

Without a Paddle: Barriers to School Enrollment Procedures for Immigrant Students and Families

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Abstract

The growing immigrant population in the United States consists of school-aged children who are in need of educational opportunities available through the country's existing educational system. Education, a basic human right, is mandated through compulsory education laws in the United States so that all children can learn, grow, and be prepared for the future. However, immigrant children and families face a challenge early on, with the enrollment process itself. Enrollment barriers include lack of proper documentation, medical clearance, absence of parents, and discrimination. This article includes a review of relevant policy, a discussion of the implications of enforcing standards on immigrant students, and provides recommendations for future educational policy, practice, and guidelines for immigrant children. There is a need to provide culturally and trauma-sensitive services to this population as they adapt to American schools academically, culturally, linguistically, and psychosocially. More professional education, policies, and research are needed to streamline enrollment processes.

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Introduction

Access to a public education is a right for children in the United States (Civil Rights Act of 1964; Plyer V. Doe, 1982); however, immigrant children struggle to gain access to the educational systems in place (Booi et al., 2016). This article begins with an overview of immigrant students and their educational outcomes. We then examine the evolution of compulsory attendance laws and school enrollment policies throughout the history of the United States, and the implications for foreign-born students, including immigrants, refugees, unaccompanied children, those without legal status in the United States, and children born in the United States to immigrant families. Definitions and distinctions for types of immigrants are provided.¹

The barriers that these students and their families face in light of enrollment policies and procedures are detailed, as well as helpful tips for overcoming some of the barriers. Whether intentional or unintentional barriers, not enrolling students in school violates the compulsory attendance laws such as *Plyler v. Doe* (1982) and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (Booi et al., 2016; Commonwealth of Massachusetts, 2018; United Nations, 1948). Recommendations for research and practice are provided with the goal of increasing access to education for immigrant students. Throughout the article, examples of laws and procedures will be drawn from the Commonwealth of Massachusetts. However, it should be noted that while policies differ slightly across the country, due to state-level oversight of schools (National Center for Education Statistics [NCES], 2015; U.S. Department of Education, 2008), many of these same barriers exist in other states.

Immigrant Students and Families

In 2015, the immigrant population in the United States was 44.9 million people and that number is predicted to reach around 78 million people (18% of the population) by 2065 (National Institutes of Health, 2016). Of all children living in the United States in 2014, 3.5% were foreign-born and 21.5% were born in the United States to at least one foreign-born parent (Child Trends, 2014). As a result, approximately one quarter of all children under the age of 18 could be affected negatively by school enrollment procedures as discussed in this article. Table 1 shows the foreign-born population living in the United States by age and place of birth. Of the population below 18 years of age, the

Table 1. 2013 Immigrant Population by Age and Region of Birth.

	Total		Asia		Europe		Mexico		Other Latin America ^a		Other areas ^b	
	Number (%)		Number (%)		Number (%)		Number (%)		Number (%)		Number (%)	
Below 16 years	1,850 (4.6)		640 (5.4)		183 (4.1)		474 (4.1)		343 (3.6)		211 (7.4)	
Below 18 years	2,412 (6.0)		801 (6.8)		244 (5.5)		635 (5.5)		463 (4.8)		269 (9.4)	
Below 21 years	3,450 (8.6)		1,071 (9.1)		319 (7.2)		1,004 (8.7)		701 (7.3)		355 (12.4)	
21 years and above	36,657 (91.4)		10,692 (90.9)		4,122 (92.8)		10,494 (91.3)		8,849 (92.7)		2,501 (87.6)	

Source. Data in this table are adapted from United States Census Bureau (2013).

Note. Numbers in thousands. Universe is the foreign-born civilian non-institutionalized population of the United States, plus Armed Forces members who live in housing units—off post or on post—with at least one other civilian adult.

