

Great Lakes Center: Another border crisis

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Key Takeaway: Policy brief explains the educational issues surrounding unaccompanied immigrant children in the United States.

EAST LANSING, Mich. (March 9, 2021) - Beginning in 2014, an increasing number of children from northern Central American countries (El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras) and Mexico, fleeing violence and poverty in their countries, have arrived and been apprehended at the U.S. border. Many of these children are unaccompanied or became so upon separation from a parent or another adult.

NEPC is releasing today a policy brief addressing the education of these unaccompanied immigrant children (UICs), including their experiences prior to, during, and after apprehension at the border. *The (Mis)Treatment and (Non)Education of Unaccompanied Immigrant Children in the United States* is authored by University of Houston assistant professor Ruth M. López.

Upon arrival, these children are expected to navigate everything from a complicated immigration legal system to overcrowded detention centers, abuse, and anti-immigrant sentiments. Considering this sociopolitical context, Professor López examines what the available research tells us about UICs' educational experiences in detention, in shelters or foster care, and in public schools. It also considers legal requirements as well as research about how schools and districts can support these children in asset-based and equity-centered ways. Using the theoretical frameworks of Critical Race Theory and Latino Critical Race Theory, she examines the ways UICs are framed, the legal and historical contexts that impact their lived reality, and their recent experience as immigrants to the United States. In the brief López shares the following:

Before migration and in their interactions with various federal agencies, UICs often face traumatic experiences, including prolonged separation from their families. After navigating a complicated immigration system, where they may not receive proper services such as education, health, or legal support, UICs have the right to attend public schools once placed with a sponsor. However, the transition to schooling is not seamless and can present other unique obstacles that affect learning conditions.

Humanitarian and legal offenses toward UICs predated the Trump administration, but Trump's immigration policies, particularly since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, exacerbated these injustices. This legacy leaves the new administration—and others—with much to do to alleviate the trauma suffered by UICs and to ensure that they receive necessary educational and coordinated supports. To this end, Professor López concludes her brief with recommendations for national-level policymakers, district and school leaders, and researchers.

Find *The (Mis)Treatment and (Non)Education of Unaccompanied Immigrant Children in the United States*, by Ruth M. López, at:

<https://www.greatlakescenter.org/>

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