

# LANGUAGE & CULTURAL CONSIDERATIONS

The United States is touched by every part of the world. As the phrase on our monetary coins states, “e-pluribus unum” (out of many, one), there are many cultures and ethnicities that enrich the population and culture of our country. With this uniqueness comes various languages and dialect which can greatly hinder communication and the ability to socialize and adapt into a society.

People come to the United States for a variety of reasons, and some are here legally while others do not have government permission to live and work in the country. Schools are responsible to educate children regardless of their citizenship, and with that comes the responsibility to meet the language needs of students and families.

Some students in school face a variety of challenges such as their citizenship status and a lack of English language skills. Many school staff do not have a second language skill which can add to difficulties for students trying to acclimate into a school setting. Because children are legally obligated to be in school, it is imperative for schools to find ways to communicate with and make students feel welcome.

## DEFINITIONS

**Immigrant:** a person who comes to live permanently from another country with permission from the government

**Undocumented Immigrant:** a person who comes into the country without permission and are not authorized to work or receive benefits

**Legal Permanent Resident:** those who have a “green card”; someone who has been granted authorization to live and work in the United States on a permanent basis usually sponsored by a family member or employer

**Refugee:** a person who fled war, violence, conflict or persecution and crossed an international border to find safety in another country; have permission to be in the country

**English Language Learner (ELL):** students who are unable to communicate fluently or learn effectively in English, who often come from non-English-speaking homes and backgrounds, and who typically require specialized or modified instruction in both the English language and in their academic courses

## DATA

Nebraska has 22,000 English language learners in grades K-12 speaking over 110 languages. Source: NDE, 2021

7.2% of Nebraskans are foreign born. Source: US Census Bureau, 2020

### IMMIGRANTS

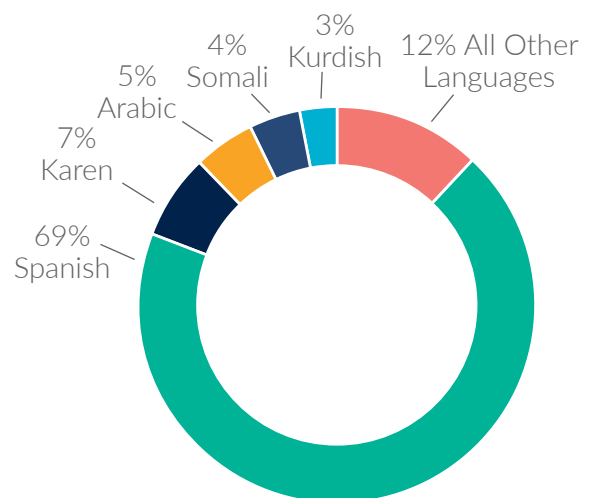
60,000 undocumented immigrants comprised 41% of the immigrant population and 3% of the total state population in 2016.

In 2018, 138,953 immigrants (foreign-born individuals) comprised 7% of the population.

In 2018, 129,838 people in Nebraska (7% of the state’s population) were native-born Americans who had at least one immigrant parent.

Source: American Immigration Council, 2020

**LANGUAGES SPOKEN BY ENGLISH LEARNERS IN NEBRASKA**



Source: Modified from Nebraska Department of Education, 2020

## REFUGEES

Nebraska had the nation's highest per capita refugee resettlement rate in the fiscal year 2016.

From January 2010 to January 2019, the state resettled 8,425 refugees. Over that time span, the top countries of origin for Nebraska-based refugees were Burma/Myanmar (3,755), Bhutan (1,610), and Iraq (1,323).

### REFUGEE RESETTLEMENT IS COMPARATIVELY HIGH IN NEBRASKA

|               | Refugee Resettlement (2016) | Refugee Resettlement (2019) | Refugees Settled Per 100,000 Persons |
|---------------|-----------------------------|-----------------------------|--------------------------------------|
| Nebraska      | 1,782                       | 445                         | 94                                   |
| United States | 84,989                      | 25,782                      | 30                                   |

Source: [ireports.wrapsnet.org](http://ireports.wrapsnet.org)

## HEALTH OFFICE CONSIDERATIONS

### WORKING WITH ELL STUDENTS AND FAMILIES

- Be aware some students are not educated on things many Americans take for granted (e.g. where their stomach is in the body)
- Body language is not universal so be aware of your nonverbal expressions
- When using an interpreter, speak to the student or parent, not the interpreter
- Do not speak slower or louder when someone speaks another language; talk in your normal voice
- Remember a lack of knowledge of the American culture does not equate to a lack of intelligence or common sense

## RESOURCES

### LOCAL

Local health departments - [dhhs.ne.gov/Pages/Local-Health-Departments.aspx](http://dhhs.ne.gov/Pages/Local-Health-Departments.aspx)

### STATE

DHHS Office of Minority Health & Health Equity [dhhs.ne.gov/Pages/Health-Disparities-and-Equity.aspx](http://dhhs.ne.gov/Pages/Health-Disparities-and-Equity.aspx)

Omaha Refugee Task Force - [www.omaharefugees.com](http://www.omaharefugees.com)

DHHS Refugee Resettlement - [dhhs.ne.gov/Pages/Refugee-Resettlement.aspx](http://dhhs.ne.gov/Pages/Refugee-Resettlement.aspx)

### NATIONAL

HHS Office of Minority Health - [www.minorityhealth.hhs.gov](http://www.minorityhealth.hhs.gov)

Bridging Refugee Youth & Children's Services - [brycs.org](http://brycs.org)

Cultural Orientation Resource Center - [www.culturalorientation.net](http://www.culturalorientation.net)

*This material was developed as a compliment to the Project ECHO School Health series on Social Determinants of Health, Session 4, The Effects of Language and Cultural Barriers in the Classroom, presented by Dr. Zainab Rida, Alana Schriver and Oscar Rios Pohirieth, on February 24, 2021. Additional resources can be found here: [www.childrensomaha.org/projectecho](http://www.childrensomaha.org/projectecho)*