a section where PSCs could document student attendance, session notes, and relevant student information, including the student's name, birthdate, and age.

The primary driver of the study, foster student participation, was identified as an essential component for promoting academic success and positive graduation outcomes. The secondary driver in this study, the design of a personalized graduation roadmap, served as a tool to engage students in discussions about their academic plans and potential pathways to graduation. The central change idea of this study, engage in ongoing support sessions with a trusted adult, was intended to facilitate dialogue about graduation planning while ensuring students received the support needed to navigate their high school experience. To examine this theory of improvement, the study was guided by the following research question:

How do professional school counselors perceive the impact of ongoing support sessions with a trusted adult on fostering participation among older newcomer MLs?

The following section details the methodology used to investigate this research question, beginning with an overview of the Plan-do-Study-Act (PDSA) cycle and the phases used to test the study's theory of improvement and its change idea. This is followed by a description of the Context and Participants, detailing the educational setting and the recruitment of PSCs. Finally, the Data Collection Instruments and Procedures are presented, detailing the tools used to evaluate the impact of the ongoing support sessions using the personalized graduation roadmap.

PDSA Cycle

Grounded in improvement science, this study used the PDSA cycle to provide a systematic structure for testing and refining tools in real time (Bryk et al., 2015). This framework allowed for collaborative evaluation of the intervention's impact, ensuring that ongoing support sessions functioned effectively to facilitate student participation, with the personalized graduation roadmap serving as a supporting tool during these sessions. Through the use of the PDSA cycle, participants engaged in multiple support sessions and provided feedback on the personalized graduation roadmap and support sessions tool. This structured approach allowed the researcher to refine and adjust the ongoing support sessions in response to participant input throughout the study.

The first PDSA cycle involved the initial implementation of the ongoing support sessions using the personalized graduation roadmap. During the planning phase, the researcher created a suggested timeline for the study (see Appendix D). The timeline included SSI-1, one professional development session, a focus group session, and SSI-2. The researcher prepared materials for the study, including a personalized graduation roadmap, a support session tool,

interview questions for SSI-1 and SSI-2, and guided questions for engaging in the focus group discussion.

Participation in this study was open to any CHSD PSC who had access to supporting older newcomer MLs at the high school level, met the eligibility criteria, and was interested in participating. School-based PSCs and central office-based PSCs from the International Counseling Office (ICO)⁸ were invited to participate in the study. The researcher identified schools with more than 150 MLs enrolled, as well as ICO, as potential recruitment sites. The researcher emailed each school-based principal and the ICO supervisor, requesting consent to recruit the PSCs in their buildings. Upon consent from the principals and the ICO supervisor, the researcher emailed a flyer including a participant interest form to PSCs at the approved high schools, as well as the ICO.

Once participants were identified, the researcher arranged logistics to engage participants in SSI-1 and a professional development session. The professional development included information on meeting the unique needs of older newcomer MLs, district and school-specific data about older newcomer MLs, the study's timeline, background, purpose, and study materials that the PSCs would utilize to foster participation among older newcomer MLs (see Appendix E). The researcher created study tools, including a personalized graduation roadmap template and a support sessions tool that PSCs utilized when engaging in ongoing support sessions.

During the *Do* phase of the PDSA cycle, the researcher engaged each participant in SSI-1 to gain insight into their backgrounds, experiences, and perceptions while working with MLs and ML subgroups, particularly older newcomer MLs. The researcher then implemented the professional development with the participants. The participants then engaged older newcomer

⁸ International Counseling Office (ICO) is a pseudonym used to protect the anonymity of the district.

MLs in biweekly support sessions. The PSCs were asked to use the study materials (personalized graduation roadmap and support session tool) during each session. They were also encouraged to take notes in their support session tools as they utilized the study materials while engaging the students in ongoing support sessions. The PSCs had the option to discuss any notes during the focus group session.

The focus group session took place three weeks after the study began. At this point, most participants had met with their students twice and could offer some feedback on the intervention. During the one-hour focus group session, some time was dedicated to revisiting and reteaching features and functions of the personalized graduation roadmap. Features explored included: adding and removing courses to align with each student's graduation requirements, translating the document to different languages, and hyperlinking emails to the document. These were features that some of the PSCs wanted to revisit and practice to ensure they were clear on how to utilize these features when working with students. PSCs spent the majority of the time making recommendations for enhancing and refining the study tools, and sharing new insights, perceptions, and experiences as they engaged older newcomer MLs in ongoing support. The PSCs recommended refining both the personalized graduation roadmap and the support sessions tool.

Regarding refining the personalized graduation roadmap (see Appendix F), PSCs chose to add some language to enhance its versatility. The PCSs discussed how using the Extended Day Program to describe additional course offerings was only applicable to schools offering that particular program. To make that section of the roadmap more applicable to varied high schools, the PCSs decided to add the term Virtual Learning. They also decided to include language to accompany each grade level labeled on the roadmap (Grade 9, Grade 10, Grade 11, and Grade

12). Often, older newcomer MLs enter U.S. schools with transferable high school course credits earned in their home countries. The PSCs felt that adding Years 1, 2, 3, and 4 would provide flexibility and ease when entering credits earned and help students understand how many years they had already completed and how many they needed to complete to earn a high school diploma. Additionally, not all school systems include grades 9-12 in high school, so including the year helped to make the roadmap comprehensible to students.

When discussing refinements for the support sessions tool (see Appendix G), the PSCs decided to add specific questions and prompts they felt were important to include when engaging older newcomer MLs in ongoing support sessions and providing targeted resources. Under the Academics category, the PSCs included a prompt to direct students to Brainfuse⁹, an online tutoring app located in Clever¹⁰. This ensured they provided students with an academic resource if they needed help with course content. PSCs also added a question that would prompt them to identify if a student was first-generation college-bound. CHSD offers after-school clubs and programs for first-generation college-bound students, so knowing this information would allow the PSCs to offer these additional opportunities. The following actionable prompts were added under the Academics category on the support sessions tool:

- Direct students to the Brainfuse online tutoring app in Clever.
- Are you first-generation college-bound?

Under the Graduation Plan category, the PSCs added a prompt to review and sign the Graduation Notification Agreement¹¹ (GNA). Since this is a document PSCs are required to

⁹ Brianfuse offers online academic support in which students can schedule live tutoring sessions in varied content areas at no cost.

¹⁰ An educational platform students use to access course materials and academic resources.

¹¹ A district document the PSC uses during the student's senior year to monitor their progress towards graduation.

review with all students on their caseloads, the PSCs felt it would be a helpful reminder to add to the support session tool. A prompt to address student transcripts¹² was also added. Many older newcomer MLs enter U.S. schools with transferable credits from high school experiences in their home country, so the PCSs wanted to add a prompt to engage students in conversations about their educational background and ensure any high school credits previously earned were accounted for and applied to the student's most current transcript. Since a certain number of student service learning (SLL) hours¹³ are required to meet graduation requirements, the PSCs added a prompt to ensure SSL hours were discussed and accounted for. The PSCs also added a prompt to ensure they shared any college and career engagements that students could participate in throughout the school year. The following actionable prompts were added under the Graduation Plan category:

- Review and sign the Graduation Notification Agreement (GNA) with the student.
- Provide and discuss a current copy of the student's transcript.
- Review the status of student service learning (SLL) hours.
- Share upcoming financial aid and college/career readiness information sessions.

During the *Study* phase of the PDSA cycle, the researcher gathered and began an analysis of SSI-1 and focus group data, including the refinement recommendations to the personalized graduation roadmap and the support sessions tool that PSCs had agreed upon during the focus group session. The researcher looked for identified codes, patterns, and themes that emerged in the data (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Burns, 2009).

¹² An official document that includes the students record of courses completed, course grades, and grade point average (GPA).

¹³ The act of providing services to the community. Students need to complete 24 service learning hours to meet that graduation requirement.

During the Act phase of the PDSA cycle, participant feedback from the focus group session was used to refine and enhance the intervention. Findings from the first PDSA cycle informed refinements to the intervention tools, which were implemented during the second PDSA cycle.

The second PDSA cycle involved implementing the refined intervention. Based on the feedback from the focus group session, the personalized graduation roadmap and the support sessions tool were enhanced to better support PSCs as they engaged students in ongoing support sessions. PSCs were asked to engage in at least one additional support session with the refined tools. Following the implementation of the refined tools, the researcher administered SSI-2 with PCSs to explore their experiences and perceptions of engaging older newcomer MLs in ongoing support sessions while utilizing the intervention tools.

Table 3 illustrates the application of the PDSA Cycle, with each phase broken down to show the actions taken throughout the study.

Table 3

Plan-Do-Study-Act (PDSA) Cycle

4. <u>Act</u> ● Utilized focus feedback to refine and enhance the study's materials ● Continued to implement the intervention after refinements had been made ● Evaluated the impact of refining the intervention via SSI-2	1. <u>Plan</u> ● Created materials for study ○ One hour of professional development ○ Personalized graduation roadmap ○ Support sessions tool ○ SSI-1 ○ Focus group discussion questions ○ SSI-2 ● Identified schools and key staff for the study ● Constructed and sent a recruitment consent form to the points of contact ● Constructed and sent a participant
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	interest form and flyer to recruit PSCs for the study ● Developed data collection processes
3. <u>Study</u> ● Gathered and analyzed the data from SSI-1, focus group data, and the researcher's notes ● Identified preliminary codes, patterns, and themes	2. <u>Do</u> ● Administered the SSI-1 ● Implemented professional development with participants ● Implemented study ○ Schedule meetings and ongoing support sessions ○ Engage in biweekly support sessions ○ Use a personalized graduation roadmap and support session tool ● Facilitated focus group discussions ● Determined ways to enhance and refine the study materials ● Refined study materials

Note. This table includes four components in the PDSA cycle that the researcher addressed throughout the study.

Context and Participants

The researcher used purposeful sampling (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Patton, 2015) to recruit CHSD PSCs with direct access to MLs enrolled in high schools. CHSD's ML subgroup enrollment data were not publicly disaggregated, so there was no available data on the number of older newcomer MLs enrolled in each high school across the district. With that in mind, the researcher focused on recruiting high schools with higher concentrations of MLs¹⁴ increasing the likelihood that some of the students enrolled might be older newcomer MLs. After reviewing ML enrollment data across CHSD, the researcher selected sixteen high schools. The researcher chose to recruit PSCs who worked in high schools from the southern, central, and northern regions to

¹⁴ The researcher selected schools with more than 150 MLs enrolled during SY 2025.

ensure representation across the district and to make the findings transferable across a variety of school contexts.

