Educating unaccompanied immigrant children in Chicago, Illinois: A case study

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ABSTRACT

Very little is known about how *unaccompanied immigrant children* (*UIC*) are faring and integrating into US communities, or about the services they utilize and their outstanding needs. This is true for both UICs that have been released from Office of Refugee Resettlement (ORR) detention centers to live with sponsors and non-apprehended unaccompanied immigrant youth. From October 2014 to August 2017, 1818 apprehended UICs detained in ORR facilities have been released to live with their sponsors/families in Illinois, of those, 866 were released to Cook County, the county housing the city of Chicago. The number of non-apprehended unaccompanied immigrant children that reside in Illinois, the state with the 6th largest concentration of undocumented residents, is not known.

Although these two UIC groups differ in their involvement with the U.S. government, they both have the right to a free and equitable education and an obligation to either attend school or receive homeschooling until, a minimum, of age 16. The current study considers the educational experiences of UIC in the Chicago metropolitan area from the perspective of diverse education, human service, and legal professionals that work with this population in ORR facilities, post-release, and community contexts. An overview of the population and education system factors that should be considered in the provision of educational services for UIC is identified. Implications for education and human service providers are presented.

1. Introduction

Unaccompanied immigrant children ("UIC"), defined as those young people under the age of 18 who enter the U.S. without a parent or primary caregiver and without legal status, represent a growing population within U.S. public schools. Since October 2013, the U.S. Office of Refugee Resettlement ("ORR") has placed nearly 170,000 UIC who need educational and/or supportive services with adult sponsors in communities throughout the United States (U.S. Office of Refugee Resettlement, 2017c). These young people join thousands more who previously entered the U.S. undetected and also require these services.

Although their numbers are relatively small compared to the 50.7 million children attending public elementary and secondary schools throughout the U.S., their need for academic and other supportive services is great. Many UIC not only are limited in their ability to speak and understand English, but these young people tend to have varied and often complex educational and social-emotional needs that impede their educational potential and integration into the communities where they live.

These young people have both a right to a public education and an obligation to attend school thus making schools among the only places where critical needs can be addressed. Federal law requires government, through public schools, to furnish these young people with the necessary supports and services to provide a meaningful and equal education regardless of their immigration status. Moreover, research continues to support the critical role schools have and continue to play in integrating new immigrants into the U.S. (Callahan, Muller, & Schiller, 2008; Deschenes, Cuban, & Tyack, 2001). Thus, public schools possess a unique service opportunity to positively impact the lives of these vulnerable young people.

This study focuses on the education and related experiences of UIC living in the Chicago metropolitan areas as perceived by education, legal, mental health, human service, and shelter professionals that interact with them or on their behalf. While the primary focus of this study is on UIC that have been apprehended, UIC that avoided apprehension are also considered.

2. Literature review: U.S. education policy and unaccompanied immigrant children

The U.S. public education system presents educational promise for these young people but, unfortunately, these promises are not fully realized. An overview of this vulnerable population and their educational needs, the relevant educational policies, as well as the research follows. When research specific to unaccompanied immigrant children living in the U.S. is not available, this summary includes research regarding children with similar migration experiences, including child refugees/asylees and newly arrived immigrant children.

2.1. Education policy and immigrant children without legal status

Titles IV and VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 assert that all children, regardless of race, color, sex, religion, national origin or legal status, have a right to a free and equitable public education and prohibits the use of administrative criteria or procedure to discriminate against these protected groups. The U.S. Supreme Court (1982) reinforced this right for undocumented children in the case, *Plyler v. Doe*, 457 U.S. 202, which held that states cannot (1) withhold funds from local school districts that educate children who are not legally admitted into the U.S. or (2) authorize local districts to deny the enrollment of these children.

While states are obligated to provide public education to all children, compulsory school education laws require all school-aged children to either attend school or receive homeschooling until a minimum of age 16, with the majority states requiring attendance until the age of 17 or 18. States and local school districts can determine the minimum requirements for enrollment and the documents necessary to establish proof of a child's residency in the school district and guardianship. They cannot, however, ask about the immigration status of the adult enrolling the child, require them to provide documentation that establishes legal residency, or oblige them furnish the child's birth certificate or social security for enrollment. Moreover, Title VII-B of the McKinney-Vento Assistance Act of 1987 (PL 100-77) requires districts and schools to accept and enroll any child, including unaccompanied children, who the Act deems "homeless," regardless if they can present required documentation.

