



**Verona Area
School District**

Preparing learners to thrive in a diverse global society



Meet Them Where They Are: Alternative Graduation Pathways for SLIFE Students

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WITESOL Conference

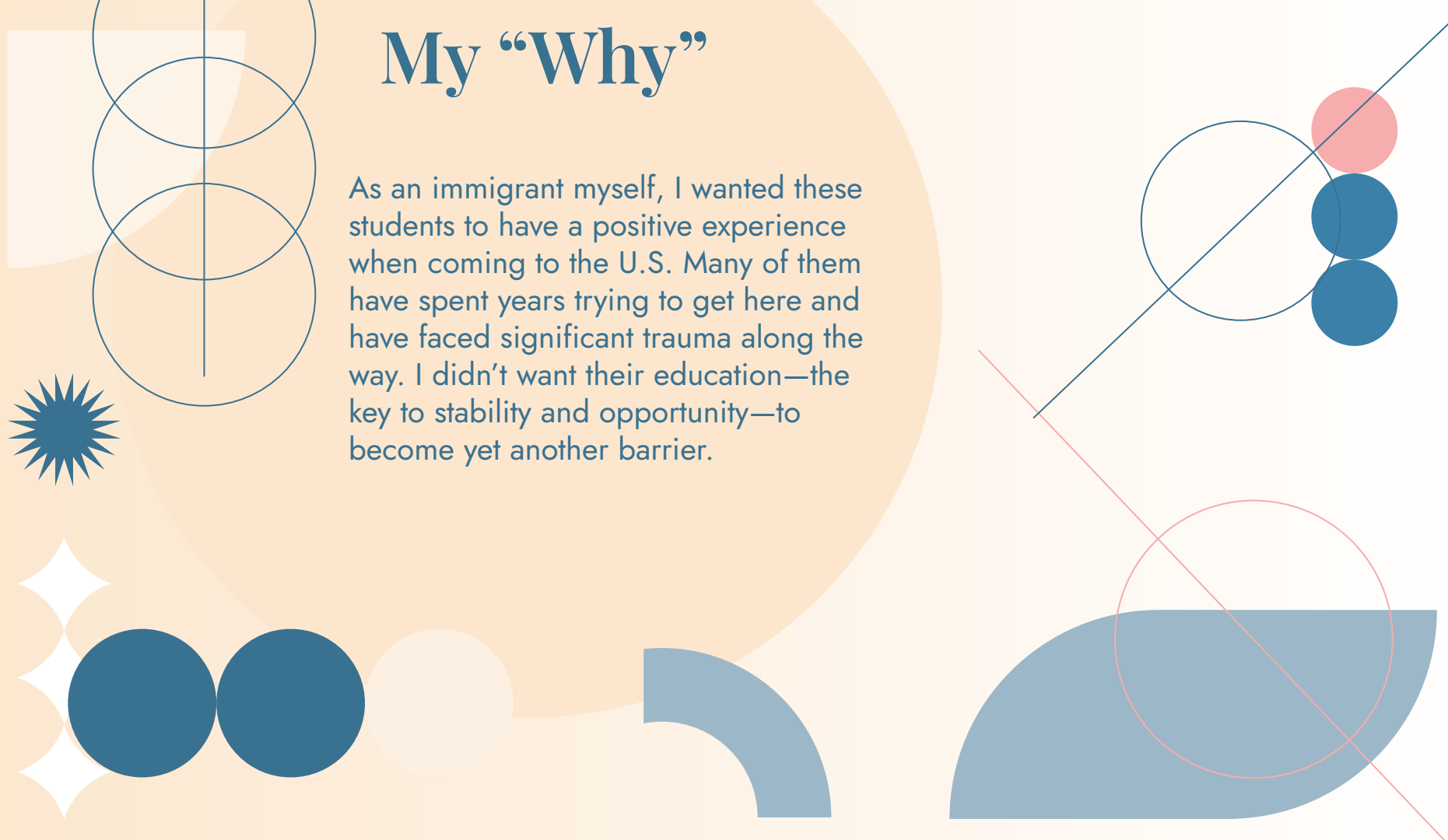
Introduction

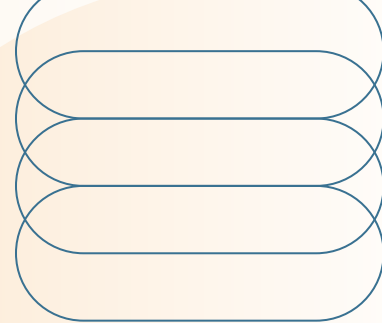
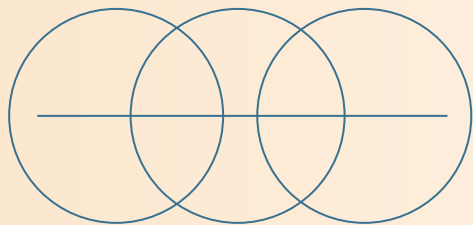
My name is Natalija Krsteva and I have worked at Verona Area School District since 2020. I primarily work with newcomers and teach ESL 2 and Introduction to U.S. Schools and Culture. I also collaborate closely with counselors and administrators to develop individualized learning plans for students who are identified as SLIFE.