To further broaden opportunities for PSCs to participate in the study, the researcher expanded recruitment to ICO PSCs. ICO PSCs specialize in supporting MLs and international students in grades K–12 across CHSD. When MLs and international students register for CHSD, they first visit ICO to ensure they are placed in the appropriate grade level and courses based on their language needs and academic history. ICO PSCs review students' English language proficiency levels, collect information about any previous coursework, evaluate transcripts, transfer applicable course credits to students' transcripts, and make course and grade level recommendations. These PSCs provide wraparound support to students and families and work with school-based PSCs to ensure students smoothly transition to their new school environment. They also visit schools to support students and collaborate with school-based PSCs.

The researcher identified the point of contact¹⁵ for each school¹⁶. This included sixteen school-based principals and ICO's Instructional Supervisor. The researcher sent each point of contact an email explaining the study with a request to recruit PSCs in their building for the study. The email also included a consent form that the point of contact needed to sign if they agreed to allow the researcher to recruit PSCs in their building. Four school-based principals and the ICO supervisor responded via email and signed the consent form, indicating permission to recruit PSCs within their buildings. The researcher located the email addresses for all PSCs who worked within the approved locations. Twenty-seven PSCs were identified within the four high schools and ICO. Individual emails were sent to each PSC with an explanation of the study and a

¹⁵ The point of contact for ICO was a department supervisor and the point of contact for high schools was the principal.

¹⁶ The point of contact needed to recruit ICO PSCs was located in an administrative building.

flyer. The flyer included additional details about the study, specific criteria for participating in the study, and a link and QR code directing potential participants to an interest form they could complete if they agreed to participate in the study (see Appendix H). The participants for this study were required to meet the following criteria:

1. The participant must be a professional school counselor (PSC) for CHSD.
2. The participant must work with and have access to supporting older newcomer MLs who are attending high school.
3. The participant must be willing to participate in a one-hour professional development session on older newcomer MLs.
4. The participant must be willing to participate in two semi-structured interviews and a one-hour focus group session during the five-week study, which will run from November to January. Participation in these sessions requires consent to audio and video recording via Zoom.
5. The participant must be willing to engage in three thirty-minute biweekly support sessions with older newcomer MLs using a personalized graduation roadmap and a support session tool.

The researcher asked participants to commit to the study for five weeks. However, participants had the ability to withdraw at any time. To ensure minimal disruptions to participants' workday, the following study requirements were conducted outside of their contractual hours. Participants engaged in an initial semi-structured interview 1 (SSI-1), a professional development session, a focus group session, and a follow-up semi-structured interview (SSI-2).

A total of four PSCs completed the participant interest form, and one additional participant was recruited through a personal referral. All five participants met the eligibility requirements and were invited to participate in the study via email. To better understand each participant's level of experience as PSCs and to ensure they had access to supporting high school MLs, the participant interest form included a question regarding their years of experience as PSCs and their work location. Table 4 shows that all participants had seven or more years of experience as PSCs and had access to supporting MLs at the high school level. All participants were assigned pseudonyms to ensure confidentiality. Participant five did not complete the interest form, so the researcher collected their information during a preliminary phone call to determine if the eligibility criteria were met.

Table 4

Participant Demographics

Participant	Years of Teaching Experience	Work Setting
1	More than 21 years	School-based (high school)
2	7-11 years	ICO
3	12-16 years	ICO
4	More than 21 years	ICO
5	More than 21 years	ICO

Participant 1 immigrated to the United States from Trinidad and Tobago in the 1980s. As a high school-based PSC for CHSD, their student caseload included students in grades 9 and 10 in an international high school, in which a large number of MLs were enrolled. In their role as a PSC, participant 1 worked with students to provide academic guidance, address social-emotional concerns, and prepare students for college and career opportunities beyond high school

graduation. They have had experiences working as a PSC in middle and high schools with small and large populations of MLs. Participants 2, 3, 4, and 5 were central-office-based PSCs from ICO. Collectively, the ICO PSCs shared similar roles in their work and specialized in working with international students and MLs in grades K–12. At a central office building, they met with families to evaluate international transcripts, recommend course placements, and provide resources to help them navigate the school system. They also conducted school-based visits for the schools they were assigned to support. At the school level, they provided additional support to international students and MLs and collaborated with school-based PSCs. Participant 5 had an additional supervisory role at ICO in which they engaged in additional managerial duties. Prior to their work as a PSC at ICO, participant 2 worked as a high school English teacher in Puerto Rico, a school social worker, an ELD teacher, and a middle school PSC. Participant 3 had experience working as a PSC in middle and high schools. Participant 4 was a former ML and refugee from Vietnam. Prior to becoming a PSC for ICO, they had experience working in middle and high schools with large populations of MLs enrolled. Before taking the role as PSC and supervisor for ICO, participant 5 had experience working in public health and had been a crisis resource teacher, a high school ELD teacher, and a high school PSC.

Data Instruments

Semi-structured Interviews. Two semi-structured interviews were conducted with participants. SSI-1 occurred at the beginning of the study (see Appendix I), and SSI-2 occurred at the end of the study (see Appendix J). Using semi-structured interviews allowed the researcher to add additional questions as needed in order to probe further and gain clarity around the PSCs' experiences, perceptions, and insights. All interviews were conducted one-on-one via Zoom. Conducting meetings over Zoom facilitated easier scheduling and participation between the

researcher and participants. Each interview took approximately one hour. Interviews were video- and audio-recorded as well as transcribed.

Focus Group. The researcher facilitated a one-hour focus group session during the third week of the study. At this point in the study, all but one PSC had engaged older newcomer MLs in two support sessions. The focus group session was implemented to share experiences engaging in the study and collectively and collaboratively refine the study tools, including the personalized graduation roadmap and the support sessions tool. The focus group session included questions designed to explore participants' experiences engaging older newcomer MLs in ongoing support sessions and to identify ways to enhance and refine the personalized graduation roadmap and the support sessions tool (see Appendix K). All participants and the researcher were in attendance via Zoom. Using Zoom for the focus group streamlined the meeting, making it more efficient and convenient for all participants to meet together. The focus group discussion was video and audio-recorded as well as transcribed.

Researcher Notes. Throughout SSI-1 and SSI-2 and the focus group session, the researcher took notes to document any insights, preliminary codes, potential themes, and key takeaways from each session while engaging in discussions with participants. During the focus group session, the researcher noted the PSCs' recommendations for refining and enhancing the personalized graduation roadmap and support sessions tool.

Personalized Graduation Roadmap. The personalized graduation roadmap is an interactive, one-page electronic document designed to be used with students to discuss graduation requirements, create a graduation timeline, and explore academic resources to support students' high school journey. The roadmap is editable and can be personalized for each student and shared electronically and in physical formats. CHSD uses Google tools, so the roadmap is a

Google Doc, making it easy to copy and share with students, view and edit the document in real time, automatically save changes, and capture a history of changes over time. Key features of the personalized graduation roadmap include:

- **Student Information:** Sections for the student's name, birthdate, ID number, English language proficiency levels, and expected graduation year.
- **Academic Planning:** Space for PSCs to indicate courses needed for graduation and a recommended timeframe for course completion, including space for additional course recommendations and summer coursework.
- **Academic Resources:** Links to Clever, an educational platform students use to access course materials and academic resources. Resources include tutoring support (Brainfuse), educational games, online textbooks, and a digital credit-check tool.
- **Tracking Other Graduation Requirements:** A dedicated area to document service learning hours completed, as well as mandated testing requirements.
- **Communication:** A hyperlink to the PSC's email.

The personalized graduation roadmap includes several notable functions: dropdown menus for course recommendations, the ability for PCSs to add and remove courses, and translation capabilities in over 100 different languages.

Support Sessions Tool. The support session tool is a structured instrument designed to document and facilitate ongoing support sessions. It includes space to log student information (name, birthdate, and age), a tracking log for student support session attendance. This tool also includes guiding questions and prompts that the PSCs can utilize to facilitate support sessions discussions. These questions and prompts are organized within four categories: Things to Consider, Check-in, Academics, and Graduation Plan. The support sessions tool is a Google

Sheet, ensuring alignment with the district's digital tools and resources. The document is editable and will automatically save any changes as well as capture a history of changes over time.

Data Collection

Data collected included transcripts as well as video and audio recordings from SSI-1, SSI-2, and the focus group session. Other data included students' support session attendance, redacted personalized graduation roadmaps, redacted support sessions tools, and researcher notes taken while engaging in SSI-1, SSI-2, and the focus group session. SSI-1, SSI-2, and the focus group session were audio recorded, video recorded, and transcribed via Zoom software.

General information about the participants was collected via a participation interest form. Information included: name, years of experience as PSCs, and work location. All participants were given a pseudonym for the study to ensure anonymity. All data were securely stored and locked on an online platform approved by the University of Maryland, ensuring confidentiality and data integrity throughout the study.

At the end of the study, the researcher collected redacted copies of the PSCs' support sessions tools and personalized graduation roadmaps that they had used when engaging older newcomer MLs in ongoing support sessions. Prior to sharing these artifacts with the researcher, the PSCs removed all student-identifiable information to ensure confidentiality.

Positionality

I am a White English-dominant female born in the United States and raised by a middle-class family in a suburban community. As a White female, I recognize my position of privilege. I do not share the same experiences as people of color and linguistically diverse communities, who are strongly marginalized and discriminated against in the United States. As a seasoned educator of multilingual learners (MLs) and a civil servant, I am focused on supporting

and advocating for equitable and inclusive educational opportunities for all learners. I have many years of experience working with MLs, and I am interested in exploring ways to support positive graduation outcomes for older newcomer MLs.

This study was conducted within the school district in which I am employed. As a district insider, my contextual knowledge and professional experience in CHSD supported an informed improvement science approach, allowing the study to be grounded in authentic practice. I recognized the importance of balancing the dual role as a researcher and educator as an employee for CHSD and remained mindful of how my position may have impacted recruitment, participant dynamics, and data interpretation. To support credibility, I implemented safeguards in the methodology, including voluntary and confidential recruitment practices, the use of multiple data sources, data triangulation, and a research-based approach to data analysis.