The Civil Rights Act, along with the Individuals with Disabilities Act or Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, provides that all children, regardless of their legal status, have the right to special education and specialized language services that allow for full participation in all educational opportunities offered in the school and district. This includes evaluating and identifying special education services in a timely manner and providing both special education and English language services, as necessary.

Finally, the Office of Refugee Resettlement ("ORR"), which is responsible for their care before they are placed with an adult sponsor in the community, has policies that direct educational services in ORR-funded facilities (U.S. Office of Refugee Resettlement, 2017b; U.S. Office of Refugee Resettlement, 2018b). Notably, these policies require care providers to (1) conduct an educational assessment within 72-hours admission into the facility; (2) provide regular and appropriate educational services to each child based on their individual academic development, literacy level, and linguistic ability; and (3) maintain educational progress reports and case notes that should be transferred with the child when they begin attending schools in a local district.

2.2. Trauma

Since 2013, the U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP) has encountered substantially more UIC at the U.S. southern border than in previous years. Between Fiscal Years 2009 and 2012, CBP encountered approximately 77,400 UIC compared to over 203,000 between Fiscal Years 2013 and 2016 (U.S. Customs and Border Protection, 2017).

These young people join an unknown number of UIC who entered the U.S. undetected. Coming from primarily Mexico, El Salvador, Honduras, and Guatemala, these young people make the difficult journey to the U.S. for multifaceted and complex reasons. Among the more common reasons is to escape the violence in their home countries, family reunification, and limited economic opportunity (Donato & Perez, 2017; Kandel et al., 2014).

A United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees ("UNHCR") study (2014) of UIC apprehended at the U.S. southern border reports that nearly half (48%) left their home country because of their experience with violence in their community (including gang violence, organized crime or government and sexual violence) and/or interpersonal/domestic violence. The countries of origin for the majority of these youth – Mexico, El Salvador, Honduras, and Guatemala – have among the highest rates of violence, crime, and poverty in the region (Kandel, 2017; University of Washington, 2017). Thus, many UIC are likely to experience trauma prior to their journey to the U.S. (Fuino Estefan, Ports, & Hipp, 2017; UNHCR, 2014). The traumatic experiences often continue during their migration with many experiencing mistreatment by human smugglers/traffickers, sexual and/or physical abuse, natural disaster, and becoming victims/witnesses of crime (Chen & Gill, 2015; Jaycox et al., 2002).

Although a child's response to trauma varies depending on the child, research suggests that it can create additional challenges for students. Generally, children who are exposed to trauma are at increased risk of negative health and well-being outcomes. This may include post-traumatic stress, anxiety, depression, and cognitive impairments, among others (Bücker et al., 2012; Sacks, Murphey, & Moore, 2014). This is notable for many recent immigrant children who are at-risk for violence exposure and related psychological distress resulting from experiences before, during, and after immigration (Jaycox et al., 2002). A study of newly arrived immigrants in the U.S. found higher levels of interpersonal, socioemotional, health, and substance abuse in this population when compared to their non-immigrant peers (Sulkowski, 2017).

A traumatic experience can negatively impact a youth's educational performance and behavior in school, thus increasing their risk for dropout. A traumatic experience can negatively impact concentration, memory, and the ability to process information, which is necessary for children to succeed in school. It can also influence the ability to self-regulate emotions and behavior, which teachers can interpret as disruptive classroom behaviors and lead to increased suspension and expulsions (Porche, Fortuna, Lin, & Alegria, 2011).

2.3. English language learners and school integration

Many of the unaccompanied children arriving in the U.S. have limited English language proficiency that can hinder their integration into school. For most, English is not their primary language and they are limited in their ability to read, speak, write, or understand the language. Federal policy states that once enrolled, schools must, without delay, identify student's eligibility for English language services. If identified as eligible, school districts must provide English language services to promote proficiency and facilitate their ability to participate equally in all school instruction and programming (U.S. Department of Justice, U.S. Department of Education, & U.S. Department of Health, & Human Services, 2014).