^aThose born in “Other Latin America” are from all subregions of Latin America (Central America, South America, and the Caribbean), excluding Mexico. ^bThose born in “Other areas” are from Africa, Oceania, Northern America, and Born at Sea.

largest group comes from Asia, followed by Mexico, other Latin American countries, those grouped as “Other,” and finally, Europe.

Academic Outcomes for Immigrant Students and Families

After arrival to the United States, approximately 30% of immigrant families have incomes below the federal poverty line and they face multiple challenges, including cultural adjustment, limited English, low paying occupations, and residence in low-income and segregated neighborhoods (Bridging Refugee Youth and Children’s Services [BRYCS], 2016; National Institutes of Health, 2016; Russo, 2013). Due to these stressors, immigrant children may take time to learn English, adjust to American culture, develop a sense of belonging, and build friendships, all while balancing the academic rigor of school (BRYCS, 2016). In addition, immigrant parents are not always able to assist their children, due to cultural, academic, or linguistic barriers. Research shows that foreign-born students lag behind U.S.-born students in educational attainment, as demonstrated in Table 2 (A. Brown & Stepler, 2016; BRYCS, 2016).

Due to the status of being labeled as “an immigrant,” having lower socio-economic status, parents with lower educational attainment, and potential legal barriers, immigrant children struggle to enter higher education (Baum & Flores, 2011). Table 2 shows that while 19% of foreign-born persons have some college experience, only 16.5% of foreign-born persons earn a bachelor’s degree, in comparison with 19.1% of the general population (A. Brown & Stepler, 2016). On the other end of the spectrum, 19.2% of foreign-born people have less than a ninth-grade education, compared with only 2.8% of those born in the United States (A. Brown & Stepler, 2016).

Similarly, research has established the link between a parent’s years of schooling and academic achievement for the child (Davis-Kean, 2005). As parental college degree attainment is a predictor of future upward educational mobility for the child (Aydemir et al., 2013), the issues of low academic achievement in immigrant populations add a barrier, with the potential of becoming cyclical. As children are educated and encouraged to attend a post-secondary institution, they become more likely to attend college, therefore increasing the likelihood of their own children will earn a college degree (Lawrence, 2016).

Forced migrants (see Note 1), such as refugees and unaccompanied children, are more dramatically affected by school enrollment procedures. For example, most forced migrants have faced traumatic events such as war, torture, assault, and separation from or loss of their biological families (Socha et al., 2016). They often arrive with minimal prior formal education,

Table 2. 2014 Educational Attainment of Residents Aged 25 and Above.

	Less than ninth grade	Ninth to 12th grade	High school graduate	Two-year degree or some college	Bachelor's degree	Advanced degree
All U.S.-born	4,986,481 (2.8%)	12,028,442 (6.8%)	50,920,142 (28.7%)	55,417,278 (31.3%)	33,792,653 (19.1%)	20,046,050 (11.3%)
All Foreign-born	7,023,139 (19.2%)	3,895,465 (10.6%)	8,275,124 (22.6%)	6,956,448 (19.0%)	6,073,368 (16.6%)	4,391,209 (12%)

Source: Data in this table are adapted from A. Brown and Stepler (2016).

interrupted schooling, limited English, and/or behavioral health needs (BRYCS, 2016; UN High Commissioner for Refugees [UNHCR], 2014). According to Kumi-Yeboah and Smith (2016), refugee students said that the lack of past educational experiences and opportunities affected their desire to thrive and excel in the school environment. However, despite the racism, classism, xenophobia, acculturative stress, classroom curriculum, language, and behaviors of cultural discrimination that negatively affected their ability to succeed in the classroom, these students had incredible resilience to succeed, utilized teacher and parent support, and thrived in positive school environment (Kumi-Yeboah & Smith, 2016). The aspiration and determination to succeed in school is born out of the resilience that forced migrants learned during their journey to the United States (Kumi-Yeboah & Smith, 2016).