Data Analysis

The researcher analyzed data inductively and performed a thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006). This six-phase process included reading and rereading data, identifying preliminary codes, searching for themes, reviewing themes, defining and naming the themes, and reporting findings (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The researcher gained familiarity with the semi-structured interview and focus group data by listening to the audio recordings while reading each transcript multiple times. This allowed the researcher to engage with the data both visually and audibly. It also ensured all transcripts were thoroughly checked and corrected for accuracy. As the researcher read and listened to each transcript, key ideas were highlighted in yellow. Evidence included key terms, phrases, notable quotes, recurring patterns, and common ideas expressed by participants. The researcher's notes from SSI-1, SSI-2, and the focus group session were also coded. The researcher organized these coded pieces of evidence into a table, with

evidence on one side and its corresponding code on the other side. The researcher reviewed the table to identify the codes most relevant to the research question. By examining the relationships between these codes, the researcher then established overarching themes. For instance, codes such as building background knowledge, visual and tangible tools, interactive, and student choice were combined under the theme Illuminating Pathways. To illustrate how these codes came together under the theme Illuminating Pathways, the following table presents one code and its corresponding evidence. Table 7 in the Findings section provides a comprehensive overview of themes, codes, and corresponding evidence.

Table 5

Example of Code and Evidence Using the Theme Illuminating Pathways

Theme	Code	Evidence
Illuminating Pathways	Visual and tangible tools	“Her questions were more deliberate, more purposeful, more on point, as opposed to when I'm just talking to students without the map.”

Artifacts from the study, including the redacted personalized graduation roadmaps and support sessions tools, were referenced to support codes and themes that emerged. The researcher included student attendance as part of the data analysis process to ensure that engagement and participation were accounted for when interpreting the data. Since attendance could impact the data, it was important to consider ongoing support sessions attendance in the data analysis. The researcher was able to collect redacted graduation roadmaps and support sessions tools from three of the five participants to verify student attendance.

The researcher triangulated data from multiple sources. Triangulating data supported a credible (Tracy, 2010), reliable, and valid study and provided the researcher with an in-depth

view of the data collected throughout the study (Ahmed, 2024; Stahl & King, 2020). Data that was triangulated included SSI-1, SSI-2, focus group transcripts, researcher notes, redacted graduation roadmaps, redacted support session tools, and student attendance. Table 6 shows the research question and the various data sources that were analyzed and triangulated to strengthen the study and support a more comprehensive view of each component related to the study.

Table 6

Data Triangulation

Research Question	Data Source #1	Data Source #2	Data Source #3	Data Source #4	Data Source #5	Data Source #6
How do professional school counselors perceive the impact of ongoing support sessions with a trusted adult on fostering participation among older newcomer MLs?	Semi-structured interview 1 (SSI-1)	One focus group discussion transcript and notes	Semi-structured interview 2 (SSI-2)	Researcher notes	Redacted personalized graduation roadmaps	Redacted support sessions tools

Note. The researcher triangulated data from SSI-1 and SSI-2, focus group transcripts, researcher notes, redacted personalized graduation roadmaps, redacted support session tools, and student attendance.

Section 3

Older newcomer MLs, a population of students who are often marginalized and overlooked, face many challenges and barriers as they navigate high school. These challenges impact their academic success and ability to achieve a high school diploma, creating a significant gap in graduation outcomes when comparing MLs and their never-ML peers. Research indicates that student participation is critical in supporting positive graduation outcomes for MLs (Rodriguez et al., 2020). To improve graduation rates for older newcomer MLs, school systems must identify and implement interventions and supports that foster student participation. Research indicates that meaningful connections with trusted adults can be a catalyst for increasing student participation and fostering positive graduation outcomes (Crawford & Valle, 2016; Suarez-Orozco et al., 2009).

For the purpose of this study, the author aimed to explore PSCs' perceptions of how ongoing support sessions with a trusted adult can foster participation among older newcomer MLs as they work towards achieving a high school diploma. The researcher identified PSCs as participants due to their specialized training and professional expertise in supporting students' overall well-being, navigating academic and career planning, and cultivating trusting relationships that promote student participation (Crawford & Valle, 2016). Identifying evidence-based ways in which schools can foster older newcomer MLs' participation in their school environment has the potential to support positive graduation outcomes. Therefore, this study aims to address the following research question:

How do professional school counselors perceive the impact of ongoing support sessions with a trusted adult, on fostering participation among older newcomer MLs?

By exploring this research question, new insights may be gleaned that provide tangible ways to address the problem of practice (PoP): Older newcomer multilingual learners in CHSD graduate at lower rates than their peers.

Findings

This study utilized a qualitative approach rooted in improvement science to explore how personalized, ongoing support sessions with a trusted adult influence participation among older newcomer MLs, as perceived by PSCs. Through semi-structured interviews and a focus group session, PSCs shared their lived experiences and perceptions on the impact of student participation over time while engaging them in ongoing support sessions. To foster participation, the PSCs used tools, such as a personalized graduation roadmap and a support sessions tool, as they engaged older newcomer students in ongoing support sessions. Following two support sessions¹⁷, the PSCs participated in a Zoom focus group session to share their experiences and collaboratively refine the tools. The PSCs then implemented these refined tools in an additional support session. The study concluded with a second semi-structured interview (SSI-2) to capture the PSCs' comprehensive insights into the impact on student participation when engaging them in ongoing support sessions.

Using a thematic analysis approach involving a six-step process, including reading, coding, and theming the data (Braun & Clarke, 2006), several key themes emerged, including: The Power of Presence, The Ripple Effects of Trust and Rapport, Illuminating Pathways, and Context for Customization. Each theme illustrates how PCSs perceived the impact of ongoing support sessions with a trusted adult on fostering participation among older newcomer MLs.

¹⁷ One out of the five participants had met with their student only once prior to the focus group session.

The following table provides a thematic overview of the qualitative data, mapping the primary themes to their supportive codes and providing exemplar quotes from participant interviews.

Table 7

Thematic Overview of Qualitative Data

Theme	Code	Evidence
The Power of Presence	Consistency and frequency of support	“...for them making the meeting a priority...When I said we were meeting, they would be there, or they would follow up, and they were tracking it [the meetings] as well.”
The Ripple Effects of Trust and Rapport	Fostering a sense of community and belonging	“She introduced me to her [friend] at the last session we met.” Researcher notes: She's talking to her friends. She's bringing her friends to the sessions.
Illuminating Pathways	Visual and tangible tools	“Her questions were more deliberate, more purposeful, more on point, as opposed to when I'm just talking to students without the map.”
Context for Customization	Intentional course mapping for future aspirations	“She has math courses already. So, in addition, as a senior next year, you [she] can take...an additional math course. Either way, dual enrollment.”

The Power of Presence

The Power of Presence explores the multifaceted ways in which PSCs made themselves available and accessible for students. The deliberate nature of their presence appeared to positively influence student outcomes, leading to greater student participation in their educational journey. PSCs maintained consistency and frequency in their meetings, establishing themselves as a reliable means of support for students. They also opened various lines of communication, ensuring they were accessible for students as needed.

By establishing consistent and frequent support sessions with the older newcomer MLs, PSCs noticed an increase in positive student behaviors. Several participants described how students expressed excitement about the meetings; they showed up with positive attitudes, ready to engage in discussions about their academic plan. Participant 1 shared that a student they were working with enjoyed their meetings together and was enthusiastic about discussing her academic plan. They stated, “She was genuinely looking forward to and excited about meeting” (personal communication, January 29, 2026). Participant 1 described how these meetings became a priority for their students, and they kept track of them independently and without prompting (personal communication, January 29, 2026). Participant 3 described the positive impact the frequency of meetings had on the student they worked with. They noted the student’s “face lights up” during their meeting times, and he was always happy to attend, knowing he would receive necessary support (personal communication, January 26, 2026). Additionally, the frequency of support sessions provided a steady continuity that ensured the student could retain and build upon insights gleaned from each meeting, preventing the loss of information that often occurs in more sporadic sessions (participant 3, personal communication, January 26, 2026). The frequency of meetings also allowed PSCs to discuss items that were time sensitive, which is

particularly important for older newcomer MLs who often face time limitations when working toward a high school diploma (participant 4, personal communication, January 22, 2026).

Participant 4 described an instance in which the frequency of meetings helped a student stay on track with their grades (personal communication, January 22, 2026). In an initial meeting, the student expressed concern about a class they were not on track to pass. This class was a graduation requirement, and the student would not have had time to retake the class before aging out of the public school system. The frequency of the meetings allowed participant 4 to encourage the student to monitor their grades, discuss progress, and maintain focus on their academic goals. The student's level of participation in their academics increased, resulting in an improvement in their grades and securing the course credits they needed to graduate high school within the planned timeframe (personal communication, January 22, 2026).

PSCs maintained a strong sense of presence through varied forms of communication, which appeared to encourage students to reach out more frequently with questions and concerns. PSCs ensured reliability and accessibility by being available through email, communication applications, and their office phone. As participant 1 suggested, this level of availability allowed students to feel secure in knowing they had a person they could connect with anytime they needed support (personal communication, January 29, 2026). Several PSCs emphasized the importance of communication that worked for their students to ensure they were accessible and that lines of communication remained open (participant 1, personal communication, January 29, 2026; participant 3, personal communication, January 26, 2026; participant 4, personal communication, January 22, 2026). Participant 3 described a moment in which their form of communication needed to change because they were unsuccessful in reaching their student via email. Participant 3 noticed the student was not very communicative via email. They discussed

communication preferences with their students and established the utilization of an application that would push communication directly to their students' phones via text message. This made it easier for their students to reach out as needed and to schedule support sessions, which led to an increase in communication (personal communication, January 26, 2024). Participant 4 stressed the importance of keeping lines of communication open to ensure their students felt connected and supported as they navigated their academic plan (personal communication, December 17, 2025). They provided students with their email address, work number, and office location so they could be reached through multiple avenues of support. Participant 4 found that one student in particular preferred to keep the lines of communication open via email. Their students emailed frequently with additional questions, concerns, and to continue discussions that took place during support sessions (participant 4, personal communication, January 22, 2026). Offering and maintaining varied lines of communication made it easier for students to seek and receive support as needed. Students asked questions, sought out resources, and continued conversations about their graduation plan and beyond. Accommodating students' preferences in forms of communication made the PSCs more available and accessible to provide support. These efforts seemed to foster communication and connection while minimizing the barriers for students seeking support and guidance.

