

2016-17 Evaluation of Refugee Support Services

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At-a-Glance

The Dallas Independent School District's (Dallas ISD) Refugee Services Program provides educational and social support to refugee students and their families intended to help facilitate transition to the United States and particularly to Dallas ISD. The Refugee Services Program was first implemented in Dallas ISD in 1999.

The Dallas ISD Refugee Services Program's offerings include the following:

- Translation and interpretation services for school-related purposes,
- Tutoring programs – individual and small group instructional support,
- A summer enrichment program,
- Transition services and assistance with educational placement,
- Students and parents are assisted with requisite forms and related school-entry information,
- School orientation meetings for parents on school related topics,
- Staff development training to inform and educate school professionals about the needs unique to the refugee population.¹

Refugee students and families who have been in the United States for less than one year receive the highest priority from this program, but the program may serve refugees who have resided in the United States up to three years; data in this report represent those served by the program who fall into these categories.

How was the Refugee Services Program Funded?

From the program's 1999 inception through 2015-16, funding was supplied entirely by the federal Office of Refugee Resettlement in the form of the Refugee School Impact Grant (RSIG)². The RSIG was entrusted by the federal Office of Refugee Resettlement Services (ORR) to the Texas Health and Human Services Commission (THHSC) for distribution within the state. THHSC then dispersed funds on an annual basis to school districts and other entities upon approval of these organizations' application for these funds.

In 2016, with increased concerns about terrorism in relation to the federal government's vetting process of refugees, Texas Governor Greg Abbott opted to

withdraw the state of Texas from participation in the federal Refugee Resettlement Services program until a more stringent refugee vetting process could be demonstrated. Federal funds from the ORR would still be made available to relevant charitable and other nonprofit organizations within the state, but the THHSC would no longer participate in the management of those funds.

Needing to ensure uninterrupted programming for the Dallas ISD Refugee Services Program for the 2016-17 school year, the Refugee Services Program manager was able to secure funding through partner programs within the district.

Budget detail for the Refugee Services Program was obtained from the Youth and Family Centers (YFC) 2016-17 Title 1 Workscope, the Refugee Services Program manager, and the Bilingual Services Program English Language Learners (ELL) compliance manager. The total funding amount for Refugee Services Program in 2016-17 was \$159,199.41. The primary funding source was the 2016-17 Title 1 budget of the Dallas ISD Youth and Family Centers Program. Monies from this source totaled \$76,395, and helped fund program staff. A secondary source of funding for the 2016-17 Refugee Services Program was the Bilingual Services Program's Title III budget. Bilingual Services Program monies for Refugee Services, totaling \$63,804.41 helped fund tutoring and interpretation services, purchases for program supplies, and supplemental pay for the Refugee Services Summer Program staff (operating at Tasby Middle School).

What were the demographic characteristics of those who participated in the Refugee Services Program?

Methodology

Data were procured from the Refugee Services program manager, merged with the Dallas ISD June 5, 2017 Chancery (demographics) database file, and analyzed using frequencies and cross tabulations.

Results

During the 2016-17 school year, 456 refugee students received instructional support and/or transitional support services through the Dallas ISD Refugee Services Program (up from 355 refugee students in

¹ Source: <http://www.dallasisd.org/Page/19732>

² More info at <https://www.acf.hhs.gov/orr/refugees>

2014-15, based on that year's evaluation report³). In addition, 431 refugee parents or guardians received services from the program, primarily in the form of school orientation sessions, interpretation and translation services, registration assistance, parent-teacher conference assistance, attendance and student discipline support, and food and health services support. Demographic results follow.

Served Refugee Students by School

Table 1 shows the distribution of served refugee students by school in 2016-17. The table shows only the top 10 schools; a total of 26 schools served students participating in the 2016-17 Refugee Services Program.

Conrad High School, McShan Elementary, and Tasby Middle School enrolled the highest number of refugee students served by the program in 2016-17, followed by Lowe Elementary School, Hotchkiss Elementary School, and Gill Elementary School. Refugee student enrollment numbers by school followed a pattern to that of the 2014-15 school year.⁴ The number of refugee students served by the program in 2016-17 who withdrew from the district during the same year totaled 47 (Table 1).