Research indicates that, although there is variation across states, an academic achievement gap in both reading and math exists between English Language Learners (ELL) and non-ELL students (Murphey, 2014). ELL youth that arrive between the ages of 12–15 often encounter the most difficulty with language acquisition and require six to eight years of schooling to reach grade level in the second language (Collier, 1987). Furthermore, if students do not reach English language fluency by secondary school, they are more likely to attend remedial, less challenging classes, which decreases the likelihood they graduate and/or attend college (Callahan, 2005).

UIC that are English learners are also at increased risk of being segregated from the general population if the school's ELL program requires extended separated instruction. English language courses that pullout students from mainstream courses may have the unintended consequence of separating English learners from other students, thus perpetuating their linguistic isolation and providing limited opportunity for them to interact with English speakers both in and out of school (Arias, 2007). Students placed into ELL courses can also spend years in lower level courses, with little interaction with students from "more linguistically, ethnically, and socio-economically diverse body of students" (Goździak, 2015, pp. 15–16).

In addition to affecting academic performance, a delay in acquiring English proficiency also impacts social and emotional adjustment. Research focusing on immigrant students indicates that newly arrived students with good English adjusted better to their new school environments than their non-English speaking peers. This was found to be especially true for youth who are already behind their peers academically. In addition, students that have strong accents and/or struggle with speaking English are more likely to report being mistreated by their teachers and peers (McBrien, 2005). These factors place UIC at-risk of lower academic performance and academic achievement, as well as school dropout (Freeman & Freeman, 2002; Gunderson, 2007).

To address these issues, some schools have implemented creative strategies for integrating ELL students, such as developing special programs, promoting more heterogeneous and collaborative groupings of ELL students, providing better-trained teachers and staff members that speak the native language of the children (de Jong & Harper, 2005). One study found that UIC students had especially positive experiences at schools that had "well-developed systems" and special "'welcoming' programs" for ELL/ESL students (Roth & Grace, 2015, p. 24) and "newcomer hubs" (Cardoso et al., 2017, p. 9).

Many newly-arrived UIC have limited consistent formal education experience (Booi et al., 2016). Due to poverty-related factors and/or the threat of violence and crime in their communities, many UIC have not attended school or have had inconsistent school attendance before their arrival to the U.S. (UNHCR, 2014). Formal schooling may also have been limited due to inadequate resources, limited education access beyond primary years, poor instructional quality, and other school-related factors (DeCapua & Marshall, 2010). As result, UIC are more likely to have limited literacy skills in their native language and be several grade levels behind their peers. These educational delays can also lead to additional delays in English language acquisition. A study of newly-arrived immigrant children with limited and/or interrupted formal education found that they had significantly lower levels of performance than other English Language Learners, who are already characterized as performing poorly in comparison with their peers (Advocates for Children of New York, 2010).

2.4. Barriers to enrollment and a meaningful and equal education

UIC present a challenge to the schools that receive them. The challenges are complex and cumulative, including educational needs related language proficiency, education disruption, assessment, and trauma. Unfortunately, schools may not provide the supports and services necessary to support them (Advocates for Children of New York, 2010). Furthermore, some schools may be reluctant to enroll UIC because of the challenges they present and the additional resources they may require. States and local school districts vary in how they enroll UIC. While many welcome unaccompanied children into their community schools, others impede or delay enrollment, contrary to federal law and policy (Booi et al., 2016; Pierce, 2015). The Associated Press reports that in at least 35 districts in 14 states, local schools and school districts bar and/or delay unaccompanied children's enrollment. The actual number, however, cannot be determined because the federal government does not release information on counties where fewer than 50 UIC are placed, which excludes 25,000 unaccompanied children

from the reporting (Burke & Sainz, 2016).

Methods used to discourage enrollment vary. Some schools require children and/or their caregivers provide documentation that is either difficult to obtain and/or is not required of U.S. citizen children (Booi et al., 2016). Some studies have found that some schools required children and/or their caregiver to provide documents from their home country, such as school transcripts and immunization records, to enroll (Fordham University School of Law & Vera Institute of Justice, 2015), while others require that they meet strict residency requirements and provide proof of "domiciliary" or permanent residency within the intended district (Booi et al., 2016). These requirements are particularly challenging for UIC and/or undocumented/mixed status caregivers who may, themselves, be transient, not have adequate documentation, may not be able to afford the process by which to obtain the necessary documentation, and/or have fears about deportation, language barriers, and cultural differences (Burke & Sainz, 2016).