The theory of improvement posits that fostering student participation can be achieved through ongoing support sessions with a trusted adult (Crawford & Valle, 2016; Suarez-Orozco et al., 2009). The power of presence illustrates ways in which PCS made themselves available to provide student support. By maintaining consistent and frequent meetings, participants kept students engaged in dialogue regarding their academic plans and addressed emerging needs as

they arose. This consistent and ongoing engagement established a reliable structure for student support. Through these interactions, PSCs guided students in monitoring their academic progress, helping them remain on a clear path toward graduation. Additionally, PSCs created multiple lines of communication in formats that were accessible and comfortable for students, allowing flexibility in how students connected with them. Many students independently initiated contact with PSCs using established communication channels, without prompting. These intentional practices of availability and responsiveness suggest that these ongoing support sessions, facilitated by PSCs, fostered greater student participation. The positive shifts observed in student behaviors suggest that the students experienced increased comfort and reassurance when engaging in ongoing support sessions, which may relate to factors associated with overall well-being.

The Ripple Effects of Trust and Rapport

The efforts PSCs made to establish trust and rapport with students had a significant ripple effect, increasing their ability to provide targeted assistance and broadening the students' community of support.

Participant 4 attributed the establishment of trust and rapport to positive changes in student behavior, including their level of participation as the support sessions progressed. They explained that building trust was critical in their approach to providing student support because it helped their student feel more comfortable asking questions and sharing thoughts and concerns (participant 4, personal communication, January 22, 2026). Participant 4 noted that as the student gained comfort in expressing needs and interests, they were able to provide intentional and targeted support and resources (personal communication, January 22, 2026). Established trust and rapport lowered the student's affective filter and facilitated open communication. The student

felt more comfortable actively participating in support sessions. This also allowed the PSC to provide more intentional and personalized support to foster student engagement.

Several participants mentioned that when trust and rapport were in place, they could help broaden their students' school community of support by facilitating introductions and helping them build relationships with other key people in the building. The students felt more comfortable meeting new people when the participants facilitated introductions and supported those additional school-based connections (participant 4, personal communication, January 22, 2026; participant 3, personal communication, January 26, 2026). This expanded their students' community, creating more opportunities to seek and receive support as needed from varied school-based points of contact. Participant 4 stated, "Because of that rapport we already have established, I was able to say, hey...this person at your school can also answer your questions, if I'm not available" (personal communication, January 22, 2026). Participant 3 helped their students make connections to key supports in the building by setting up meetings in which they could facilitate introductions. This helped the student gain a sense of comfort and familiarity with other individuals at school with whom they could connect as needed (personal communication, January 22, 2026). These intentional connections expanded the students' school community of support so they had more people to engage with as they navigated their high school experience.

This act of building a community of support through trust and rapport was apparent through the students' initiatives as well. Participants 1 and 4 discussed how some students they worked with introduced them to their friends. Participant 1 described how their student came to their office with several friends who also sought guidance on their academic plan. These peer-to-peer referrals served as relational validation as participant 1 noted, "because she's

connected with me, I'm gaining credence” (personal communication, January 29, 2026).

Participant 1 suggested that their student's willingness to introduce her friends indicated a significant amount of trust (personal communication, January 29, 2026). Participant 4 shared an instance in which their student brought a friend to the meeting to continue discussions about college programs (personal communication, January 22, 2026). By introducing their friends, the students demonstrated they trusted the counselor enough to vouch for their support. This act of trust and connection reflected a more engaged and collaborative role in their school community, indicating a greater level of active student participation.

Aligned with the theory of improvement, PSCs prioritized relationship building to ensure they established trust and rapport with students. Research suggests that supportive relationships with trusted adults can foster student participation (Crawford & Valle, 2016; Suarez-Orozco et al., 2009). The development of trust helped lower students’ affective filters, making them more comfortable engaging in discussions, asking questions, expressing needs, and sharing their interests and goals. As students became more comfortable communicating openly, the PSCs were able to provide more targeted support, helping to reduce any barriers for students as they worked toward achieving a high school diploma. Through a trusting relationship, PSCs served as bridges for connecting students to a broader school community of support, suggesting an increase in their level of engagement in their school environment. The impact of this trust expanded students’ willingness to seek support and participate more actively in their educational experiences.

Illuminating Pathways

As the PCSs illuminated graduation requirements, pathways, and opportunities beyond a high school diploma, students developed a greater sense of ownership over their educational

journey. During support sessions, participants dedicated time to building students' understanding of the U.S. school systems, specific graduation requirements, graduation pathways, educational resources, and postsecondary possibilities. As a result of sharing this information during support sessions, PSCs seemed to empower students with the knowledge to ask questions, utilize resources, advocate for themselves, take initiative, and express their interests and college and career goals. These intentional acts of illumination appeared to serve as a catalyst for building student agency and, in turn, increasing student participation in their education.

PSCs created space and time to help students build upon their background knowledge as they navigated their high school experience and engaged in discussions about graduation plans and requirements. Participant 5 stressed the importance of taking the time to build background knowledge and how doing so empowered their student to ask questions, seek support at school, clarify misunderstandings, and take self-directed action (personal communication, February 12, 2026). During support sessions, participant 5 spent time discussing Student Service-Learning (SSL) hours and specific courses needed to meet graduation requirements. They described how their student used the information gleaned from the support sessions to continue discussions with their teachers, school-based PSC, and the SSL Coordinator (personal communication, February 12, 2026). They described a moment in which the student was confused about a testing requirement. It was a new concept for them, and they didn't yet see how it connected to earning a high school diploma. Participant 5 took time to explain why the student needed to take specific tests to graduate high school, which reassured the student and helped them to feel more confident and in control of their graduation pathway (personal communication, February 12, 2026). Participant 5 noted that the student invested more in meeting their graduation requirements and

sought out the school-based Testing Coordinator¹⁸ (TC) for more information (personal communication, February 12, 2026). Additionally, Participant 5 spent time discussing attendance policies, which then led to a noticeable increase in the student's daily attendance at school (personal communication, February 12, 2026). This enhanced understanding seemed to empower the student to effectively articulate needs, self-advocate, and take the lead on fulfilling their graduation requirements, thus fostering a deeper level of participation as they navigated high school graduation requirements.

Participant 1 described how they presented graduation requirements into digestible chunks so the student would be less overwhelmed and more prepared to tackle the requirements as they arose (personal communication, January 29, 2026). During one support session, they discussed testing requirements, and in another session, they discussed SSL hours. Building background in small increments helped the student understand their graduation requirements and made each requirement feel more manageable and attainable (personal communication, January 29, 2026). According to participant 1, the student appeared more optimistic about the possibility of graduation and began talking about plans beyond high school (participant 1, personal communication, January 29, 2026). Similarly, when participant 2 broke down their students' graduation plan, the students' level of "motivation" increased, and they appeared to take more of a vested interest in their plan (personal communication, February 5, 2026). When PSCs broke information into digestible pieces so as not to overwhelm or overload their students, they noticed changes in student motivation and investment in their graduation plan.

¹⁸ A school-based staff member who monitors and manages the administration of local, state, and federally mandated assessments.

The PSCs utilized the personalized graduation roadmap to illuminate each student's path, providing a clearer picture that boosted motivation and encouraged students to take a more active role in their academic journey. Several PSCs noted that having a tangible reference point allowed students to participate more deeply in their graduation planning. Consequently, the roadmap served as a focal point for collaboration, where students actively engaged in dialogue, explored options, and made informed choices that best met their needs, interests, and goals. Participant 1 noticed that having something tangible gave the student a concrete reference point, which helped them engage more deeply in the discussion. They stated, "She liked having something tangible to reference, and I felt like throughout the process, she was able to reference and refer to things that we talked about earlier in prior sessions..." (participant 1, personal communication, January 29, 2026). Participant 1 described that the student's "questions were more deliberate, more purposeful, and more on point" when they displayed the graduation roadmap versus simply engaging in an oral discussion about the student's graduation plan (personal communication, January 29, 2026). They observed that the student became more motivated, noting that the visual representation made the student's high school timeline feel "achievable" and kept them engaged in their progress (personal communication, January 29, 2026). Participant 4 noticed that when they used the personalized graduation roadmap to show the student their graduation plan, their drive to engage in the school experience increased. They went on to say, "The roadmap has been...motivating to her, because she can see she can do it" (personal communication, January 29, 2026).

Participant 1 highlighted the interactive check box feature on the personalized graduation roadmap and felt it served as a significant motivator for students. As participant 1 noted, "the check-off component of it...really gave them [the student] added motivation that it [graduation]

was attainable" (Personal communication, December 17, 2025). Participant 1 recounted a student's excitement as they checked off a box on the graduation roadmap to indicate they had completed a course. Participant 1 noted the student "lit up" as they "checked off" courses that they had completed. They went on to describe how the act of checking off the boxes on the personalized graduation roadmap provided students with time to "internalize it and realize it, and connect with it." The participant concluded that such a moment of realization was "really powerful" and represented "one of the best aha moments for them" (personal communication, December 17, 2026). Participant 5 similarly emphasized the motivational impact of marking completed courses, stating, "Because that's so motivating in so many ways, to be able to check something off" (Personal communication, December 17, 2025). Both participants suggested that this visual representation of progress fostered a sense of accomplishment, which increased students' motivation. This motivation strengthened participation, as students became more actively engaged in tracking, planning, and taking ownership of their academic progress.

Participant 3 utilized the personalized graduation roadmap to promote student choice by illustrating different ways the student could navigate their high school experience and ultimately earn a diploma. The student had some concerns about whether or not they would pass some of their courses. Participant 3 showed the student a graduation roadmap including the option to retake courses during the summer, so they wouldn't lose time retaking courses during the school year. In the case that the student passed the courses they were concerned about, Participant 3 created a graduation roadmap without summer coursework. These options allowed the student to see that there were multiple possibilities for meeting all graduation requirements within their expected graduation timeline. Providing the personalized graduation roadmap as a visual helped the student better understand their options and make decisions about their plan. The student was

able to examine both visual representations of their graduation pathway and timeline, compare the plans, and identify the plan they felt best met their needs (participant 3, personal communication, January 26, 2026).

PSCs who facilitated discussion around plans beyond high school noticed an increase in student participation. When the PSCs talked with students about college and career possibilities, students engaged in conversations about their interests and goals, independently conducted research, sought out school-based resources, spoke with friends, and used community resources. When discussing college and career interests with their student, participant 4 noted that the student began conducting independent research to identify college programs and courses of interest (personal communication, January 22, 2026). Participant 4 discussed dual enrollment¹⁹ in which the student could continue high school while taking college classes toward a college program of their choice. This option was appealing to the student, so they planned on applying once the application window opened (personal communication, January 22, 2026). Participant 2 talked to a student about local college fair opportunities they could attend. One fair in particular was for international students. The student expressed interest in attending the fair and made plans to do so (personal communication, February 5, 2026). By fostering these conversations, participants sparked a level of student engagement that extended beyond the classroom into proactive future planning.

