



MARCH 2005 SPOTLIGHT INTRODUCTION

Serving Children With Little or No Previous Formal Schooling

Several groups of refugees have recently resettled in the U.S. after having waited for years in refugee camps for resettlement: the [Somali Bantu](#), the [Hmong](#), and the [Liberians](#). The majority of these new arrivals are originally from rural areas, are more likely to be pre-literate, and many of these children and youth may have had limited or no access to formal schooling. Due to these gaps in education and differences in background, these refugees often undergo an extensive process of adjustment to the school setting here in the U.S. At the same time, educators and other service providers are looking for resources in order to better understand and to assist these students and their families. This month's Spotlight on education - a collaboration between BRYCS and the [Spring Institute](#) - gives an overview of some of the issues and questions raised as we serve these newest arrivals and provides resources that can help address these concerns.

Typically, refugee students and their families place great importance on education, and these newer arrivals are no exception. Refugee parents often make great sacrifices so that their children can succeed in school, and both parents and children have demonstrated tremendous strength and resourcefulness by making the journey here. For example, Hmong students whose families arrived in the earlier wave of refugees have tended to do well overall in school – a [study published by the Wisconsin Policy Research Institute](#) notes that Asian students (90% of whom were Hmong) had scores above national norms and are graduating at rates equal to or higher than other students. However, refugee students also face great challenges, especially when they first arrive, including mastering a new environment, a different school system, and often, a new language; learning culturally-appropriate behaviors; placement at a level that may be too difficult or not challenging enough; recovery from emotional trauma and loss; peer pressure and discrimination; and pressures from parents undergoing their own adjustment. See BRYCS' [past spotlight on education](#) for more information on these strengths and challenges.

The BRYCS Clearinghouse continues to acquire resources that address educational issues for refugee children and their families. The resources not only describe and examine problems, but many offer practical solutions. For example, an article in [ESL Magazine](#) notes the innovative approaches of “collaborative inclusion and content-area instruction” as aiding the educational experience of Hmong students. The book, [Building Bridges: Multilingual Resources for Children](#), explores the “potential of using multilingual resources for building bridges between monolinguals and bilinguals, between home and school.”

Parental involvement in a child's education can improve success in school. [A Guide to Your Children's School: A Parent Handbook](#) describes the school system in the United States. It is available in seven languages in addition to English. It can be downloaded free from the Web site listed in the BRYCS Clearinghouse. The BRYCS Clearinghouse can also lead you to additional practical resources like the [Helping Your Child Succeed](#) series from the U.S. Department of Education, the resources guides for professionals working with immigrant populations from the [School of the 21st Century](#) program at Yale University, and presentations from the U.S. Office of Refugee Resettlement's Achievement and Challenge Proceedings 2004 National Refugee Program Consultation.

Funding Sources for Educational Programs:

[The Refugee Children School Impact Grants Program](#), administered by the U.S. Office of Refugee Resettlement (ORR), provides for some of the costs of educating refugee children incurred by local school districts in which significant numbers of refugee children reside. State Departments of Education submit applications requesting funds to cover costs to local school districts that are impacted by significant numbers of refugee children. States are encouraged to consult with local refugee service organizations to ensure coordination and avoid duplication. School districts use the grants to fund activities that will lead to the effective integration and education of refugee children. For instance, grants have been used to fund English as a Second Language (ESL) instruction, after-school and summer programs, tutoring, parental outreach programs, salaries for teachers, aids and counselors as well as interpreter services.

The 21st Century Community Learning Centers program falls under the No Child Left Behind Act. It expands academic enrichment opportunities through after school programs for students and families. Congress has appropriated \$991.07 million for after school programs in Fiscal Year (FY) 2005. the program focuses on children attending low-performing schools by offering tutorial services and academic enrichment activities in reading and math. In addition, programs provide youth development activities, drug and violence prevention programs, technology education programs, art, music and recreation programs, counseling and character education to enhance the academic component of the program.

This month's featured search in the BRYCS clearinghouse will lead you to the above resources and more related to the topic of education.

Burna Dunn of The Spring Institute examines the issues and challenges facing educators and school administrators in serving refugee children and youth.