Despite applicable laws mandating the child's right to attend, meeting age or grade-level requirements are a barrier to enrollment for some UIC. A North Carolina and Texas study found that factors such as the child's age or testing performance were used to delay and/or discourage enrollment (Booi et al., 2016).

School administrators also face additional performance-based pressures to maintain and/or improve student academic performance and graduation rates (Menken & Solorza, 2014). These pressures create a disincentive to serve English learning UIC, who are more likely to be judged low performing and less likely to graduate before they reach the identified graduation age. As a result, schools may divert older UIC to alternative education programs where they can continue their education beyond district age limits and outside district reporting requirements. Several studies concluded that while administrators may impede enrollment for a variety of reasons, it is frequently done to limit costs and maintain higher school performance and graduation rates (Booi et al., 2016; Sugarman, 2016).

After they are enrolled, schools and districts must provide equal access to necessary supports and services to all children regardless of their immigration status. Under the Individuals with Disabilities Act (IDEA) or Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, school districts must provide unaccompanied children who are English learners and have disabilities with both English language and disability-related services in a timely manner. Unfortunately, school systems often fail to adequately evaluate UIC and other culturally and linguistically diverse students, resulting in inappropriate educational placements and services (Advocates for Children of New York, 2010; Booi et al., 2016; Fernandez & Inserra, 2013). These practices contribute to resource disparities, limited learning opportunities, and diminished educational attainment. In addition, they have been linked to negative outcomes, such as inappropriate referrals for special education, behavioral problems, low engagement, grade retention, high dropout rates. (Brayboy, Castagno, & Maughan, 2007; Suárez-Orozco, Roos, & Suárez-Orozco, 2000). This is particularly problematic for UIC who are English Language Learners and/or have histories of limited or interrupted formal education (Duran, 2008; Gunderson, 2007).

Research suggests that schools are more likely to identify English learners as having learning disabilities or mental retardation when compared to their English speaking white peers, resulting in their overrepresentation in special education programs (Artiles, Rueda, Salazar, & Higareda, 2005; Sullivan, 2011; Valenzuela, Copeland, Qi, & Park, 2006). School staff often fail to distinguish between students' limited cultural and English language proficiency and actual learning disability and to their academic detriment, may be mistakenly considered as remedial students and placed in special education courses (Collier, 1987; Fernandez & Inserra, 2013; Sullivan, 2011).

3. Current study

This study presents the initial findings of a larger study in process of

the post-release/family reunification experiences and outcomes of un-accompanied immigrant children (UIC) and their family or sponsors in the Chicago metropolitan area. The larger study employs a mixed method design that includes in-depth semi-structured interviews with experts/key informants, a community forum, and a survey of local human service, education, health, and legal advocacy organizations attending to unaccompanied immigrant children and the families re-united in Illinois. For this study, "Unaccompanied Immigrant Child' (UIC) refers to children/youth, under the age of 18, who entered the United States without a legal primary caregiver and without lawful immigration status in the U.S.

The study is guided by four overarching questions: (1) What are the unique health, mental health, legal, educational, and human service needs presented by this sector of the immigrant population? (2) What agencies and organizations form the service infrastructure that attends to the needs of this population? (3) What are the strengths and weak-nesses of the public and private service sector, as well as the opportu-nities for infrastructure enhancement to better serve the population and promote integration? And (4) what state and local public policies and agency practices facilitate access, utilization, and coordination of ser-vices that enhance well-being and integration of this population?

More specifically, for this paper, we sought to understand the fol-lowing: (1) How do unaccompanied immigrant children fare in ob-taining a formal education? (2) How do schools and community pro-viders respond to the educational needs of these young people? And (3) What are the challenges and strengths of the systems that address these young people's needs?

3.1. Setting

The current study was conducted in Chicago, Illinois. Illinois is home to a large and diverse immigrant community and ranks among the top six receiving states for new immigrants. With just under half a million undocumented immigrants, Illinois ranks 6th among states with undocumented residents (Pew Research Center, 2016). More than 60% of the state's foreign-born (1.09 million) live in Cook County, which includes Chicago and the metropolitan area. This includes 1818 UIC who have been released by the Office of Refugee Resettlement (ORR) to live with sponsors in Illinois since October 2013 (U.S. Office of Refugee Resettlement, 2017b). The vast majority of whom (866) were placed in Cook County, the county housing the city of Chicago (U.S. Office of Refugee Resettlement, 2017c). These young people join thousands more UIC who entered the United States undetected and also live in this area.