The Importance of Education for Immigrant Students and Families

Overcoming the challenges of enrolling immigrant children in local schools should be of the utmost importance to educators, social workers, and advocates alike. Today, there is a common notion and understanding that education and educational attainment are important factors in achieving social and economic success (Stone, 2009). Education within a supportive environment can play a role in healthy development (Samuels, 2014), economic growth (Torpey, 2012), and opportunity for the future (Hao & Pong, 2008).

The U.S. educational system has a duty to prevent behavioral health problems and ensure healthy development for all youth (Hawkins et al., 2015). Research shows that healthy development begins with early education, especially when economically disadvantaged children are being suspended from school for aggressive and disruptive behaviors (Samuels, 2014). However, for the educational system to be successful with immigrant children, they must first be enrolled in school. Without access to school, children are not only missing the standard educational opportunities of reading, math, and social studies but are also missing an array of social and life skills training opportunities (Botvin, n.d.-d; Klien, 2015). For example, social skills learned in school include building self-esteem and overcoming shyness, drug prevention, anger management, problem-solving skills, communication skills, risk-taking, and the influences of the media (Botvin, n.d.-a; Botvin, n.d.-b, Botvin, n.d.c), all of which are important skills later in life.

Research shows a relationship between immigrant children and the desire for a post-secondary education (Baum & Flores, 2011; Vernez & Abrahamse, 1996). Without an effective means to learn and graduate from high school,

immigrants are often limited in their ability to attend college. In the United States, college graduates and immigrants who graduate from college (Allensworth, 1997) often have higher wages than people with a high school diploma (Torpey, 2012). In the 1980s, the Supreme Court acknowledged a large potential for harm to society if children were not educated, by stating, “we deny them the ability to live within the structure of our civic institutions, and foreclose any realistic possibility that they will contribute in even the smallest way to the progress of our Nation” (American Immigration Council, 2012, p. 1).

Since the 19th century, advocates have noted that school attendance can increase civic participation and enhance democratic values of students, overall preventing social ills such as delinquency and crime (Stone, 2009). The societal costs of such actions include a greater likelihood for future arrest of student dropouts (Thornberry et al., 1985).

As demonstrated above, there are multiple benefits from education for a developing child. However, access to education is also a social justice issue. According to Article 26 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948), which was signed by 48 countries including the United States, countries should provide free and compulsory primary education and prohibit discrimination in schooling (United Nations, 1948). Education provides the opportunity for individuals to realize their full capabilities and potential, enabling opportunities to live their lives in ways which give them personal value and providing a measure of individual dignity. As a result, this individual dignity can be seen through the lens of equality of capability, a relationship which can be mitigated through schools (Walker, 2006).

There is currently a need for more academic research and literature around educational access and enrollment for immigrant students and families. Many social service agencies are aware of the struggles and are working to advocate child by child for equality, but larger systemic changes are needed to improve the opportunities for immigrant children and families at large (Booi et al., 2016; BRYCS, 2016; U.S. Department of Education, 2014; U.S. Department of Justice & U.S. Department of Education, n.d.; Worcester Public Schools, 2018). This article is designed to add to the literature on school enrollment for immigrant students and will provide recommendations for improving school enrollment procedures for immigrant students and families.

History of Education Policies in the United States

In 1635, the first public school was opened, and soon after, in 1647, Massachusetts was the first state to pass a compulsory education law

requiring communities with 50 or more homes to employ a schoolmaster, and communities with 100 or more homes to establish formal grammar schools (DiNitto, 2011; Freedom Trail Foundation, 2015). By the late 1700s, free, tax-supported, education was proposed and by the mid-19th century, the idea had spread throughout the United States (DiNitto, 2011; Stone, 2009). In 1865, after the Civil War, the first schools for Black children were created in the Southern states (National Archives, 2016). Then, *Brown v. Board of Education* (1954) desegregated schools, yet many southern states took more than a decade and additional court cases to normalize integrated education (Reardon et al., 2012).

