

We Need More Culturally Significant After-School Clubs

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Many people think American schools are places full of hope and opportunities for immigrants. But does America welcome us? Do immigrants feel accepted and welcome in this mixed environment?

As an immigrant student, I frequently hear concerns that there aren't many immigrants in school clubs. The concern is rooted in reality. According to 2011 sample research through "Nonparticipation in Extracurricular Activities among Immigrant Youth" out of a total of 6229 students in 3 different schools, 29% of the population does not participate in any sport and 44% do not participate in any club. ([Cherng et al. 9](#)). Extracurricular activities help English Language learners (ESL) be exposed to more meaningful engagement through informal settings, which can build their interpersonal, ideational, and textual skills through various natural settings.

In a 2021 experiment conducted for "English Language Learning Clubs: A Novel Approach to Improving EFL Students' Verbal Communication Skills", through an interview of 130 English Foreign Language (EFL) high school students, the result shows that 2.30 % stated that they needed to improve their reading skills and 3.84 % said they needed to improve their listening skills, the vast majority (93.86 %) indicated they needed to improve their speaking and listening skills. ([TOBOULA 6](#)) These studies show that the few hours that ESL students get in the classroom per week to practice their English is far from enough, most of the students think that they need to improve their oral speaking skills, which can only be done through extracurricular activities after school.

As for myself, I feel frustrated that there is so little ethnic diversity in the clubs that interest me. After joining a club that I thought was supposed to help others, since it has the word "Mentor" in the club's name, I found out that this club rarely did anything to help others. Even though everyone is very welcoming, a club full of African Americans makes me a little uncomfortable, because of the lack of diversity.

Conversations with my peers offer some reasons why this might be the case.

Nahomy Torrez arrived from Nicaragua with her family in high school. "From my experience of not being welcome in Drama Club, because I was also treated poorly by the teacher because she has a favorite, making me think that my differences in race and my language barrier are the

reason this happens. I am scared that I am incapable of meeting the club's requirements. Even if I join, I fear that I will become a burden to my teammates," Nahomy said.

Also, an anonymous student that came to my junior high school in 2017 from Nepal showed how she was afraid to join a club because no one welcomed her. "Everyone is with their group of friends that they spent time together with only. Even if I try to start a conversation, I would never be included in the team. To make it worse, someone always discriminates against me about my personality or race." Said this anonymous student.

Together Nahomy, this anonymous student, and I speak to the fear that immigrant students will not feel welcome in after-school activities. Factors like sociocultural, linguistic, and individual barriers all affect ESL learners to join after-school clubs.

But this is a big problem.

This problem needs to be fixed since according to the National Center for Educational Statics, English learners (ELs) in public school students was higher in the fall of 2020 (10.3 percent, or 5.0 million students) than in the fall of 2010 (9.2 percent, or 4.5 million students). ([English Learners in Public Schools 2023](#)) As we have more EL students it is increasingly urgent to fix this problem for the future.

If we don't do anything to make immigrants feel more welcome in school clubs and other extracurricular activities, they risk social isolation and loneliness and losing the opportunity to explore their interests and build bonds with friends.

Fortunately, students and supportive adults in school buildings, like teachers, coaches, and other school staff can implement changes right now that can be life-changing to immigrant youth. Here are four recommendations to support the creation of more cultural-significant after-school clubs after school clubs in Ohio:

Recommendation 1: [Host a Club Fair](#)

A club fair is an event organized for students to be able to explore clubs that they might be interested in. Hosting a Club fair with flyers in different languages can communicate to immigrants in a personal way that they are welcome.

Recommendation 2: [Have TV Advertisement](#)

Some schools have added a TV screen in the hallway which can promote events and tell others that a club exists. In a televised advertisement, students can explain directly to other students what benefits they get when joining a club and why others should join too.

Recommendation 3: [Start a Culture Club](#)

Start a Culture club in your high school to spread information on the similarities and differences among cultures. A Culture Club can build connections and help more people learn about cultural differences and how to better interact with a diverse group of people. This can let immigrants feel more comfortable and safer with their peers.

Recommendation 4: [Form a Culture Study Group](#)

Study groups are made so that everyone in the group can learn from and from each other in a social context. At the same time, American students could develop language fluency from a native speaker, and immigrant students could sharpen their English skills. Students can help each other in class or with homework, and immigrants can ask any question about adapting to America.

Even if you believe that you cannot help solve this problem, give support to others—like us—who have ideas of where and how to start. With more awareness, we can convince schools to have more after-school programs that can build bonds between immigrants and students who were born in America. You can get updated information on our organization by following us on Instagram [@equalisticdreamforhope2022](#).

Works Cited page

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