Chicago is a traditional gateway city for immigrants with a long history of reception and resettlement for newcomers. Chicago and Cook County have a strong and active network of immigrant-serving agen-cies, vibrant immigrant organizations, and ethnic enclaves (Martone, Zimmerman, Vidal de Haymes & Lorentzen, 2014). Illinois has several unique policies and directives aimed at immigrant integration, such as the 2005 New Americans Executive Order that created an infrastructure and mandates to develop a comprehensive immigrant integration plan and initiatives (City of Chicago, Office for New Americans, 2017) and Chicago is a designated sanctuary city (Welcoming City Ordinance, 2017).

Chicago has an extensive public school and city college system. With approximately 400,000 students and a nearly 5.5 billion-dollar budget, the Chicago Public School (CPS) district is the third largest school district in the nation. Nearly half of the students in the Chicago Public School System, 46.8%, are Hispanic, followed in number by African American students, 37.0%, and White students, 10.2%. Most of the students, 77.7% are categorized as economically disadvantaged, 18.0% as English language learners, and 13.7% have Individual Education Plans (IEPs) (Chicago Public Schools, 2017). The district is comprised of more than 600 schools: 421 district-run elementary schools (kindergarten through 8th grade) and 93 high schools; 56 ele-mentary and 66 charter high schools; and 27 alternative schools.

The school system presents a complex array of options, with varied application processes and acceptance criteria, and significant differ-ences in resource allocation, curriculum offerings, and student out-comes across schools in the system. The kindergarten through 12th grade options include open enrollment schools that accept all students that live within a neighborhood attendance boundary and specialty magnet and magnet cluster schools and selective enrolment schools (varied gifted, classical, international and academic centers) that have varied application procedures that include application deadlines, computerized lottery selection, testing, neighborhood attendance boundaries, or a combination of some of these application elements. High school options include college and career academies, international baccalaureate programs, magnet high schools, military academies, and selective enrollment schools. Similarly, the CPS high school options present a complex array of application processes and selection criteria.

The City Colleges of Chicago (CCC) serves more than more than 80,000 students annually at seven campuses and six satellite sites. As one of the largest community college systems in the nation, it offers an array of programs that are relevant to UICs enrolled in high school or 16 and 17 years old with a high school separation form. The relevant of-ferings include the following: Dual Enrollment, which allows high school seniors to take courses at CCC; Dual Credit, which provides both college and high school credit for students enrolled in designated classes in participating high schools; English as a Second Language classes (ESL), and High School Equivalency Certificate Programs.

3.2. Design and procedures

The study was guided by an advisory board comprised of ten in-dividuals that directly work with or are involved in the provision of services to UIC and families who reside in the Chicago area. The project research team worked with the Advisory Board to develop the sample strategy and recruitment as well as review and comment on the inter-view guide and survey instrument. The authors and Advisory Board members identified professionals and provider agencies attending to UICs and immigrant populations in the Chicago metropolitan area and Illinois to develop a comprehensive list that includes professionals and organizations providing legal, health, mental and behavioral health, educational, recreational, child welfare, housing, employment, and other human services. In addition, a web-based search was conducted to identify additional major human service providers and organizations that possibly attend to UIC and families living in the Chicago area. Prospective study participants were identified for each of the primary data gathering activities of the project: interviews, community forum, and survey. In the initial phase of the study, letters of invitation were sent to individuals and organizations that were known to work directly with UIC and their sponsors. Interviews were scheduled with the in-dividuals responding affirmatively to the invitation.

A semi-structured interview guide (See Appendix A) was developed for the study. The guide includes questions regarding the population served, the presenting problems/needs of the population served, pro-gram and services offered, and perceptions regarding unmet needs of the client population. These more general questions were followed by more specific questions regarding the educational experiences and needs of the UICs served. This study protocol was reviewed and ap-proved by an Institutional Review Board at the researchers' institution.