Educational policies affect immigrant students. In the early 20th century, an increase in immigration, industrialization, and urbanization as well as a decrease in child labor led to an increase in the number of children eligible to attend schools (DiNitto, 2011; Stone, 2009). Beyond access to formal education, there was a large push for schools to focus on socializing and bettering the conditions for immigrant students and the poor, while expanding secondary education to be able to prepare students for college (Stone, 2009). The Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) of 1965 established the role of the federal government in K-12 compulsory education and awarded funds to assist in the education of disadvantaged students, such as immigrants (Klien, 2015).

In the 1970s, school districts in Texas began to deny or charge undocumented students to attend school due to the costs associated with their education (American Immigration Council, 2012; *Plyler v. Doe*, 1982). However, in 1982, *Plyler v. Doe* affirmed that local school districts could not deny children enrollment in public schools due to their immigration status because it violated the Equal Protection Clause of the Fourteenth Amendment, specifically “[no] State shall . . . deny to any person within its jurisdiction the equal protection of the laws” (American Immigration Council, 2012; Booi et al., 2016). Justice Brennan argued that to deny educational services to undocumented children, “disadvantaged as a result of poverty, lack of English-speaking ability, and undeniable racial prejudices, . . . will [cause them to] become permanently locked into the lowest socio-economic class” (*Plyler v. Doe*, 1982).

Today, the federal government is the largest provider of educational services for children, and education is one of the largest social service programs offered in this country (Stone, 2009). However, there is still confusion and schools struggle to adequately serve immigrant children (Stone, 2009; U.S. Department of Education, 2014). The U.S. Department of Education has a variety of programs and initiatives designed to assist school districts in

serving immigrant children such as Services for Educationally Disadvantaged Children (Title I), English Language Acquisition Programs, Migrant Education Programs (MEPs), and the National Clearinghouse for English Language Acquisition (U.S. Department of Education, 2014). Despite the robust history of educational policy, action, and programs that support education for immigrant students, the battle continues. In addition, acts of discrimination such as delayed, denied, and diverted enrollment to other schools are still occurring across the country (Booi et al., 2016).

School Enrollment

Compulsory School Attendance Laws

By law, school attendance is mandatory for children in all 50 states, the District of Columbia, and U.S. Territories; however, the specifics of who is mandated to attend vary by state (Bush, 2010; NCES, 2015). Similarly, states are required to provide free education to children, but again the ages vary from state to state, with minimum ages from 3 to 6 years, and maximum ages from 17 to 26 years (NCES, 2015). Some states have additional clauses that allow children to leave school at a milestone, such as the ability to drop out of school after completing eighth grade in Montana, or in Louisiana where children can leave school under the age of 18 with parental consent and the completion of an exit interview (Bush, 2010).

According to the Commonwealth of Massachusetts's General Laws, Part I, Title XII, Chapter 76, Section 1, the following policy is in place for school attendance:

Every child between the minimum and maximum ages established for school attendance by the Board of Education shall, subject to section fifteen, attend a public day school in the town the student resides, or some other day school approved by the school committee, . . . but such attendance shall not be required of a child whose physical or mental condition is such as to render attendance inexpedient or impracticable subject to the provisions of section three of chapter seventy-one B or of a child granted an employment permit by the superintendent of schools when such superintendent determines that the welfare of such child will be better served through the granting of such permit, or of a child who is being otherwise instructed in a manner approved in advance by the superintendent or the school committee. (Commonwealth of Massachusetts, 2018)

The aforementioned policy references the minimum and maximum ages of attendance, which is from the age of 6 to 16 according to the Massachusetts

Department of Elementary & Secondary Education policy 603 CMR 8.00 (Massachusetts Department of Elementary & Secondary Education, 1997; NCES, 2015).

