

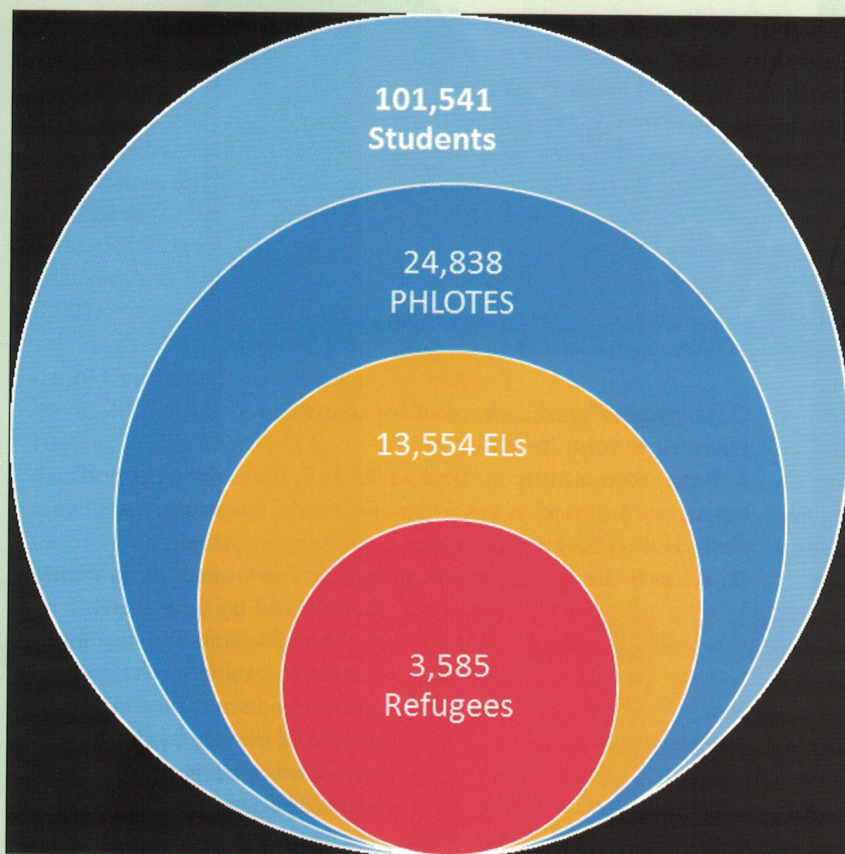
It should come as no surprise that poor academic performance in the ninth grade is used to identify English language learners (ELLs) at risk of dropping out of school (Maxwell, 2012, p. 14). ELLs represent the fastest growing population in elementary and secondary schools in the U.S. (Z. Sheng, Y. Sheng, and Anderson, 2011, p.98), yet they have not historically received equitable educational services and resources (ASCA, 2005). As a result, this article explains the importance of credit preservation for ELLs who enroll in U.S. public schools, specifically at the secondary level.

One might wonder how stakeholders plan to remove barriers for an ELL population that according to the U.S. Census already represents the majority of "our nation's population younger than age one" (U.S. Census Bureau, 2012). Foreign transcript evaluation allows students to earn the equivalent credit within the U.S. for classes taken in their native countries. ELLs are then able to bridge past knowledge with present expectations and concentrate only on courses needed for graduation. This article takes a pragmatic approach to the transcript evaluation framework and considerations

for educators working with students who have attended school in another country. By empowering educators with an understanding of this process, we can transform obstacles into opportunities for newcomer ELLs.

The DeKalb International Welcome Center counseling department has evaluated thousands of foreign transcripts from over 158 countries spread across six continents. With over 166 languages represented in DeKalb County School District, identified as the most diverse school system in Georgia, the EL counselors have been called to facilitate professional learning and to present internationally, nationally, and state wide on their transcript evaluation framework and process.

How did the EL counselors become transcript evaluation advocates and create a transcript evaluation framework for ELLs? In 2009, an article published by Mary Ann Zehr titled "High School Credits for ELLs Still a Challenge" shared a story about a 16-year-old with foreign transcripts showing the completion of 9th grade in Mexico who was placed in the sixth grade because she didn't speak English. They began to research federal and state guidelines for transfer credit awarded for foreign transcripts and concluded that most states allowed local education agencies (LEAs) to create board policies and procedures for awarding credit. In 2010, they consulted with the Georgia Department of Education and other EL studies programs in the Atlanta metropolitan area to develop their own transcript evaluation framework.



Welcome to DeKalb County School District in Stone Mountain, Georgia, which serves nearly 101,000 students. Among those are 24,838 students whose primary home language is a language other than English (PHLOTE). Approximately 13,554 students are provided with language support through the English to Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) program. Within the population of ELs, 9,869 students are classified as immigrants and 3,585 students are classified as refugees.

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS ABOUT EVALUATING FOREIGN TRANSCRIPTS

Q. What information is needed to evaluate a foreign transcript?

A. Essential information needed to evaluate a foreign transcript includes the school year the student attended/completed school and U.S. equivalent school year, the country student attended school in, the grade level the student completed, a grading scale provided along with the transcript, conversion of completed courses into the state curriculum, and documentation of hours per week that the student attended each class.

Q. What is an educational system outside of the U.S.?

A. An educational system is commonly referred to as public schooling ranging from kindergarten to high school or primary to secondary outside the U.S. It often excludes private schooling in its definition.

Q. What free online resources are available to assist with foreign transcript evaluation?

A. Online resources: www.classbase.com; www.wes.org; www.foreigntranscripts.com

Q. What guidance or resources have been provided by LEAs and state boards of education in the U.S.?

A. Several school districts have created manuals for evaluating foreign transcripts, which are available online:

1. "A Guide for the Placement of Students Presenting Foreign Transcripts by The District School Board of Pasco County," (<http://shelbycearley.files.wordpress.com/2010/06/a-guide-for-the-placement-of-students-presenting-foreign-transcripts.pdf>)