Table 1: Refugee Students Served by School (Top 10 + Withdrawal N)

School	N
Conrad, Emmett J.	94
McShan, Lee A. Jr.	85
Tasby, Sam	74
Lowe, Jack Sr.	47
Hotchkiss, L.L.	26
Gill, Charles A.	23
Carter, David W.	10
Alexander, Birdie	7
Atwell, William H.	7
Hexter, Victor H.	7
<i>Withdrawals This Year</i>	<i>47</i>
Total	427

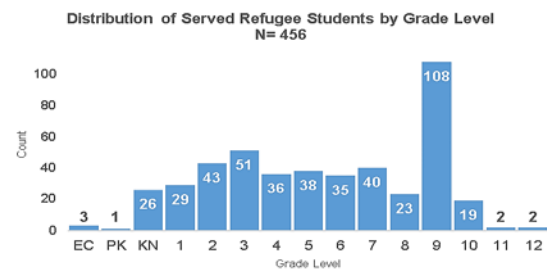
Note: The remaining 29 served refugee students were based across 16 different schools.

By Grade Level

Figure 1 shows the distribution of students served by the Refugee Services Program in 2016-17 by grade level. Refugee students in ninth grade (N=108) constituted the largest group of students served, followed by those in third grade (N=51) and seventh grade (N=40). The high concentration of these students in ninth grade may be best explained by the district's practice of placing all students based on earned course credits as shown in school transcripts. Many refugee students arrive without transcripts. If of high school age, they are placed by default into the ninth grade in order

to accommodate an often-significant need for English language learning and of other critical skills which, if not provided, may increase the risk for dropout.⁵

Figure 1: Refugee Students Served, by Grade Level



By Gender and Special Groups

The number of male and female refugee students served by the program was split evenly at 50 percent (Table 2). Nearly all refugee students served by the program were flagged as At Risk for dropout (99.1%) as well as Limited English Proficient (LEP) (98.9%). More than 91 percent were classified as Economically Disadvantaged.

Table 2: Refugee Students Served by Gender, Special Groups (N = 456)

	N	%
Gender		
Male	228	50.0%
Female	228	50.0%
Special Groups		
At Risk for Dropout	452	99.1%
Economically Disadvantaged	417	91.4%
Limited English Proficient	451	98.9%
Special Education	18	3.9%

By Country of Origin

Students born in Burma constituted the largest student group served by the Refugee Services Program, totaling one-third (33.3%; Burma N=152) of all participants. The next most-highly represented countries of birth among served refugee students were Congo (12.1%), Syria (8.3%), Bhutan (7.0%) and Iraq (6.8%). A total of 25 countries were represented in the program.

What activities or services were provided through the Refugee Services Program in 2016-17?

Methodology

Data on program activities were obtained from the Refugee Services program manager. In addition to procuring quantitative data-tracking files, the program

³ Source: Lucas, M. Evaluation Report EA15-199-4

⁴ Source: Lucas, M. Evaluation Report EA15-199-4

⁵ Source: Email communication with Bilingual Services Program Director, June 2017.

evaluator interviewed the program manager to obtain a better understanding of program activities and issues from the 2016-17 school year.

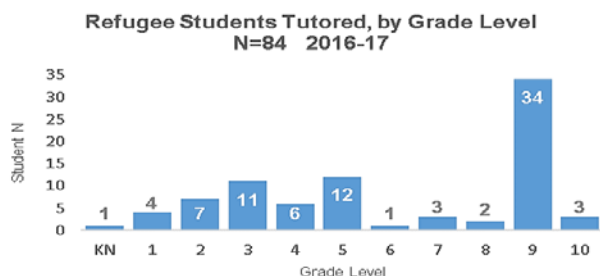
Results

Direct Supplemental Instruction: Tutoring and Summer Enrichment Program

The Refugee Services Program provided direct supplemental instruction to refugee students in the form of tutoring during the spring semester. A total of 84 students received these tutoring services. Tutored students were based at four schools: Conrad High (N=37), Lowe Elementary (N=16), McShan Elementary (N=25), and Tasby Middle School (N=6).

More than 40 percent of students tutored in this program were in the ninth grade (N=34, Figure 2). The number of hours each student was tutored ranged from 0.75 to 26 hours, with an average of 5.6 hours.

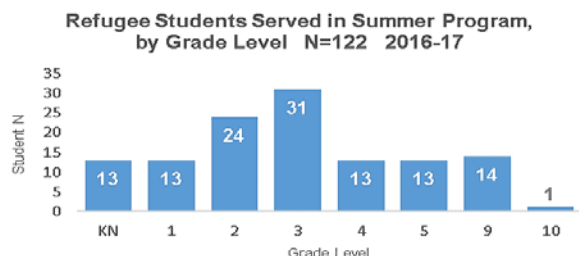
Figure 2: Tutored Students, by Grade Level



Direct supplemental instruction for refugee students also included a four-week summer enrichment program to teach literacy, language, and mathematics skills based on state standards. The summer program staff provided enrichment opportunities through thematic learning, cultural lessons, and field trips. A total of 122 students were enrolled in the summer program as of June 14, 2017, and came from six different schools including McShan Elementary (N=30), Lowe Elementary (N=29), and Hotchkiss Elementary (N=22).

