



Students with Interrupted Formal Education (SIFE)

While needs of the SIFE population may overlap with those of English language learners (ELLs) in general, SIFEs are likely to need additional support and instruction in basic skills for a number of reasons (Office of English Language Learning & Migrant Education, 2008, p.1):

1. Stress: A student's formal education may have been interrupted by migration, war, lack of access to education, and/or socioeconomic or cultural circumstances (p.1). As a result, the student may suffer from post-traumatic stress disorder, may be under severe distress, or may be completely overwhelmed by the need to assimilate to a new school environment in a new language.

2. Literacy and academic gaps: Students may not be able to read or write in their native language, and may also lack an understanding of the basic concepts, content knowledge, and critical thinking skills that their peers will have mastered (p.1). This situation presents a challenge to educators because,

On the one hand, these learners require instruction in the basic concepts and skills necessary for academic success, including how to study and take notes, and how to participate in class discussions. On the other hand, their academic success rests on meeting increasingly sophisticated standards and English-language assessments. So, even when students are not fluent in English or are not formally educated, rather than focusing exclusively on basic and/or remedial skills, it is important to offer lessons designed to develop critical knowledge, using content that reflects students' lives, interests and culture. (DiCerbo and Loop, 2003)

3. Frustration: A SIFE may be very excited to finally attend school regularly, and may have high hopes for his ability to work and support his family; however, the discovery that he is in fact far behind his peers can be a source of great frustration. Even as he makes great academic progress throughout the year, he is still chasing a moving target because English-speaking, grade-level peers are continuing to learn as well, and the realization that meeting his goals will be harder than expected may be devastating.

4. High risk of dropping out: SIFEs are considered to have a high risk for dropping out of high school given the precarious nature of their relationship with school as indicated by this statistic: "At-risk Hispanic students aged 16-19 who judged themselves as not speaking English well were four times more likely to drop out of high school than were their peers who spoke English well." (Fry, 2003 as cited in Spaulding, Carolino & Amen, 2004, p.8)

While these reasons present numerous challenges to school educators and administrators, students with limited or interrupted schooling can succeed if their school makes a commitment to

help them achieve that goal. The following lists of suggestions offer some ideas that educators can implement to support SIFEs throughout the school and in the classroom.