

Over the past 30 years, more than 100,000 refugees have made Pennsylvania their home, adding to its cultural diversity and strengthening its economy. The Refugee Act of 1980 expanded the number of persons considered refugees.

- In 2002, Pennsylvania became home to over 1,300 refugee students, which grew to 1,800 in 2006. Despite the September 11 tragedy and subsequent policies, the refugee student population continued to increase by 28% in the Commonwealth. www.refugeesinpa.org and TANF data, Department of Public Welfare

- The state represents many ethnic minorities from over 20 countries, speaking 135 languages.
Pennsylvania State Data Center, Pennsylvania Facts 2007

In Pennsylvania, educating refugee children becomes the responsibility of school districts. The Pennsylvania Department of Education provides federal funding to school districts that experience the greatest impact of refugee students in their schools and communities. The federal funding falls under the name Refugee Children's School Impact Aid (RCSIA). Currently, there are five school districts in the state that provide services to refugee students. They are located in Baldwin-Whitehall, Erie, Lancaster, Philadelphia and Upper Darby. The goal of this program is to support refugee students so they can graduate from high school.

The objectives of the Refugee Education

Program are to:

- Enhance refugee children's educational achievement and offset the financial impact of these students on local schools;
- Build the capacity of districts to respond to the needs of refugee students, families and community by improving their ability to meet goals and the mission more effectively;
- Foster the development of partnerships among schools, voluntary resettlement agencies and community support/social services;
- Expand cooperation and coordination efforts among state, local and federal programs designed to meet the needs of the refugee population; and
- Facilitate students' and families' integration into the community and increase their access to services and resources.

The program is divided into four components with corresponding activities:

Overcoming Barriers: Raise awareness in the community, support teachers with professional development, provide opportunities for cultural exchange opportunities and help administrators understand their role and ways they can promote tolerance and diversity.

Coordinating Services: Develop relationships with competent, reliable providers, communicate effectively between families and schools and assess students accurately and in a timely manner.

Participating in the Community: Forge partnerships with community-based organizations, provide enrichment opportunities

for all students and strengthen the community as a whole.

High School Graduation: Provide career exploration, job shadowing, tutoring, summer programs and community service.

The Pennsylvania Department of Education aims to integrate and acculturate refugee students into school districts. The Refugee Education Program offers advocacy for a special population of students who otherwise may not have a voice. The Department provides technical assistance and supports districts' capacity to:

- Connect school districts to the appropriate refugee resettlement agency in their areas
- Identify refugee students at enrollment
- Record the achievement of refugee students to contribute in increasing the overall achievement of the district
- Provide a free and appropriate education for refugee students in the least restrictive environment
- Facilitate school districts' requirements to provide translators and interpreters in their native languages for refugee parents
- Link refugee students to appropriate programs within the district to help them achieve academic and social success
- Work with community-based organizations to support refugee youth
- Involve refugee parents in the education of their children
- Help schools value and use the diversity that exists within the refugee community to prepare all students for global service and leadership

*Pennsylvania Department of Education
Bureau of Community & Student Services
Division of Student Services and Migrant
Education*

*333 Market Street, 5th floor
Harrisburg, Pennsylvania 17126*

*Phone 717 – 783 – 6468
FAX 717 – 783 – 4392
TTY 717 – 783 – 8445*

www.pde.state.pa.us/
www.pde.state.pa.us/rcsia



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Educational Supports For Refugee Youth

