

## **Welcoming Newcomer Students: The Role of School and Community Leadership in New Brunswick's Evolving Education Landscape**

**Manju Varma<sup>1</sup>, Lyle Hamm<sup>2</sup>, Nidhi Menon<sup>3</sup>, Katharine Hartnett<sup>4</sup>,  
Ruth Mamman<sup>5</sup>, Alicia Noreiga<sup>6</sup>, Meera Joshi<sup>7</sup>**

<sup>1</sup> Engaging Matters Diversity Consultants  
<sup>2,3,4,5</sup> University of New Brunswick (UNB)

<sup>6</sup> Acadia University

<sup>7</sup> University of Waterloo

### **ABSTRACT**

**Conference Proposal:** In recent years, Canada has witnessed a significant increase in newcomer students and community members, reflecting broader trends in immigration and population growth. This demographic shift presents both challenges and opportunities for our provincial schools and communities. School and community leaders are uniquely positioned to shape the experiences of their students by fostering inclusive environments, supporting diverse needs, and promoting mutual community engagement. This conference proposal draws on recent and drastic change in demographics in New Brunswick, a province in Eastern Canada and an historically predominately White location. Our current project draws from three school-based studies that comprised 12 ethnoculturally diverse schools in New Brunswick (Hamm et al., 2023; Hamm et al., 2021; Massfeller & Hamm, 2019) and a significant report commissioned by the provincial government to study systemic racism in our province (Varma, 2022). Through a critical constructivist/interpretivist lens, we designed and employed a case study methodology using survey, semi-structured interviews, and focus groups to gather and analyze the perceptions of 16 administrators, 31 classroom teachers, and 32 newcomer students in total through the three school-based studies. The provincial study on systemic racism employed a mixed methods approach using Likert perception scales, a phone survey (N=400), and paper survey (N=137). Findings from all sources reveal that New Brunswick-born students, their educators and administrators, and community members from across the province are struggling with the rapid demographic changes, specifically the cultural and racial changes to their classrooms. Further, newcomer students and their parents are confronting multiple barriers such as discrimination, social exclusion, and lower economic status as they adapt to

their new home. In this paper, we examine how school and community leadership can address challenges such as language barriers, cultural integration, racism, and gaps in educational readiness. Our current project highlights opportunities, including fostering intercultural understanding, leveraging diverse perspectives to enrich learning, and building stronger school-community partnerships. With a current change in provincial government leadership, our team is hopeful that our current work will have implications for positive change in New Brunswick schools and communities and support and contribute to more effective professional learning for educators who are still unprepared to teach in ethnoculturally diverse schools. To date, our team has gained the approval of the new premier and education minister, and we have conducted professional development in a large high school.

Key topics include:

- Strategies for creating inclusive school policies and practices.
- Building capacity among staff to support linguistic and cultural diversity.
- Engaging families and communities of newcomer students to strengthen home-school connections.
- Collaborating with community organizations to enhance resources and support.

Participants will leave with practical insights and actionable strategies to lead with empathy and effectiveness in this evolving context. The session aims to inspire a proactive approach, viewing the influx of newcomer students not just as a challenge but as an opportunity to enrich the educational landscape.

**Keywords:** antiracism, demographic change, diversity, immigration, policy