As mentioned above, the legal reasons that a child would not attend school per the compulsory attendance laws include Section 15 which explains the immunization requirements for school attendance, attending a school outside the district, employment, and when the physical or mental condition of the child prohibits school (Commonwealth of Massachusetts, 2018). It is important to note that there is no clause or mention of legal residency, citizenship, or ability to speak English in the compulsory attendance laws, so it can be presumed that all immigrant children are required to attend school under the same regulations as U.S.-born and English-speaking children. In fact, according to the U.S. Department of Education (2014), "All children in the United States are entitled to equal access to a public elementary and secondary education, regardless of their or their parents' actual or perceived national origin, citizenship, or immigration status."

Enrollment Procedures

In the United States, school enrollment procedures are most often set at the school district level and therefore vary to some degree across the country (U.S. Department of Education, 2008). However, there are multiple documents required for enrollment, which are requested by almost all schools. For example, a larger city in Massachusetts with a higher immigrant population (21%) than the state average (15%) allows registration to be centralized at one location where staff are familiar with processes and speak a variety of languages (Goodman et al., 2015; Worcester Public Schools, 2018). The enrollment policy states,

All new parents/guardians must provide: 1. Proof of Worcester residency - current utility bill, driver's license or student proof of address verification form for those who are sharing housing or in a temporary shelter. 2. Proof of child's date of birth - official birth certificate. 3. Proof of Legal Guardianship - court mandated document. 4. Updated Immunization Record. A physical exam is required at time of registration for all first time registrant's if entering preschool, kindergarden, grades 4, 7, or 9. (Worcester Public Schools, 2018, p. 8)

Challenges to Enrollment for Immigrant Students and Families

A review of the procedures listed above reveals that there are a variety of challenges faced by immigrant families and foreign-born children that delay or prohibit enrollment into U.S. public schools. These include lack of proper documentation, lack of immunizations, parents not being present at time of

enrollment, and language barriers, all of which will be discussed further below.

Lack of Documentation

When enrolling a child, schools request a set of formal documents to assist with logistics, school determination, and grade placement. As mentioned above, the most common documents requested include birth certificate, proof of residency, transcripts, guardianship forms, and immunization records (Worcester Public Schools, 2018). A birth certificate is requested to prove the child's name and age for enrollment, and to ensure the child is within the minimum and maximum age range to attend public school (Worcester Public Schools, 2018). However, there are multiple reasons that an immigrant student may not possess a birth certificate, such as being born in an area without birth certificates (Morrison, 2013), being stateless,² (UNHCR, 2017), and losing records when fleeing their country of origin (UNHCR, 2016).

Documents needed to establish residency are typically determined at the discretion of individual school district, as long as they meet state-mandated minimums (Booi et al., 2016). The purpose of residency requirements ensures that children are placed in a school district in which they live (U.S. Department of Justice & U.S. Department of Education, n.d.). Many immigrants share housing with large numbers of people and may lack proper documentation in their own name, thus creating a struggle to prove their home address (Booi et al., 2016).

In addition, proof of medical clearance and immunizations can be a barrier or delay to enrollment for immigrant children and families, especially if they have not seen a doctor or are waiting for an appointment. This is not usually a challenge for unaccompanied children served by the Office of Refugee Resettlement's (ORR) shelter system, because they are vaccinated upon arrival to the United States and their sponsor is given both medical and immunization records to assist in the school enrollment process (U.S. Department of Education, 2014). However, it is a challenge for refugees because while they are expected to have a health screening and immunization appointment within 90 days of arrival to the United States, having to wait until after this appointment can cause a lengthy delay before starting the school registration process (CDC, 2012).

High schools typically request prior school records, transcripts, and/or testing scores to determine the grade and course level in which a child should be placed (Worcester Public Schools, 2018). Often foreign-born children have had interruptions in their educational background, and some children have never attended school or may not have record of the schooling they did complete (J. Brown et al., 2006; UNHCR, 2014). School systems as well as

transcripts vary widely across the world making credit recovery complicated and time-consuming for students who do have record of their education (Apostille, 2015; The School Board of Broward County Florida, 2007).