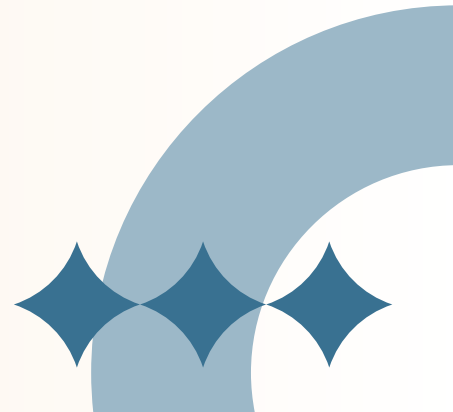
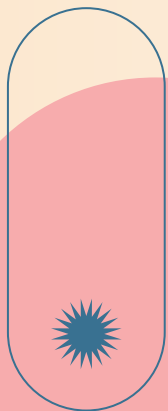
My “Why”

As an immigrant myself, I wanted these students to have a positive experience when coming to the U.S. Many of them have spent years trying to get here and have faced significant trauma along the way. I didn't want their education—the key to stability and opportunity—to become yet another barrier.

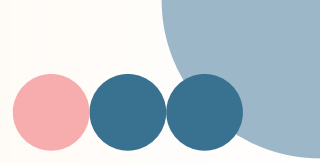




The goal of today's presentation is to share strategies and methods that support SLIFE students in earning a high school diploma—despite the significant obstacles they may face.

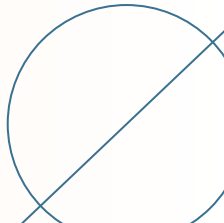


Guiding Questions



Think about the SLIFE students you might have encountered in your career. What was helpful and what was not in their high school career?

What strategies can your organization implement to help these students?



Context

Who are SLIFE students?



Students with Limited or Interrupted Formal Education (SLIFE) is an umbrella term used to describe a diverse subset of the English language learner population who share several unifying characteristics. SLIFE students are typically new to the U.S. school system and have had interrupted or limited schooling opportunities in their native country. They have limited backgrounds in reading and writing in their native language(s) and are below grade level in most academic skills (Freeman & Freeman, 2002). Students who have these characteristics could be refugees, migrant students, or any student who experienced limited or interrupted access to school for a variety of reasons, such as poverty, isolated geographic locales, limited transportation options, societal expectations for school attendance, a need to enter the workforce and contribute to the family income, natural disasters, war, or civil strife. (WIDA, May 2015)



The Challenge We Faced

- During the 2020–21 school year, our high school started receiving a large number of students identified as SLIFE.
- However, the school did not have resources or programs tailored to their needs.
- Most alternative program teachers had no experience with SLIFE or multilingual learners, and as a result, many students' needs were not met—leading to dropouts or GED completion.



WHAT WAS BEING DONE

- ❖ **Collaboration with multilingual program coordinator (the only staff member with both Alternative Education and ESL licenses)**
- ❖ **Creation of individualized projects and credit for out-of-school experiences**
- ❖ **Extra credit opportunities through teacher collaboration**
- ❖ **Exploration of GED-like proficiency tests (some in Spanish)**

Challenges:

- ❖ **Inconsistent implementation**
- ❖ **Many students still unable to meet graduation requirements**

NEW PROGRAM DEVELOPMENT

1

Administration Involvement

Conducted research on DPI's CORE 15 credit requirement and how it could be implemented locally.

2

Proposal to the Board

The Director of ML Programming presented the proposal using DPI and other districts as models.

3

Board Approval

The proposal was approved and added to administrative rules.

4

Program Launch

The program officially began in the 2024–25 school year, resulting in five students graduating on time.

How does it look today?

CORE 15 Program

For eligible SLIFE students
(minimum 15 credits
required)

SLIFE Class

Focused support and
individualized project
completion

LEAP Alternative program

For multilingual learners
who don't qualify as SLIFE

Results

- ❖ 5 students graduated on time in 24/25.
- ❖ 6 students currently completing projects in SLIFE class.
- ❖ 8 more students expected to graduate on time this year.

Programs used for individual projects

Collaboration with the LEAP teacher who already has created some individual projects for specific subjects (PE or Financial Literacy)

Khan Academy (Spanish)

Variety of courses to choose, a good selection in Spanish.

ELLII

Used for English credit

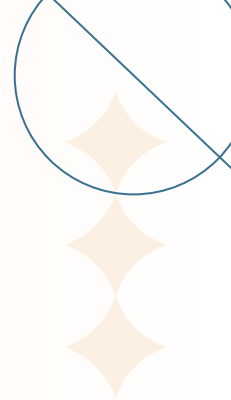
CK-12

Math, Science, Social studies (Some are in Spanish)

NGPF

Personal Finance

Examples of Projects



Khan Academy (Spanish)

Algebra 1, Geometry, Intro to Biology

ELLII

English for Nursing Assistants, English at Work

CK-12

Math, Science, Social studies (Some are in Spanish)

NGPF

Personal Finance





Reflection

- **We've made tremendous progress, but our work continues.**
- **Some students may still benefit from options like the Spanish GED or partnerships with local organizations.**
- **The key takeaway: be flexible, think creatively, and design pathways that meet each student where they are.**

Thank you!

Questions?

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