

The School System and Refugee Children: Bridging the Gap

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Introduction

This presentation will describe the challenges faced by both refugee families and schools in facilitating the success of refugee students.

Recommendations for promising practices/strategies to support refugee student well-being will be provided.



Challenges



Refugee Children & the Schools

- School staff lack knowledge about the refugee experience, cultural differences, and consequences of war trauma.
- Refugee students are often not matched to the appropriate grade level.
- Parents lack understanding of U.S. culture including the role of the schools and U.S. child protection laws.



Cultural Differences in Parenting

- Different expectations (schools and parents)
- Parents' involvement in the school system
- Parenting styles within different cultures
- Familial obligations and priorities vs. U.S. education and child protection laws



Promising Practices



Strengths Approach: Key to Successful Student Integration

<i>Stereotypes</i>	<i>Values and strengths</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Refugee student might be labeled as aggressive vs. understanding behavior as a defense mechanism or as struggling to become familiar with rules • Lack of English often associated with lower intelligence • Lack of eye contact often interpreted as disrespect (rather than respect in child's culture) • Belief that refugee children are abused 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Refugee children are eager to adapt and to accept guidance • Student strengths (e.g., respect) can lead to the right grade placement. Some refugee students score higher than their peers. • Refugee students are very polite and respectful • Refugee parents want their children to develop resilience and to succeed



Strengths Approach: Key to successful student integration (continued)

<i>Stereotypes</i>	<i>Values and strengths</i>
When teachers repeatedly send notes home, they label the refugee family as dysfunctional	Refugee families embrace and adhere to positive family dynamics
Counseling and testing referrals not seen as supportive services, but as a message that something is seriously wrong with the child	Multiple meetings that engage the family and family coaching are more effective

Strategies

- Training school staff on cultural diversity and immigration issues
- Match student with appropriate grade level
- Develop “Child Safety Plan” with parents to include extended family members
- Schools orient refugee parents and students concerning expectations and US laws



Successful Models

- CSS Strengthening Refugee Families Program
 - Refugee Marriage Education Project
 - Relationship Intelligence Project
 - Intergenerational Education Project
- Role of CSS: Joint efforts with mainstream community