When supplying documents that originated in another country to schools and other public offices in the United States, it is common practice to have them translated into English, which can pose a further delay in the process and an added expense for families (Apostille, 2015). In addition, providing any of these documents poses an additional challenge for forced migrants who often leave their homes unexpectedly (UNHCR, 2016) and may be unable to bring school documents with them.

Unaccompanied Children

Parents have an enormous amount of responsibility in caring for their children, and as mentioned above, the parent or guardian is requested to enroll a child in school (Worcester Public Schools, 2018). This requirement poses a specific challenge for unaccompanied children living in the United States. Unaccompanied children by definition arrive to the United States without a parent or guardian who is able and willing to provide care, and are later released from the custody of the ORR to a “sponsor” who is an appropriately screened adult willing to care and provide for the child (ORR, 2016). However, this “sponsor” has not gone through a legal process for transferring guardianship, and so the documentation requested by schools is not available (ORR, 2016).

Discrimination and Bias

Once all of the documentation is provided for enrollment, some immigrant students and families still face discrimination or other intentional delays by school personnel (Booi et al., 2016). According to a study by Booi et al. (2016), immigrant students were discouraged to enroll due to challenges the school would endure such as testing, grade placement, and low prospects of graduation. Discrimination is also seen in school districts which have a policy allowing for immediate enrollment and a grace period to produce documentation, but immigrant families are unfairly not informed of this procedure (Booi et al, 2016). Research by Greenman and Hall (2013) found systematic discrimination toward immigrants based upon legal status, poverty, and the lack of future educational opportunity, because some colleges will not allow undocumented students to enroll.

In some areas, schools create programs to meet the demand of immigrant students, but in other areas, schools forcibly enroll students in alternative schools, where programming is focused on behavioral needs rather than

cultural needs (Booi et al., 2016). For example, the New Citizens Center in Worcester, MA is a bilingual program for recently arrived immigrants to learn English and social norms that specializes in helping youth with interrupted educational histories learn the content they need to participate in a mainstream classroom (Goodman et al., 2015). On the contrary, the School District of Lancaster, PA is currently under a lawsuit for attempting to deny older immigrant students access to public school and pressuring them to enroll in a privately run alternative school for underachieving and problematic (American Civil Liberties Union of Pennsylvania [ACLU], 2016). These students were diverted due to their age and immigration status, rather than an academic or behavioral need to attend the alternative school (ACLU, 2016).

Advocating for Immigrant Students: Implications for Social Workers, Teachers, and School Personnel

Many school systems across the country are discriminating against immigrant students, and educated professionals can advocate to stop these practices. Through advocacy, we can increase the number of immigrant children who are able to attend school. The challenges to enrollment for immigrant students mentioned in this article may delay the educational process or lead to uneducated members of the community. There are already systems in place to overcome some of these challenges, and school staff and social workers can play a critical role in advocating for children's right to attend school. As part of the systems-level advocacy, social workers and teachers can educate school personnel and parents about the resources available. For example, the aforementioned challenge of documentation can be overcome. If a birth certificate is unavailable, parents should be informed that they have the right to provide alternative documentation, including hospital or physician's note, adoption record, religious document showing date of birth, previously verified school documents, or an affidavit from a parent (U.S. Department of Justice & U.S. Department of Education, n.d.).

In 2001, the national McKinney–Vento Homeless Education Assistance Improvements Act was passed and specifically addressed the needs of homeless students, including the difficult requirement of proving residency for this population, and mandated that school districts create provisions to work around this requirement (U.S. Department of Education, 2004, 2016). Unfortunately, not all school personnel automatically extend the McKinney–Vento Act (which requires immediate enrollment for students who qualify as homeless) to immigrant populations who cannot provide proof of residence (Booi et al., 2016). School districts are not able to mandate a social security number for children

and are not supposed to ask about the immigration status of parents as part of the residency requirement or enrollment process (U.S. Department of Justice & U.S. Department of Education, n.d.).