Most summer enrichment program participants were in elementary school, with third-graders comprising the largest group of participants (Figure 3).

Figure 3: Summer Enrichment Program, by Grade



Parent Orientation Sessions

The Refugee Services Program offered 11 school orientation sessions for parents or guardians of refugee students in 2016-17. School orientations provided an introduction to the American education system and to Dallas ISD in particular. Parents received a handbook, a school calendar, an example of a written absence excuse, and an application for a free school uniform.

Attendance at each orientation session ranged from two to 31 individuals; a total of 95 refugee parents or guardians were recorded as having attended an orientation session between October 2016 and May 2017.

Dallas ISD Staff Professional Development

The Refugee Services Program offered several professional development opportunities throughout the 2016-17 school year to Dallas ISD staff on topics pertinent to the refugee student population. Themes included cultural awareness, the refugee resettlement process, refugee student support services, and instructional objectives.

Professional development sessions were offered on a total of 24 dates, at locations that included schools with higher concentrations of refugee students such as Carter High, Adams High, Conrad High, McShan Elementary, and Tasby Middle School, as well as at Dallas ISD's Psychological Services Department.

Interdepartmental / Interagency Collaboration

The Refugee Services Program collaborated throughout the year both with departments within Dallas ISD and with external agencies.

Internal (district) departments included the Bilingual Services Department, the Adams Feeder Pattern, the Office of Family and Community Engagement, and the World Languages Department, as well as with various departments housed within individual schools across the district. Program records showed that Refugee Services collaborated with a total of 23 unique departments or entities within the district in 2016-17, engaging in 46 interdepartmental collaborative efforts. Many interdepartmental collaborative efforts included the provision of interpretation services at meetings as well interpretation services for parent or community communication tools such as flyers and other media.

External agencies with which the Refugee Services Program collaborated in 2016-17 included the International Rescue Committee, the Dallas Area Refugee Program (DARF), Refugee Services of Texas, Region 10, the Vickery Coalition Action Team, Dallas City Hall, and Catholic Charities of Dallas. Program

records showed that Refugee Services engaged with a total of 24 different external agencies during the 2016-17 school year and participated in a total of 43 meetings or other such professional activities during that time. External organizations provided the program with additional translation services, teacher training assistance, advocacy assistance, school supplies, and refugee student opportunities.

Multicultural Student Club and Other Supportive Services

The Refugee Services Program also offered organizational and leadership assistance for multicultural clubs on various Dallas ISD campuses. Because attendance for these gatherings was not consistently recorded, detailed meeting data were not provided to the evaluator and thus are not reported here.

Other supportive services provided by the Refugee Services Program in 2016-17 included provision of referrals for and/or language (interpretation) support for physical health and immunizations, mental health issues, absence and attendance issues, and parent teacher conferences. Other support was material, in the form of uniforms and other basic school supplies. Given the significant role of language-related services provided for this population, Table 3 is included to show the seven most common languages refugee students enter the district speaking as their primary language.

Table 3: Top Seven Primary Languages Spoken by Served Refugee Students

Language	N
Burmese	122
Arabic	76
Swahili	58
Nepali	56
Tibetan	42
Afro-asiatic	35
Niger Congo	23

How did students served by the Refugee Services Program perform academically in 2016-17?

Methodology

The evaluator cleaned and merged program files procured from the Refugee Services Program manager containing student identification (ID) numbers with the June 21, 2017 Semester 2 student demographic file to analyze attendance data. To examine STAAR outcomes, the evaluator cleaned and merged Refugee Services Program files with the 2016-17 STAAR Grades 3-8 and STAAR EOC "all [test] administrations"

files from June 2017, then ran frequencies and cross-tabulations to determine final numbers.

Results

Attendance Rate

Of the 456 refugee students served by the program, attendance data were available for 409 students. The average attendance rate for all served refugee students (grades Early Childhood through 12th grade) for the 2016-17 school year was 95.7 percent.

STAAR Passing Rates

Tables 4, 5, and 6 present *State of Texas Assessments of Academic Readiness (STAAR)* and *STAAR End of Course (EOC)* data for student participants.

For served refugee students in grades three through eight (N=128 with valid scores), passing rates on the STAAR reading exam ranged between 9.1 percent and 26.7 percent by grade level (Table 4). The passing rate on the writing exam for grade four was 23.5 percent; for seventh grade, the passing rate was 12.5 percent.