PSCs who discussed school-based resources empowered students to take charge of their education. In one instance, participant 3 described how they showed their student a free online tutoring application that the district offers to students if they need help with classwork or

¹⁹ A program in which students can take college courses while attending high school for free or low cost.

homework. Participant 4 walked the student through the application features and showed them how to sign up for tutoring. The student took initiative, signed up for tutoring sessions independently, and added the application to their computer's favorites so they could easily access it as needed. Participant 3 noted this growth in the student's ability to navigate school-based resources successfully and felt the student was developing his sense of independence (personal communication, January 29, 2026). The initiative to sign up for tutoring sessions and ensure easy access to the application illustrated an increase in the student's ability to actively participate in their academic success.

Consistent with the theory of improvement, PCSs supported student participation by helping students understand and navigate their pathways to graduation and beyond. By illuminating pathways, PSCs observed greater student initiative in navigating their educational pathways. During ongoing support sessions, PCSs talked with students about school structures, graduation requirements, academic resources, and college and career pathways. Positioned as a secondary driver in the theory of improvement, the personalized graduation roadmap served as a tool to illustrate graduation pathway possibilities, design viable plans for graduation, and monitor progress. Having opportunities to design a personalized graduation plan is critical in supporting students' academic success (Manspile, 2021; OELA, 2023; Rumpf, 2020; Sugarman, 2017; Umansky, 2018). These experiences appeared to empower students to ask questions, engage deeper with their school community, pursue their graduation plans, tap into academic resources, and begin plans for life beyond high school. Students learned to navigate their academic paths with more confidence and purpose. These findings reflect the theory of improvement's emphasis on personalized planning and support as important components in fostering student participation.

Context for Customization

Several PSCs drew on each student's unique background, including their home and work obligations, to craft a personalized plan that was not only achievable but also accommodated their personal responsibilities and aligned with their future aspirations. This comprehensive understanding allowed them to tailor each student's personalized graduation roadmap effectively. This level of personalization increased student motivation and buy-in in their academic plan. The PSCs spent time with students discussing transcripts, course recommendations, and school schedules. By leveraging students' educational and personal contexts, PSCs effectively supported and engaged them, ensuring their plans were both meaningful and achievable.

Several PSCs prioritized reviewing students' high school records to ensure that any applicable credits earned from previous schooling were accounted for and applied to their current transcripts. As credits were applied to students' high school transcripts, PSCs noted shifts in students' motivation and the ways they interacted with their academic plans. Participant 1 described an instance in which their student noticed that a transferable course they had taken in their home country was not reflected on their current transcript. Participant 1 obtained documentation indicating that the student had completed the course in their home country. The course was then transferred to the student's transcript and applied to their personalized graduation roadmap, bringing them closer to graduation. Participant 1 indicated that the student was eager and excited to have an additional credit counted toward meeting her graduation goal (personal communication, January 29, 2026). Participant 2 described how their student entered the first support session feeling frustrated and discouraged about the credits they needed to graduate from high school. Their main concern was that they would age out before meeting all the requirements for high school graduation. Participant 2 delved deeper into the student's

educational history and found that the student had earned many transferable credits from schools attended in their home country, enabling the student to earn their high school diploma in half the time originally expected. Participant 2 noted that after the student's high school graduation timeline was adjusted, the student became more motivated to discuss their academic plans. Participant 2 noticed an increase in students' persistence in reaching out and connecting more often to ask questions and share concerns (personal communication, February 5, 2026). Validating the student's credits allowed Participant 2 to demonstrate that graduation was within reach, which appeared to boost the student's motivation to continue to work toward earning their high school diploma.

With their student's career interests and academic background in mind, participant 4 customized a graduation plan that would help prepare the student for their future beyond high school. By considering the student's aspirations in nursing, participant 4 created a plan to include more advanced science and math courses to successfully prepare the student for a nursing program. Participant 4 evaluated the student's transcript and provided tailored course recommendations. This personalized approach led to a noticeable increase in the students' interest in their graduation plan, as well as more focused discussions about their academic and career goals (participant 4, personal communication, January 22, 2026). Participant 4's approach to customization leveraged student context to develop a supportive plan, which appeared to increase their student's level of interest and investment in their high school experience.

Participant 3 invested time in understanding their students' work and home obligations so they could tailor and discuss plans to help them balance their schedules. For example, participant 3 recommended that the student take summer school courses not only to stay on track for graduation but also to set up a more flexible schedule for their last year of high school. They

understood that the student might have additional home or work obligations as they got older, so they helped the student craft a plan that incorporated a half-day schedule for their senior year (participant 3, personal communication, January 29, 2026). Participant 4 worked with a student who had home obligations and was struggling to find a balance. Participant 4 worked with a school-based PSC to adjust the student's schedule so they could attend half days at school without compromising their graduation timeline. Participant 4 stressed that "there is no one size fits all," every student has their own unique needs, and plans need to be tailored to meet each student where they are (personal communication, December 17, 2026).

Consistent with the theory of improvement, PSCs facilitated ongoing support sessions that deepened understanding of their students, enabling them to tailor support and personalize graduation plans. PSCs examined each student's educational background to ensure credits were accounted for, a process that encouraged and motivated them to persist. By exploring students' specific interests and career aspirations, PSCs could recommend targeted coursework and programming to keep students connected to their goals. They considered potential economic and home obligations to ensure the students could maintain a sustainable balance between their education and other responsibilities. Positioned as a secondary driver within the theory of improvement, the personalized graduation roadmap appeared to serve as an essential tool, allowing PSCs to design customized plans that reflect each student's unique context (Rumpf, 2020; Santos, 2018). This tailored approach seemed to spark a deeper sense of student ownership and personal investment in their educational journey. Plans appeared more manageable and meaningful to students, positively influencing their participation and keeping them on track towards graduation.

Conclusions

Addressing the Problem of Practice

To address the problem of practice, that older newcomer multilingual learners in CHSD graduate at lower rates than their peers, this study aimed to identify ways to foster student participation and ultimately promote positive graduation outcomes. The study explored PSCs' perceptions of how ongoing support sessions with a trusted adult may foster student participation. Student participation has been consistently linked to academic success and graduate outcomes for high school students (Appleton et al., 2008; Plasman, 2018; Wang & Fredericks, 2018). Rodriguez et al. (2020) suggest that student participation is an important component in supporting positive graduation outcomes, specifically for MLs.

Qualitative findings suggested that as PSCs facilitated ongoing support sessions, students appeared to become more active participants in their educational journeys. Various supports provided by PSCs encouraged participation from students, including the use of a personalized graduation roadmap, which served as a tool that helped students better understand, monitor, and engage with their progress toward graduation and postsecondary goals. PSCs' consistent presence and open communication encouraged students to anticipate and actively engage in the support sessions. Trusting relationships led to meaningful dialogue, enabling the PSCs to identify students' needs and interests, expand their support network, and provide targeted assistance to reduce barriers.

PSCs enhanced students' ability to navigate their high school experience by clearly explaining graduation requirements and using a personalized graduation roadmap to illustrate their graduation plan. As a result, students demonstrated increased capacity to ask specific

questions, find necessary support, and actively track their progress toward meeting graduation criteria.

When PSCs aligned plans with students' educational backgrounds, economic and household responsibilities, and postsecondary aspirations, their graduation roadmap appeared more relevant, accessible, and manageable. This personalization supported deeper participation and a growing sense of ownership over their educational pathways.

Implications and Next Steps

Based on the findings of this study, several implications emerge for supporting older newcomer MLs. These findings suggest that the current school system's structures often overlook the unique needs and challenges of this student population. To better support older newcomer MLs and promote equitable and inclusive educational experiences, school systems must create more intentional, targeted, and systematized interventions. The following section outlines the short-term and long-term implications of these findings.

Short-Term Implications

Establishing Support Structures and Caseload Management

Findings suggest that engaging older newcomer MLs in ongoing support sessions fosters student participation. Effective implementation requires schools to establish organizational structures that prioritize specialized support for older newcomer MLs and provide consistent opportunities for students to connect with their PSC. Regular support sessions can allow students to build trust and feel comfortable asking questions, sharing concerns, and expressing interests, enabling PSCs to provide targeted support that increases student participation. Consistent implementation would require that PSCs be allotted the time needed to engage older newcomer

MLs in ongoing support sessions. Large caseloads may limit the feasibility of sustained, consistent one-on-one support, so dedicated scheduling structures would be necessary to support this practice. As a critical next step, school systems must refine intervention protocols to provide PSCs with a clear structure for facilitating ongoing support sessions with older newcomer MLs. Establishing clear protocols will ensure PSCs are allotted adequate time and manageable caseloads to provide individualized and ongoing support.

The following table includes actionable steps that can be taken to establish support structures for older newcomer MLs.

Table 8

Actionable Steps to Establish Structures to Support Older Newcomer MLs.

Actionable Item	Description
ELD PSC Staffing	Identify a PSC to support older newcomer MLs.
Manageable Caseloads	Modify the PSC's caseload to ensure they will be able to engage older newcomer MLs in consistent ongoing support sessions.
Enrollment Notification System	Establish automated protocols to alert the ELD PSC immediately upon the enrollment of an older newcomer ML.
Support Initiation	Ensure the ELD PSC connects with the older newcomer shortly after enrolling in their respective high school to begin the intervention.
Engagement in Intervention	Engage older newcomer MLs in consistent ongoing support sessions utilizing the personalized graduation roadmap and support sessions tool.

Designing and Implementing Graduation Planning Resources

The study suggests that PSCs foster student participation when graduation plans are presented in a clear, accessible format. Implementation of such supports requires that school systems design and implement graduation planning resources that are comprehensible and accessible to older newcomer MLs, who may be unfamiliar with graduation expectations in U.S. schools and the linguistic demands associated with academic planning. Accessible planning tools, such as the personalized graduation roadmap, may help students better understand their pathways to graduation and engage more actively in monitoring their progress. Creating, utilizing, and refining graduation planning tools to support older newcomer MLs as they navigate high school is essential for promoting student participation and progress toward graduation. An important next step is to enhance and refine the personalized graduation roadmap to improve its functionality and accessibility for older newcomer MLs. Additionally, there is value in further developing the support session tool as a resource that PSCs can utilize to facilitate sessions, engage in dialogue regarding topics relevant to older newcomer MLs, and document student progress. These refinements aim to ensure that this intervention continues to improve its function and impact on student participation.

