

## Chapter 5

# Immigrant and Refugee Children in the United States: Challenges for Teachers and School Administrators

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### **ABSTRACT**

*Since 2014 America has seen increasingly large numbers of poor, immigrant refugee children, often unaccompanied, arrive in the United States. By 2016, 26% of the 70 million children in the U.S. under 18 were immigrant children. States with high numbers of immigrants with children, many illegal and undocumented and often living in the care of non-family members, attend schools in the United States. In 1982, the Supreme Court in Plyler v. Doe recognized the right of all students, regardless of immigration status, to have a free public education affirming a state may not deny access to a basic public education to any child residing in the state whether present in the United States legally or otherwise. Educators face issues with under-resourced schools gaining increasing numbers of immigrant children of undocumented immigrants while there is a need to enhance opportunities for all students to learn.*

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## **INTRODUCTION**

Since 2014 America has seen increasingly large numbers of poor, immigrant refugee children, often unaccompanied, arrive in the United States (American Immigration Council, 2018). Children interviewed while in the custody of the Office of Refugee Resettlement (ORR) (2017), the agency under the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services responsible for children apprehended in U.S. border crossings, listed reasons for leaving their country of origin as threats or victimization by gangs, abuse, poverty and deprivation, as well as the desire to pursue further education (Adelman & Taylor, 2015); however, Kandel, Bruno, Meyer, Seelke, Taft-Morales, & Wasem (2014) stated most children cited violence as the major reason for leaving their country of origin. Children migrated from Guatemala, Belize, El Salvador, Honduras, Nicaragua, Costa Rica, and Panama with most coming from El Salvador, Honduras, and Nicaragua, the Northern Triangle (Arthur, 2019).

By 2016, 26 percent of the 70 million children in the U. S. under 18 were immigrant children (Zong & Batalova, 2015; Zong, Batalova, & Hallock, 2018). There are varying political points of view about the impact of immigrant populations on the United States; however, immigrants with children, many illegal and undocumented and often living in the care of non-family members, must conform to compulsory school attendance laws, which vary by state, and attend school in the United States (Blumenreich, Baecher, Epstein, & Horwitz, 2018; Education Commission of the States, 2010; National Center for Education Statistics, 2017)). For the purposes of this article, the researchers focused on children who live with family members and guardians, rather than with children who are housed in Homeland Security care centers.

The American Immigration Council (2018) reported, “5.9 million citizen children under the age of 18 live with a parent or family member” who is an undocumented immigrant (p. 1). Zong, Batalova, and Hallock (2018) reporting for the Migration Policy Institute define immigrants as people born in another country referring “to persons with no U.S. citizenship at birth. This population includes naturalized citizens, lawful permanent residents, refugees and asylees, persons on certain temporary visas, and the unauthorized” (p. 1). Populations of immigrants living in the U.S. are growing much faster than citizens born in the U.S. according to Zong, Batalova and Hallock (2018).

There are contradicting ideas of what to do with immigrant children (American Immigration Council, 2015, 2016, 2018; Every Student Succeeds Act, 2015; Lindsey, Robins, & Terrell, 2009; Nguyen & Kebede, 2017; U. S. Office on Civil Rights, 2014).

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