The interviews were conducted by the authors in the office/facility of the research participant. Prior to initiating the interview, the parti-cipants were provided a verbal overview and written consent form detailing the purpose of the study, any risk or benefits and issues of confidentiality. Each interview lasted approximately one hour in length. All interviews were audiotaped and later transcribed for ana-lysis. This study was reviewed and approved by an Institutional Review Board at the researchers' institution.

This paper presents the findings related to education from the initial 20 interviews of the study involving individuals that work in

Table 1
Participant Professional Role.

Former teacher in ORR-funded shelter care facility
Case manager in ORR-funded shelter care facility
Program administrator for UIC post-release services
Administrator of shelter for UIC who aged out of ORR care and have a pending asylum case
Case manager at shelter for UIC who aged out of ORR care and have a pending asylum case
Clergy that provides pastoral accompaniment to UIC in ORR facilities
Executive director of community-based immigrant-serving organization
Administrator in community-based human service organization that provides services to UIC/Former state human service director for immigrant services
Director of immigrant advocacy and resource organization
Attorney/guardian ad litem for children in Illinois' child welfare system
Attorney in legal clinic that provides pro bono representation to UIC
Social worker at organization that advocates for the rights and best interest of UIC
Public school system administrator for language and cultural Services
Public school system administrator for college and career planning
Public school system administrator for community relations and refugee services
City colleges advisor and transitional language services program administrator
Executive director of public education policy organization/Former public charter school network administrator
Social worker in public high school with immigrant welcoming center
Social worker in grade school with large immigrant population /Former social worker in public high school with large immigrant population
Attorney in organization that represents UIC in legal immigration proceedings

organizations that directly attend to UIC. The interviews were conducted by the July through November of 2017.

3.3. Sample

The participants were recruited for the study because of their personal knowledge, experience, and insights regarding the unique service needs of the UIC population and the system capacity to address these needs in the Chicago Metropolitan region. The sample included individual interviews with 20 professionals drawn from diverse education, legal, and human service professions and roles in the public and private sector. "Table 1" provides a description of each participant.

3.4. Analysis

The authors conducted an inductive transcript-based analysis using open and axial coding with the interview transcripts to identify themes and their interrelationships (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Strauss & Corbin, 2008). They used Dedoose, a web-based application, to aid with the coding and analysis of qualitative data aided this process. Several strategies were employed to enhance rigor and quality including an iterative transcript review process, independent coding by three of the researchers and discussion until agreement was reached, documentation of coding development through memoing, rechecking coding against the data, and identification of direct quotes to support themes for transparency.

Initially, the two authors that conducted the interviews and a graduate research assistant read the same four transcripts independently to begin coding or categorizing the themes identified in the interview. An inventory of codes was developed by each of the coders with a description of each code. The coders then met to discuss the codes developed independently and through a consensus discussion developed an initial codebook. The initial themes identified as codes were: 1) personal barriers to education, 2) system based barriers to education, 3) difficulty in assessment, 4) limited post-high school options, and 5) need for ancillary services. The three research team members conducting the data analysis then independently read through the remaining transcripts using the codebook to code identified themes and memoing to capture emerging themes. The coders met again to discuss the results of the additional coding, identify discrepancies in coding and refine the coding scheme. Through a consensus discussion,

the coders revised the codebook to add additional codes and subcodes and axial codes.

The research team members conducting the analysis read through all of the transcripts an additional time to ensure that all key themes had been identified, that there was congruence between the codebook and the transcripts, and to identify quotes that illustrated the subcodes. This was followed by a meeting of the three coders to ensure consensus.

4. Findings

4.1. Chicago's educational supports and services

4.1.1. Lack of uniformity of services across public school system

When asked about how the city's public schools respond to the needs of UIC and other similar immigrant populations, a CPS district administrator responded "660 different ways." This response emphasizes the lack of service uniformity between the more than 600 schools throughout the district. Several study participants concluded that both the services and level of services a student received varied based on the school's geography, student population, and capacity of individual schools. This variation occurs across the different public school types throughout the district (e.g. traditional public, charter public, selective enrollment, magnet).

A CPS district coordinator for community relations and refugee services emphasizes this variation between schools with some schools having vast diversity in their school population while others are relatively homogenous.