Leveraging Professional Learning Communities to Strengthen Equity

When PSCs had opportunities to engage in a professional learning community (PLC) format to discuss their experiences working with older newcomer MLs and review resources and supports, they refined their materials to better support student needs and align with their counseling approaches. In addition to improving resources for older newcomer MLs, the PLC served as a space for collective reflection and advocacy. As a next step, the system could

establish a data-driven PLC to track student participation, academic success, student retention, and graduation outcomes for older newcomer MLs. This collaborative structure could support ongoing evaluation of the intervention and provide a space for PSCs to continue sharing experiences, reflecting on practices, and reducing the challenges and barriers these students face as they work toward earning a high school diploma and plan for postsecondary ventures. Establishing a PLC may act as a catalyst for change in organizational structures, promoting more equitable and inclusive practices for older newcomer MLs.

Long-Term Implications

Embedding Foundational Knowledge Supports within School Systems

Findings suggest that when PSCs provided older newcomer MLs with background information about high school expectations, graduation requirements, and resources, student participation increased. To promote the sustainability of this aspect of support, school systems could expand these efforts beyond individual PSCs and embed them in broader organizational structures. As a next step, school systems should prioritize developing and implementing workshops to provide older newcomer MLs and their families with information on graduation requirements, high school expectations, and available resources.

Systematizing Graduation Planning Resources

Over time, school systems should work toward systematizing accessible graduation planning resources to ensure consistent support for older newcomer MLs as they work toward graduation. This includes integrating digital graduation planning tools into district platforms and establishing clear protocols for PSCs when supporting older newcomer MLs in graduation planning. Resources such as the personalized graduation roadmap and the support sessions tool

can be incorporated into broader counseling practices to provide PSCs with more guidance on supporting older newcomer MLs in navigating graduation pathways. As graduation planning resources are tailored for older newcomer MLs, the next step would be to seek approval from central office stakeholders to digitize and upload them into district platforms so they are accessible to a broader scope of individuals working with older newcomer MLs.

Flexible Scheduling and Programming

Findings suggest that older newcomer MLs face unique circumstances that often require flexible customizations in scheduling. Due to competing economic and household responsibilities, alongside age-related time constraints, flexible scheduling and additional programming options would be beneficial in supporting student participation and progress towards meeting graduation requirements. To provide more flexible and individualized scheduling, school systems should ensure older newcomer MLs have access to additional course offerings, including evening, online, extended-day, semesterized, and summer coursework. Additionally, nontraditional school models, including daytime, evening, semesterized, and work-study opportunities, may provide pathways for students who struggle to attend traditional school settings. These course offerings must be responsive and accessible to meet the linguistic needs of older newcomer MLs. As a next step, the school system should evaluate its current scheduling and program models and identify ways in which to enhance, expand, and design scheduling models and programming options that support positive graduation outcomes for older newcomer MLs.

Postsecondary Preparation

Older newcomer MLs demonstrated increased participation when they engaged in discussions about postsecondary opportunities and created graduation plans that incorporated coursework for postsecondary preparation. School systems would need to provide accessible and comprehensible college and career programming and coursework that enable older newcomer MLs to better understand and prepare for postsecondary pathways. Structured opportunities tailored to older newcomer MLs' interests and goals may support deeper participation in their high school experience. Additionally, having opportunities to obtain experience, certifications, and credits toward a career may help older newcomer MLs stay engaged and persist toward graduation. As a next step in supporting postsecondary preparation, school systems should develop and enhance structured opportunities, such as career and technical education (CTE) programs, work-study programs, certifications, and dual-enrollment programs, tailored to meet the needs and interests of older newcomer MLs.

Promoting Advocacy Through Data Collection and Disaggregation

School systems must commit to collecting and disaggregating data to provide clearer insight into how to support more inclusive and equitable educational systems for older newcomer MLs. When data are disaggregated, school stakeholders can identify patterns, needs, and outcomes that may otherwise be embedded within broader datasets representing the overall ML population. This increased visibility can promote advocacy efforts that are more targeted and intentional in supporting older newcomer MLs as they work toward earning a high school diploma. A next step in promoting greater data accountability for older newcomer MLs is for school systems to establish measures requiring the collection of disaggregated data for ML

subgroups, including older newcomer MLs. Central office stakeholders, including ELD, data accountability, high school, counseling services, and school-based staff, should collaborate in this effort to examine data and make informed, systemic decisions that reduce barriers and promote equitable and inclusive practices for older newcomer MLs.

Relevance

Older newcomer MLs at CHSD graduate at lower rates than their never-ML peers, illustrating a persistent equity concern. This marginalized subgroup of students faces unique challenges that often impact their ability to successfully navigate high school, meet graduation requirements, and ultimately achieve a high school diploma. Currently, little is known about specific ways to reduce these barriers for older newcomer MLs in order to foster successful participation within their high school experience. This lack of understanding hinders school systems' ability to design and implement the mindful, intentional supports necessary to facilitate meaningful participation and successful educational outcomes for this particular population of students.

This study provided insight into how school PSCs can foster participation among older newcomer MLs as they navigate high school and work toward achieving a diploma. When students received ongoing support and used a visual and interactive tool to help them access their graduation plan, they participated in their educational environment in varied ways, keeping them connected and focused on working toward a high school diploma.

These findings are relevant to school communities serving older newcomer MLs in high school. The study illustrates how ongoing support from a trusted adult, combined with comprehensible, manageable, and meaningful graduation pathways, can foster student

participation. By focusing on participation, the study revealed the varied ways older newcomer MLs can participate in their educational experience when supports are aligned with their needs.

Limitations

Sample and Context

A limitation of this study was the relatively small sample size, consisting of five PSCs. This limited scope of experiences and perceptions may restrict the transferability of the findings to other contexts. PSCs' work locations posed an additional constraint, as four out of the five participants were central office-based, so perceptions may not have captured the lived experiences of school-based PSCs from a wider range of schools spanning the school district. Additionally, all five PSCs regularly worked with MLs and had extensive experience supporting this population. As a result, these findings may reflect the perceptions and experiences of PSCs with specialized expertise and may not represent how the intervention would be perceived or implemented by PSCs with less experience working with MLs. Participation in the study was voluntary, and participants demonstrated a strong pre-existing commitment to supporting MLs, suggesting the potential for selection bias. Consequently, participants may have been more inclined to view the intervention favorably, which may have also contributed to confirmation bias in the interpretation of findings.

Data Collection and Observation

The findings are based primarily on self-reported data. Because direct observations of PSCs as they engaged older newcomer MLs in the intervention were not conducted, the results reflect the PSCs' self-reported experiences and perceptions. This has the potential to introduce bias-related recall, interpretation, or social desirability. As a result, some challenges or

complexities that emerged during implementation may not have been fully captured. With these limitations in mind, this study should be characterized as a pilot of a pilot in which a preliminary exploration of the intervention's impact on fostering participation was conducted.

Timing and Implementation

The timing of the PDSA cycle limited long-term findings. A five-week period is a relatively short period of time to determine any long-term impacts of the intervention on graduation outcomes. Furthermore, the timeline in which PSCs completed their ongoing support sessions prior to the focus group varied. While most PSCs met with their students twice prior to the focus group session, one PSC was only able to meet with their students once. This implementation variation may have influenced the depth of perceptions, experiences, and specific suggestions provided for refining the support session tools.

Materials for Triangulating

Although the intention was to include a comprehensive collection of all redacted materials, including personalized graduation roadmaps and support session tools, artifacts were ultimately obtained from three of the five PSCs. This partial collection limited the range of qualitative data available for analysis. While data from SSI-1, SSI-2, the focus group, researcher notes, and a partial collection of redacted materials provided deep insights, the absence of a complete set of physical artifacts means that the researcher could not fully compare all redacted documents and relied on interviews to provide deeper insight into the PSCs' experiences. However, consistent findings in the data suggest that the absence of the remaining two data sets did not change the study's conclusion.

Trustworthiness

Trustworthiness in qualitative research ensures a high-quality study (Stahl & King, 2020). For this study, the author utilized several strategies to promote a trustworthy study, including credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). A trustworthy qualitative study is credible (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). One way in which this study maintains credibility is through the use of data triangulation (Ahmed, 2024; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Stahl & King, 2020; Tracy, 2010). Data triangulation entails examining data from different sources within the study. The researcher collected data from multiple sources, including semi-structured interviews, focus group discussion materials, researcher notes, and redacted artifacts. Comparing data from varied sources strengthened the study's findings and fostered trustworthiness. Another way the researcher increased trustworthiness was through transferability to ensure findings could be applied across varied settings and situations. To promote transferability, the researcher provided thick descriptions that moved beyond the surface of the study and captured nuances and context (Ahmed, 2024; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Stahl & King, 2020). This study increased its dependability by creating an audit trail in which any changes or adjustments to the study or materials related to the study were clearly documented (Ahmed, 2024; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Stahl & King, 2020). The researcher used confirmability through peer debriefing to seek feedback and examine interpretations of study findings (Ahmed, 2024; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Stahl & King, 2020). Applying these strategies to the study enhanced its quality and trustworthiness.

Appendix

Appendix A: High school course requirements for graduation in Maryland public schools

22 course credits are required	
Subject Area	Number of credits
English	4
Math	4
Social Studies	3
Science	3
Fine Arts	1
Physical Education	.5
Health	1
Foreign Language or Career and technical education program	2 3-9 (dependent upon the program requirements)
Environmental Literacy	.5
Computer science, technology, or engineering	1
Electives	Any remaining credits needed

Note. This table breaks down the high school course requirements for graduation in Maryland public schools in SY 2024-2025. The information was gathered from the Code of Maryland Regulations (COMAR 13A.03.02.03).

Appendix B: Personalized Graduation Roadmap



Personalized Graduation Roadmap

Student ID: _____ Name: _____ Birthdate: _____

You need 22 credits to graduate high school
🎓 Projected graduation year: _____

Grade 9		Grade 10	
☐ Newcomer English -	☐ Spanish 1 -	☐ English 10 -	☐ Spanish 2 -
☐ Math Applications -	☐ English Lab -	☐ Geometry -	☐ FOC -
☐ Language of History -	☐ AIM 1 -	☐ U.S. History -	☐ English Lab -
☐ Language of Science -	☐ N/A -	☐ Biogeochem -	☐ Health 1 -
	☐ N/A -		☐ N/A -
Extended Day Program ☐ Summer ☐		Extended Day Program ☐ Summer ☐	

Grade 11		Grade 12	
☐ English 11 -	☐ ELD Lab -	☐ N/A -	☐ N/A -
☐ Algebra 2 -	☐ Financial Literacy for T... -	☐ N/A -	☐ N/A -
☐ LSN Government -	☐ Health 2 -	☐ N/A -	☐ N/A -
☐ Biology -	☐ N/A -	☐ N/A -	☐ N/A -
	☐ N/A -		☐ N/A -
Extended Day Program ☐ Summer ☐		Extended Day Program ☐ Summer ☐	

English Language Proficiency Levels Reading: Writing: Listening: Speaking: Overall:

Testing requirements: ☐ ELA 10 ☐ Algebra 1 ☐ Biology/Misa ☐ LSN Government Service Learning Hours (24 hours needed):



Counselor's email



[StudentVUE](#)



[Clever](#)



[Graduation Requirements](#)



[Credit Check Template](#)



[School Calendar](#)

Note. Professional School Counselors used this personalized graduation roadmap during ongoing support sessions with older newcomer MLs.