Recommendations for Research, Practice, and Policy

Immigrant students and children of immigrants face many challenges when trying to enroll in public schools in the United States, and professionals must serve as advocates to create positive change. Implications for research, practice and policy are identified below.

There is a need for more empirical research and attention to the barriers to school enrollment for immigrant students. The struggles of enrollment are well known by service providers but need to be lifted beyond the clinical and individual level and be addressed at both the systems and policy level. First, the issue needs to be better understood by informing the public, looking at specific challenges in different geographic areas, developing interventions, and advocating that education be tailored to local needs. Second, the practice of central enrollment offices should be evaluated to see whether they decrease the number of denials for enrollment and/or whether the central enrollment office is providing a safe and welcoming environment for immigrant families. This practice was created to simplify the process for parents with multiple children, eliminate the need for appointments, and decrease waiting time (Mathur, 2006), and now an analysis is needed to evaluate their success. As research has demonstrated a relationship between school non-participation and problematic behaviors in early adulthood (Henry et al., 2011), more longitudinal research is needed to better understand the long-term outcomes of not educating immigrant students.

Practice implications are abundant for school social workers, case managers, teachers, other professionals working in school settings, and those who work at the school district and state level in the realm of education. First and foremost, more professional education is needed for all staff, including teachers, staff, and administrators around the needs of immigrant students (Stuftt & Brogadir, 2011). In order to help professionals better understand the circumstances faced, build empathy, and increase cultural sensitivity and compassion, information about the populations and types of immigrants in local communities should be shared. This will empower teachers to think creatively, show appreciation for culture, and in turn empower their immigrant students (Peterson & Heywood, 2007). Additional training can be offered to school personnel, registrars, and parents around the resources, practices, and procedures (i.e., utilizing the McKinney–Vento Act) available to simplify enrollment for children who are missing “required” documentation for enrollment.

Attention to improving the parent’s experience upon entry to a school community is important (Stuftt & Brogadir, 2011). Clerical staff, counselors,

and parent–community liaisons should receive training to make the environment as welcoming and simple to navigate as possible. This may increase parental engagement, a key variable in academic outcomes for students (Suárez-Orozco et al., 2010). Home visits can work in a similar manner, engaging with the parent in an environment, which may be less threatening than a school (Suárez-Orozco et al., 2010).

Advocating for inclusive and trauma-sensitive schools can benefit immigrant students both during enrollment and in their educational journeys. According to the Child Welfare League of America's Standards of Excellence for Child Welfare Services, "Entities should use trauma-informed approaches, asking what has happened to individuals and families instead of asking what is wrong with them" (Child Welfare League of America, n.d., p. 6). Trauma can affect a student's ability to learn, as well as their behaviors and relationships at school and trauma-sensitive schools have been found to help children feel safe to learn (Trauma and Learning Policy Initiative, n.d.). Many forced migrants come to the United States in search of better educational opportunities in addition to the push factors such as community violence and abuse in the home (UNHCR, 2014). When seeking educational opportunities, being told you cannot enroll can be traumatizing and therefore trauma sensitivity should be embodied in the language and demeanor used by enrollment staff, especially if a student is being denied enrollment or told they are missing items and need to return to the office again on another day.

Policy changes can be an excellent way to greatly diminish the barriers to enrollment and discrimination that exist in the enrollment process. Ideally, federal policy should be enacted that explicitly states that immigrant students cannot be denied enrollment in public K-12 education. To develop this policy, the McKinney–Vento Homeless Education Assistance Improvements Act of 2001, Subtitle B of Title VII (42 U.S.C. 11431 SEC. 721), can be utilized as an example. It contains four main parts all of which could be replicated for immigrant students.³ Section 722 discusses funding and grants that schools can access to assist with education of this population and is an important factor that should not be overlooked in the creation of a similar law for foreign-born children (U.S. Department of Education, 2004).

