

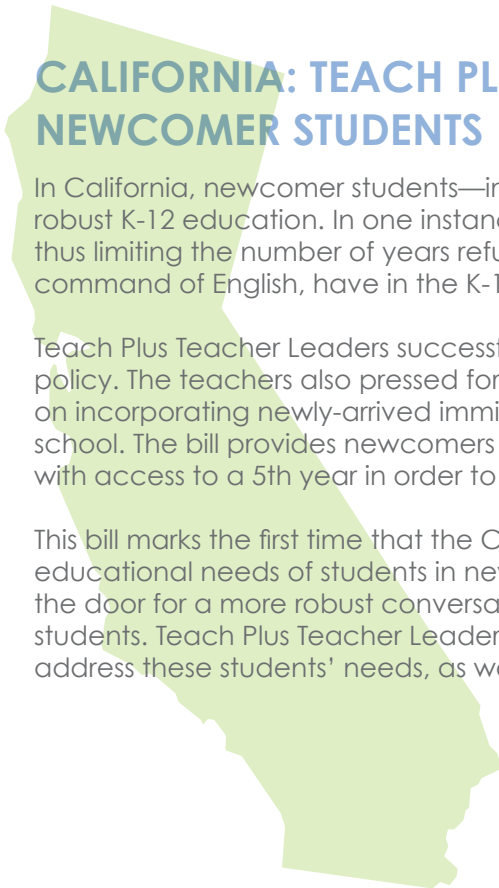


CALIFORNIA: TEACH PLUS TEACHER LEADERS ADVOCATE FOR NEWCOMER STUDENTS

In California, newcomer students—immigrant, refugee, and asylum seekers—often lack equitable access to a robust K-12 education. In one instance, a Modesto, California district policy mandated age-based enrollment, thus limiting the number of years refugee students, many of whom arrive in the U.S. with limited schooling and command of English, have in the K-12 system.

Teach Plus Teacher Leaders successfully advocated for more flexibility in the Modesto school board enrollment policy. The teachers also pressed for a statewide solution, working with State Assemblymember Anna Caballero on incorporating newly-arrived immigrant students into legislation that enables them to have a 5th year of high school. The bill provides newcomers who enter California public schools in their 3rd or 4th year of high school with access to a 5th year in order to meet local graduation requirements.

This bill marks the first time that the California Education Code has been amended to address the specific educational needs of students in newcomer programs. With this legislation, Teach Plus Teacher Leaders opened the door for a more robust conversation about the unique educational needs of these historically-marginalized students. Teach Plus Teacher Leaders are now focusing on the opportunities in the next legislative cycle to address these students' needs, as well as the needs of the broader English learner population.



Teach Plus Teacher Leaders **Lindsey Bird** and **Amelia Herrera**, the founding teachers of the Language Institute, a specialized high school program for newcomer students in Modesto City Schools, have worked with immigrant, refugee, and asylum-seeking students in Modesto since 2009. Relentless in their advocacy, the two teacher leaders continually brought the issue to public attention at the local and state level.



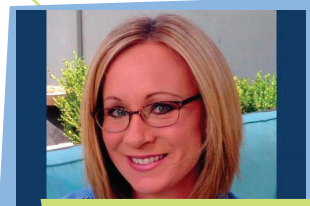
Some of our students' life circumstances are such that they are going to need extra time to become competent in English and to graduate. For example, I had a student from Angola who wasn't literate in her primary language or in English. Under the current policy, if a 17-year-old student has fled their home country and has had limited or no schooling there, they would still be enrolled as a high school senior. State and federal law allow a student to stay in the K-12 system until they are 21, but these students are being forced out by the time they were 18.



Amelia Herrera



We work hard to give our students the confidence that it's okay to tell their story and to fight for their education in this country. We want our students to be proud of who they are, and to know that they can share their life experiences with others.



Lindsey Bird