Appendix C: Support Session Tool

Student ID	Name	GRADE	BIRTHDATE	AGE	Create a bi-weekly calendar invite	Created a personalized graduation plan with the student	Session 1 Date	Session 1 Notes
			08-19-2009	15	☐	☐		
					☐	☐		
					☐	☐		
					☐	☐		
					☐	☐		

Things to consider	Check-in	Academics	Graduation Plan
Do you have the student's transcripts?	Introductions- name, role, contact information, location office hours, etc	Do you have any credits from other countries or states that you haven't turned in? Did you attend secondary school anywhere else. Do you have any school records?	Perform a brief overview of the personalized graduation roadmap and its purpose.
Have you reviewed the PS-12?	How are you doing?	Do you know how to check your assignments and grades? Look across platforms together.	Complete the personalized graduation roadmap with the student.
Has the student been prammed?	How are you feeling about school/classes/teachers?	Do you have any questions about classes, grades, platforms, or assignments?	Discuss course offerings, CTEs, electives, dual enrollment, summer school, credit recovery
Does the student need a math placement test?	Is there anything you need at this time (resources, supports, etc.)?	Do you need any additional resources or supports (language and academic enrichment, clubs, tutoring, activities to spark interests, etc.)?	Discuss timeline and projected graduation date- summer school, credit recovery, etc.
Does the student have interrupted education?	Do you have any questions or concerns?	Are there any subjects or classes you like or dislike?	Discuss graduation requirements (credits, testing, service learning hours).
Does the student live with a parent, guardian, or alone?	Set up calendar invites for biweekly meetings. Show student how to access their Google calendar and email.	What is your plan for the future?	Discuss the features within the personalized graduation roadmap. This can be done in multiple sessions. Features include, email, Synergy, Canvas, credit check, graduation requirements
Student's age and goals-timeline- does student have the option of a three or four year plan? Is the student eager to join the workforce, are they undecided, or do they want to pursue college?		How can we support you in meeting your future goals?	Discuss and sign up for credit recovery as available.
Will this student be applying for early graduation?			Revist plan as needed (interests, goals, age, academic standing, etc.).
Will the student benefit from summer school or credit recovery?			

Note. The support session tool contains two tabs. Tab 1 contains space to track attendance and take notes about each session. Tab 2 contains suggested prompts and questions the PSCs utilized during student support sessions.

Appendix D: Suggested Study Timeline

Study Timeline

Length of study: five weeks



Note. The researcher suggested a study timeline that was presented to PSCs during the professional development.

Appendix E: Professional Development for Professional School Counselors

November 2025

Exploring How Personalized Support Can Foster Positive Graduation Outcomes for Older Newcomer Multilingual Learners

Kirsten Lennon
klennon@umd.edu

Slide 1

Agenda

1. Introductions
2. An overview of older newcomer MLs
3. Exploring trends
4. Study overview
5. Study tools and interventions
6. Put into practice
7. Questions and resources

Slide 2

Introductions

Kirsten Lennon

- CHSD for 20 years
- Teacher, Instructional Lead
- Teacher, Coordinator, NBCT, and Admin I
- Doctoral student at the University of Maryland, College Park
- School System Leadership-Specialization in TESOL and Dual Language Education

- Share a bit about yourself
 - Where do you work?
 - How long have you worked in your field?
 - What do you hope to gain from this experience?

Slide 3

An overview of older newcomer multilingual learner (ML)

- Older newcomer MLs are students who enter the United States **two years "off track"** in age and credit accumulation (New York City Department of Education, 2012, p. 4).
- Newcomer MLs are students who have recently arrived in the United States (U.S.). The U.S. Department of Education's Office of English Language Acquisition (OELA) (2023) defines newcomer MLs as **immigrant adolescents who have lived in the United States for less than three years and are in the process of acquiring English.**
- Typically, these students are two or more years older than their peers in the same grade level.

Example: 17-year-old newcomer entering ninth grade without previous high school credits.

Slide 4

Enrollment trends

- The National Education Association (2020) predicted that by 2025, one out of four children enrolled in U.S. schools will be an ML.
- Maryland ranks among the top ten states with the highest percentage of MLs enrolled in the public school system (Irwin et al., 2024)
- In 2024, nearly a quarter of MLs enrolled in Maryland public schools were MLs in grades 9-12

Slide 5

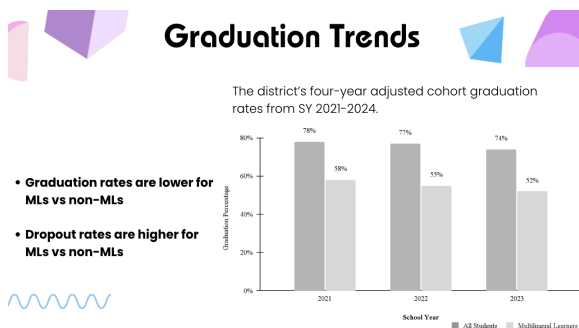
Graduation Trends

Maryland's 4-year Adjusted Cohort Graduation Rate (ACGR) and dropout rate for MLs and never MLs in SY 2021-2022.

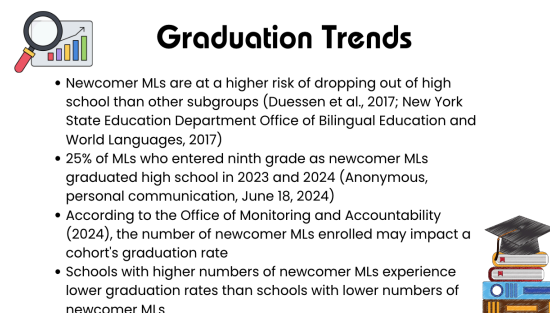
Category	Current MLs	Never MLs
Graduation Rate	58%	78%
Dropout Rate	25%	15%

- Graduation rates are lower for MLs vs non-MLs
- Dropout rates are higher for MLs vs non-MLs

Slide 6



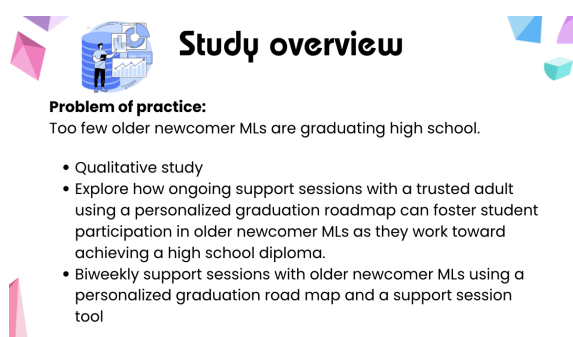
Slide 7



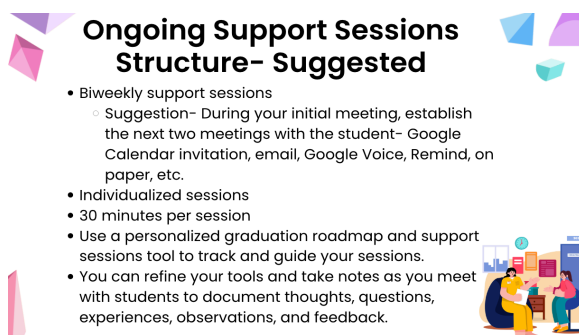
Slide 8



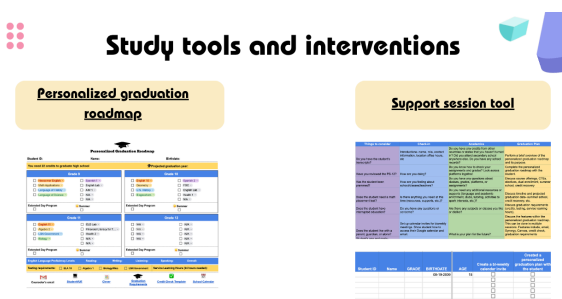
Slide 9



Slide 10



Slide 11



Slide 12



Let's explore the tools



Click on each tool to make a copy
Explore each tool
What do you notice?
What do you wonder?
Questions?



**Personalized graduation
Roadmap**

Support session tool

Slide 13



Study tools and interventions



Features:

**Personalized graduation
roadmap**

- Google Document
- Student ID, Name, Birthdate
- Four squares
- Dropdown for courses
- Section for Extended Day Program
- Section for summer school
- Section for English Language Development Levels
- Testing requirements
- Service learning requirements
- Resources- PSC email, platforms and Apps, graduation requirements, credit check sheet, school calendar

Slide 14

Study tools and interventions



Support session tool

Features:

- Google sheet
- Two tabs
 - The first tab is for attendance and notes
 - The second tab contains questions and prompts to consider while engaging in ongoing support sessions using the personalized graduation roadmap.

Slide 15

Let's make a folder to store your materials



1. Go to Google Drive
2. Create and name your folder
3. Open folder
4. Add one copy of the support session tool
5. Add a copy and name the personalized graduation map

Slide 16

Let's practice

Use the personalized graduation roadmap to create a plan for an older newcomer.

[Click here to make a copy of the personalized graduation roadmap.](#)

You may refer to an older newcomer ML in your building or use this student profile:

Name: Melany
Grade: 9th
Birthdate: 12/28/2006
Transcripts: No previous high school records from home country
ELD Levels:
Reading: 1.0, Writing: 1.0, Listening: 1.0, Speaking: 1.0, Overall: 1.0



Slide 17

Study Timeline

Length of study: five weeks



Slide 18

Suggested Timeline

Suggested Timeline

- After Thanksgiving break - Engage 1-3 older newcomer MLs in two support sessions (December 1st - December 16th, before winter break).
- On December 17th or 18th, we can meet via Zoom to discuss the tools (Focus group session).
- Once we return from winter break, engage students in one more support session (January 5th - January 9th).
- One final chat (semi-structured interview) during the week of January 12th - January 16th.