Conclusion

According to *Plyler v. Doe* 457 U.S. 202 (1982), it is unconstitutional to ask students about their immigration status or deny them entry into school (American Immigration Council, 2012). Enabling immigrant students to easily enroll in public school in the United States has the potential to enhance the mental health and educational attainment of these youth (Hawkins et al., 2015; Samuels, 2014). Education is a means of socialization (Botvin, n.d.-d;

Klien, 2015), higher wages, and economic success (Allensworth, 1997; Stone, 2009; Torpey, 2012); can increase civic participation (Stone, 2009); and can be seen as a prevention strategy for criminal involvement (Thornberry et al., 1985).

Educators, social workers, and policy makers must work together to overcome barriers and create a culture of change. To be most effective, the buy-in needs to occur at all levels, including from students, parents, paraprofessionals, school counselors, teachers, administrators, and principals. All staff have a role in creating a culture of excellence that includes funding and adequate personnel to carry out effective strategies for inclusion of immigrant students.

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Notes

1. Throughout this article, a variety of terms will be used to describe the types of immigrant populations. “Foreign-born” refers to an individual who was born outside the United States, Puerto Rico, or other U.S. territories and whose parents, generally speaking, were not U.S. citizens (PEW Research Center, 2015). The terms “foreign-born” and “immigrant” are used interchangeably. “U.S. born” refers to an individual who is a U.S. citizen at birth, including people born in the United States, Puerto Rico, or other U.S. territories; it does not include naturalized citizens. According to the Fourteenth Amendment, anyone born in the United States is a U.S. citizen at birth regardless of the immigration status of their parents (Cornell University Law School, n.d.). “Citizenship through naturalization” is a process that requires meeting a handful of requirements but grants U.S. citizenship to people born in other nations (U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services [USCIS], 2013). “Undocumented immigrant” is a term used to describe all foreign-born non-citizens residing in the country who are lacking legal immigration paperwork. The vast majority of undocumented

- immigrants either entered the country without valid documents, or arrived with valid visas but stayed past their visa expiration date, or otherwise violated the terms of their admission (PEW Research Center, 2015). “Unaccompanied” children are those who entered the United States without a parent or legal guardian (UN High Commissioner for Refugees [UNHCR], 2014). Typically, the term “Unaccompanied Children” is referring to children who have originated from Central America and are undocumented (UNHCR, 2014). “Immigrant families” refers to mixed-status families, often where the parents are immigrants and the children were born in the United States. “Refugee” is a legal term given to people who have fled their country of origin due to persecution based upon their race, religion, nationality, sexual orientation, or membership in a particular social group (UNHCR, 2014). “Forced migrant” is a term used to describe both refugees and undocumented immigrants who have fled their home country due to protection concerns and a need to find safety and security in a new place.
2. A person who does not identify with or have a birth certificate from any country is referred to as stateless. This can happen because their nation no longer exists or because they were born without citizenship due to legalized discrimination in certain parts of the world (UNHCR, 2017),
 3. McKinney–Vento Homeless Education Assistance Improvements Act of 2001, Subtitle B of title VII (42 U.S.C. 11431 SEC. 721). (a) Each State educational agency shall ensure that each child of a homeless individual and each homeless youth have equal access to the same free, appropriate public education, including a public preschool education, as provided to other children and youths. (b) In any State that has a compulsory residency requirement as a component of the State’s compulsory school attendance laws or other laws, regulations, practices, or policies that may act as a barrier to the enrollment, attendance, or success in school of homeless children and youths, the State will review and undertake steps to revise such laws, regulations, practices, or policies to ensure that homeless children and youths are afforded the same free, appropriate public education as provided to other children and youths. (c) Homelessness alone is not sufficient reason to separate students from the mainstream school environment. (d) Homeless children and youths should have access to the education and other services that such children and youths need to ensure that such children and youths have an opportunity to meet the same challenging State student academic achievement standards to which all students are held.

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