

# Surges in undocumented and asylum-seeking children prompt need for better K-12 policies

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New RAND Corporation research finds that 491,000 children from Mexico and the Northern Triangle (Honduras, Guatemala, El Salvador) arrived in the United States between fiscal years 2017 and 2019 and

remained with unresolved immigration statuses. Of these, 321,000 were enrolled in U.S. K-12 public schools as of March 2020. About 75% settled in California, Texas, Florida, New York, Virginia, Maryland, New Jersey, Georgia, North Carolina and Louisiana.

"The migration of undocumented and asylum-seeking children, from border countries or elsewhere, will have a considerable impact on K-12 [public schools](#), which are federally required to serve and support these students," said Shelly Culbertson, coauthor of the report and a senior policy researcher at RAND, a nonprofit, nonpartisan research organization. "Our research provides critical data needed to assist policymaking and we also analyzed the needs of schools to support these children."

RAND researchers drew on multiple data sources to provide the only existing estimates on the numbers, locations and ages of these children by state and school district, as well as numbers of new teachers and staff needed to keep pace with new arrivals.

The report also provides case studies of the policies and practices used by Louisiana's Jefferson Parish Schools and California's Oakland Unified School District in supporting these students. While there were some [positive outcomes](#) and [best practices](#), researchers found that schools need more teaching materials and better teacher training as well as more flexible funding to address the range of needs among these children.

Researchers estimated that, to maintain [teacher](#)-student classroom ratios and accommodate recent arrivals, multiple states would have needed to hire an additional 1,000 teachers. And the two school districts with most new arrivals—Los Angeles County, California, and Harris County, Texas—would also have each needed to hire at least an additional 1,000 new teachers from FY2017 to FY2019. The researchers did not track

whether the districts did in fact hire those numbers of new teachers.

"Schools, and teachers themselves, need supports to help newcomers learn," said Julia Kaufman, report coauthor and a senior policy researcher at RAND. "Many of these children bring extra challenges to the classroom. Some have little formal education, are English-language learners, are in impoverished households or have symptoms of psychological distress and trauma. We found that the policies in place and accessibility of resources were often hard to navigate at the local level."

The report offers policy recommendations aimed at easing pressure on schools, including:

- Create agreements for educational records transfers with Northern Triangle countries
- Create opportunities for collaboration and discussion among the Office of Refugee Resettlement, community service providers who support immigrant families, and local education agencies
- Provide additional funding for schools with immigration surges on a rolling basis
- Increase funding and resources for nonacademic supports for students, such as mental health and counseling services
- Provide professional learning and high-quality resources to all teachers to support English-language learners as well as information and training for all [school](#) staff who engage with newly arriving [children](#).

**More information:** Paper:

[www.rand.org/pubs/research\\_reports/RRA1326-1.html](http://www.rand.org/pubs/research_reports/RRA1326-1.html)

Provided by RAND Corporation

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