Slide 19



Slide 20



Slide 21

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Slide 22

Note. The researcher provided this professional development to participants prior to the study.

This presentation was redacted to conceal any identifiable information.

Appendix F: Refined Personalized Graduation Roadmap



Personalized Graduation Roadmap

Student ID: _____ Name: _____ Birthdate: _____

You need 22 credits to graduate from high school **Projected graduation year:** _____

Grade 9/Year 1	Grade 10/Year 2
☐ English 9 - ☐ Math Applications - ☐ Language of History - ☐ Language of Science - ☐ Spanish 1 - ☐ English Lab - ☐ AIM 1 - ☐ N/A - ☐ N/A - Virtual Learning/Extended Day ☐ ☀ Summer ☐	☐ English 10 - ☐ Geometry - ☐ U.S. History - ☐ Biogeochem - ☐ Spanish 2 - ☐ FOC - ☐ English Lab - ☐ Health 1 - ☐ N/A - Virtual Learning/Extended Day ☐ ☀ Summer ☐
Grade 11/Year 3	Grade 12/Year 4
☐ English 11 - ☐ Algebra 2 - ☐ LSN Government - ☐ Biology - ☐ ELD Lab - ☐ Financial Literacy for T... - ☐ Health 2 - ☐ N/A - ☐ N/A - Virtual Learning/Extended Day ☐ ☀ Summer ☐	☐ N/A - ☐ N/A - ☐ N/A - ☐ N/A - ☐ N/A - ☐ N/A - ☐ N/A - ☐ N/A - Virtual Learning/Extended Day ☐ ☀ Summer ☐

English Language Proficiency Levels	Reading:	Writing:	Listening:	Speaking:	Overall:
Testing requirements: ☐ ELA 10 ☐ Algebra 1 ☐ Biology/Misa ☐ LSN Government	Service Learning Hours (24 hours needed):				



[Counselor's email](#)



[StudentVUE](#)



[Clever](#)



[Graduation Requirements](#)



[Credit Check Template](#)



[School Calendar](#)

Note. During the focus group session, PSCs refined the personalized graduation roadmap.

Appendix G: Refined Support Sessions Tool

Things to consider	Check-in	Academics	Graduation Plan
Do you have the student's transcripts?	Introductions- name, role, contact information, location office hours, etc	Do you have any credits from other countries or states that you haven't turned in? Did you attend secondary school anywhere else. Do you have any school records?	Perform a brief overview of the personalized graduation roadmap and its purpose.
Have you reviewed the PS-12?	How are you doing?	Do you know how to check your assignments and grades? Look across platforms together.	Complete the personalized graduation roadmap with the student.
Has the student been prammed?	How are you feeling about school/classes/teachers?	Do you have any questions about classes, grades, platforms, or assignments?	Discuss course offerings, CTEs, electives, dual enrollment, summer school, credit recovery
Does the student need a math placement test?	Is there anything you need at this time (resources, supports, etc.)?	Do you need any additional resources or supports (language and academic enrichment, clubs, tutoring, activities to spark interests, etc.)?	Discuss timeline and projected graduation date- summer school, credit recovery, etc.
Does the student have interrupted education?	Do you have any questions or concerns?	Are there any subjects or classes you like or dislike?	Discuss graduation requirements (credits, testing, service learning hours).
Does the student live with a parent, guardian, or alone?	Set up calendar invites for biweekly meetings. Show student how to access their Google calendar and email.	What is your plan for the future?	Discuss the features within the personalized graduation roadmap. This can be done in multiple sessions. Features include, email, Synergy, Canvas, credit check document, graduation requirements, testing, service learning hours, school calendar
Student's age and goals- timeline- does student have the option of a three or four year plan? Is the student eager to join the workforce, are they undecided, or do they want to pursue college?		How can we support you in meeting your future goals?	Discuss and sign up for credit recovery as available.
Will this student be applying for early graduation?		Direct students to the Brainfuse online tutoring App in Clever.	Revist plan as needed (interests, goals, age, academic standing, etc.).
Will the student benefit from summer school or credit recovery?		Are you first-generation college-bound?	Print and discuss the Graduation Notification Agreement (GNA).
			Provide the student with a copy of their transcript and take time to discuss it with them.
			Discuss Service Learning Hours (SLHs).
			Discuss any financial aid information session opportunities for college and career readiness.

Note. During the focus group session, PSCs refined the support sessions tool. Added questions and prompts are in yellow.

Appendix H: Study Recruitment Flyer

Participants Needed

High School Professional School Counselors

I am conducting a five-week qualitative study to explore how ongoing support sessions with a trusted adult using a personalized graduation roadmap can foster participation among older newcomer multilingual learners (MLs) as they work toward achieving a high school diploma. Older newcomer MLs are adolescents who have lived in the United States for less than three years, are in the process of acquiring English, and are two or more years older than the average student in their grade level. As a high school professional school counselor your educational background, expertise, and scope of practice uniquely position you to build trusting relationships and foster participation among older newcomer MLs as they navigate their high school journey.

If you are interested in participating in this research study, please [click here](#) to complete the interest form or scan the QR code

If you have any questions, please email klennon@umd.edu



Eligibility Requirements

- You must be a professional school counselor (PSC) for Chestnut Hollow School District.
- You must work with and have access to supporting older newcomer multilingual learners (MLs) in high school.
- You must be willing to participate in a one-hour professional development session on older newcomer MLs
- You must be willing to participate in two semi-structured interviews and a one-hour focus group session during the five-week study, which will run from November to January. Participation in these sessions requires consent to audio and video recording via Zoom.
- You must be willing to engage in three thirty-minute biweekly support sessions with older newcomer MLs using a personalized graduation roadmap and a support session tool.



Note. The researcher emailed this study recruitment flyer to PSCs once approval to recruit was received from their supervisor or principal. This flyer was redacted to conceal any identifiable information.

Appendix I: Semi-structured Interview (1)

Thank you for your willingness to participate in this interview. I want to value your time, so I will do my best to keep this interview to an hour. Through this study, I aim to explore how ongoing support sessions with a trusted adult using a personalized graduation roadmap can foster participation among older newcomer MLs as they work toward achieving a high school diploma. As a professional school counselor, your expertise and educational background will provide valuable insight into this exploration. This is a semi-structured interview with seven primary questions. There are no right or wrong answers, so please feel free to speak openly and without reservations. I will be recording and taking notes during this interview. Your identity will remain anonymous in any publication or report to protect your confidentiality. You can choose not to answer any questions you are uncomfortable with. You can withdraw from the study at any time. Do you have any questions or concerns before we begin?

1. Can you describe your role?	
2. Tell me about your experience working with MLs. a. Subgroups (older/SPED/long-term)	
3. Can you describe your strategies when working with MLs and ML subgroups? a. Do your strategies change depending on subgroup (older vs. standard age to grade level)? b. What strategies are used to support positive graduation outcomes for older newcomer MLs?	
4. Can you describe what student participation looks like? a. What characteristics do you notice in a student who participates in their educational experience?	

b. What characteristics do you find in a student who does not participate in their educational experience?	
5. What challenges do you think impact older newcomer MLs' level of participation as they work toward achieving a high school diploma?	
6. How might ongoing support sessions utilizing a personalized graduation roadmap with older newcomer MLs foster participation and impact graduation outcomes?	
7. Do you have any questions, concerns, or additional thoughts you would like to share?	

Note. This semi-structured interview (SSI-1) took place at the beginning of the study.

Appendix J: Semi-structured Interview (2)

Thank you for your willingness to participate in this interview. I want to value your time, so I will do my best to keep this interview to an hour. Through this study, we have explored how ongoing support sessions with a trusted adult using a personalized graduation roadmap can foster participation among older newcomer MLs as they work toward achieving a high school diploma. This is a semi-structured interview with eight primary questions. There are no right or wrong answers, so please feel free to speak openly and without reservations. I will be recording and taking notes during this interview. Your identity will remain anonymous in any publication or report to protect your confidentiality. You can choose not to answer any questions you are uncomfortable with. Do you have any questions or concerns before we begin?

1. Can you describe your experience engaging students in ongoing support sessions utilizing the personalized graduation roadmap? a. Can you describe any challenges? b. Can you describe any successes? c. Can you tell me your thoughts on the frequency/timing of check-ins?	
2. Have you noticed any changes in student participation since you met with them and used the personalized graduation roadmap? a. What did these changes look like (characteristics, actions)? b. What factors do you think impacted their level of participation?	
3. How, if at all, did ongoing support sessions utilizing a personalized graduation roadmap	

with older newcomer MLs impact their participation as they worked toward achieving a high school diploma?	
4. Can you share an example or story of a student who benefited from ongoing support sessions using the graduation roadmap?	
5. Have your strategies for supporting older newcomer MLs changed throughout the study? If so, how?	
6. If you could make any changes or additions to the intervention (ongoing support sessions and personalized graduation roadmap), what would you change or add?	
7. Would you consider utilizing this graduation roadmap with students in the future?	
8. Do you have any questions, concerns, or additional thoughts you would like to share?	

Note. This semi-structured interview (SSI-2) took place at the end of the study.

Appendix K: Focus Group Discussion Prompts

1. Can you share a little about your experience engaging students in ongoing support sessions using a personalized graduation map?
2. Have you experienced any successful moments in engaging students in ongoing support sessions using a personalized graduation map?
 - a. If so, can you share an example?
 - b. What adjustments, if any, can we make to promote more successful moments?
3. Have you experienced challenging moments engaging students in ongoing support sessions using a personalized graduation map?
 - a. If so, can you share an example?
 - b. What adjustments, if any, can we make to address some of these challenges?
4. Have you noticed any changes in your students' participation as you work with them in ongoing support sessions using the personalized graduation roadmap?
 - a. If so, what did these changes look like?
 - b. What do you think influenced these changes?
5. What are your thoughts on engaging in biweekly support sessions?
 - a. Would you make any adjustments to the timeframes and frequency of meetings?
6. What are your thoughts on the support session tool?
 - a. Would you make any adjustments to improve this tool?
 - b. Are there questions or prompts you would add or remove?
7. What are your thoughts on the personalized graduation roadmap?
 - a. Are there things you would like to add to the roadmap to refine or enhance it for you and your students?
 - b. Are there things you would remove from the roadmap to refine or enhance it for you and your students?
8. Moving forward, what adjustments can we make to the support sessions and resources to enhance students' levels of participation?
9. Do you have any questions, concerns, or additional thoughts you would like to share about this experience at this time?

Note. Questions used to facilitate the focus group session.

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