Table 4: STAAR Reading and Writing, Grades 3-8, 2016-17, Served Refugee Students

Grade Level	N Tested	N Passed	% Passed
STAAR Reading			
3	30	8	26.7%
4	17	3	17.6%
5	19	2	10.5%
6	22	2	9.1%
7	27	5	18.5%
8	13	2	15.4%
Total	128	22	17.2%
STAAR Writing			
4	17	4	23.5%
7	24	3	12.5%

Passing rates on the STAAR mathematics exam across grades three through eight for served refugee students averaged 31.0 percent (Table 5). Those in grades three and eight showed the highest average passing rates at 40.0 percent each; those in grade five showed the lowest average passing rate, at 21.1 percent.

Table 5: STAAR Mathematics, Grades 3-8, 2016-17, Served Refugee Students

Grade Level	N Tested	N Passed	% Passed
STAAR Mathematics			
3	30	12	40.0%
4	17	5	29.4%
5	19	4	21.1%
6	22	7	31.8%
7	28	7	25.0%
8	10	4	40.0%
Total	126	39	31.0%

STAAR End of Course (EOC) exams are given to high school students. Table 6 shows passing rates by subject for served refugee students across grades nine through 12. The average served refugee student passing rate for Algebra 1 across all high school grades was 67.1 percent. The average served refugee student passing rate for English 1 was 8.2 percent across all high school grades, and for English 2, 30.8 percent. It should be noted, however, that the group of served refugee students who took the English 2 STAAR EOC exam was notably smaller (n=13) than that of the other two STAAR EOC tested groups and as such should be interpreted with greater caution.

Table 6: STAAR EOCs: Algebra 1, English 1, and English 2 (Grades 9-12) 2016-17 Served Refugee Students

Grade Level	N Tested	N Passed	% Passed
STAAR EOC: Algebra I			
9-12 Combined	76	51	67.1%
STAAR EOC: English I			
9-12 Combined	61	5	8.2%
STAAR EOC: English 2			
9-12 Combined	13	4	30.8%

The evaluator also analyzed grade point averages (GPA) for high school student participants. Table 7 presents the GPAs for served refugee students with valid data by grade level. The average GPA for all high school students served by the program was 80.89 (range: 56.62 to 94.93). The mean GPA for this population's ninth graders was 80.62 (range: 58.19 to 94.94); the mean GPA for 10th grade served refugee students was 83.06. The numbers of students in 11th and 12th grades with valid GPA data were too small to analyze.

Table 7: Average Served Refugee Student GPA by Grade Level (High School)

Served Refugee High School GPA, 2016-17				
Grade Level	Student N	Mean	Minimum	Maximum
9	91	80.62	58.19	94.94
10	14	83.06	56.63	94.63

Recommendations

The following recommendations are offered based on the evaluator's end-of-year interview with the Refugee Services Program manager. In addition to informing program practices, they are included to inform the design of future program evaluations.

- **Promote Career and Technical Education (CTE) and vocational training as valuable options for middle- and high-school-age refugee students.**

Many of these students are at risk for failing to thrive socially, academically, and vocationally due to the extraordinary demands placed on them frequently inherent to living as a refugee in a completely foreign culture. Often, high school is the last mandated, organizing social structure in which these students can be seen and guided in a way that will promote academic and vocational success. Promoting CTE endorsements for middle- and high school age refugee students is one valuable way to encourage vocational thinking and engagement.

In addition, Richland College, which is geographically close to where many of these refugee students live, offers vocational training and ESL classes to 17- and 18-year-old under-schooled students. Such opportunities have proven valuable to those students and families who know about and have taken advantage of them, but a more concerted communication effort backed by the district to increase such awareness is likely to prove valuable to many more of these students and families, and may thereby help reduce the poverty risk attendant to this population.

- **Continue to partner with and expand efforts to collaborate with internal and external agencies that focus on social and emotional adjustment, and reach out to these students and families to encourage use of these resources.** Many of these students and families have incurred great trauma as refugees; some have come from war-torn countries and all have for one reason or another been forced to flee a familiar culture and often an entire social, emotional, and economic support system and settle in a new and unfamiliar culture and begin again. The stress of this experience can impair the adjustment process and with it, academic performance - in addition to the challenge the language barrier already presents.

References

Lucas, M. (September 2015). Evaluation of Refugee School Impact Grant: 2014-15 Final Report. Dallas, TX: Dallas Independent School District.

For more information, please contact Program Evaluation at evaluation@dallasisd.org.

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