> *Some schools are diverse and they are always ready. I mean you can go down the street, [School X] has 40–80 languages, and you go in their hallway and they are equipped. They have staff who speak different languages and [School Y] their school is really diverse staff wise from the lunchroom to the principal themselves. You know, different people, those schools help. And then we have some schools that are also just one kind of population, you see like 99% Hispanics schools, they are also very supportive to the school.*

Schools try to address the diverse needs of their students, but the resources available in individual schools depend on the need within those schools. Thus, schools with more students speaking a non-English language are more likely to have specific supports and services for those children.

Children, however, may not attend schools where their needs are best addressed. As the executive director of a public schools policy organization states, families/children often choose a school near to where they live.

> *Because these [neighborhoods] are so hyper-segregated it's… a correlation between who is serving those kids [UIC and ELL] or not, is usually based on geography more than it is based on schools…And you can say that about traditional schools or charter schools it doesn't matter, that's is a big determinant.*

Study participants indicated that some schools provide more supports and have stronger linguistic, cultural, staff and programmatic capacity to attend the unique needs of UIC than other schools. In some schools, the capacity is institutionalized through their staffing and programming. Such schools are in communities that have a long history of receiving new immigrant students, a characteristic often determined by geography. In other cases, the district, charter school organizations, or individual schools secure external resources through additional funding or partnerships with community-based organizations to support students and sometimes their families in the schools.

Study participants identified community school grants as a source for some schools to extend building hours and provide additional school and community-specific programming to students and their families. Programming includes academic supports for students, health and wellness services for students and families, social-emotional and

cultural learning opportunities, and adult education and family/community engagement programming. In the 2017–2018 school year, 159 schools receive additional support to implement a community school model to increase the services and supports to children and community.

Many schools depend on community-based organizations to fill service gaps for these and other students. These organizations often have the skills and training that schools lack to engage students in their primary language and in a culturally appropriate manner. In addition, they provide other supports to the schools and their staff including "Know Your Rights" and other immigration-related presentations and trainings on providing trauma-informed services to immigrant populations. The executive director of an immigrant advocacy organization notes his organization's role in supporting schools:

We do some work with the schools in terms of just providing them with some of the tools or the connections with organizations that can provide some level of culturally competent, linguistically competent, case management, but not the specialty care that they need. And that is what many of our member organizations provide… They are looking to us for the policy analysis and training or resources, right, because unfortunately, not every counselor knows what kind of resources are available to families or children that have no status, mixed status.

Unfortunately, study participants report that even with the support of community-based organization, many schools still do not have adequate resources to support these students. Many of these students and their families need additional services and supports to help them integrate and succeed in school and that providing these services in the child's primary language and in a culturally-sensitive manner is regularly a challenge. Moreover, these challenges are often exacerbated by cultural differences and each child's unique migration experience.

4.1.2. Limited availability of bilingual educational services

Among the notable service gaps for UIC attending Chicago Public Schools (CPS) is the limited availability of bilingual staff that can communicate with UICs in their primary language, especially if the needed language is not among the common foreign languages spoken in the area (Spanish, Polish, Mandarin, etc.…). As the executive director of an education policy organization states: "There is a huge pipeline challenge for all schools on finding people who have dual certification that actually can speak whatever the language that is that you are trying to serve."

CPS takes a variety of steps to address this "pipeline challenge," but, generally, the school district continues to struggle. For example, CPS enacted a policy waiver that allows schools to hire bilingual qualified staff from outside the city but, as a CPS administrator states, even with this waiver, and especially for students who speak indigenous and other less common languages, there remains "a huge need that we cannot fill." In support of this statement, he offered the following example:

I was at a high school recently that had a large number of Syrian refugees and the only person who spoke Arabic in the school was a Syrian student, but no teachers in the entire school spoke Arabic and they had 22 students who spoke Arabic and I know there are 22 different variations of Arabic as well. They are all from different countries…. But to have one in the building who spoke the language seems not supportive.

A CPS administrator who works predominantly with English language learners offered other strategies to fill this service gap:

No, we have tried even go as far as recruiting tutors at least from the college level. And sometimes it's difficult to identify native speakers. Particularly for students who are becoming proficient first and foremost with the dialect. We don't have anyone that speaks it. If Spanish is first or second in terms of their number one proficient language, we for the most part, have been able to (identify) if not a teacher, identify a tutor… college student to (work with) them after

hours to help them transition…We are actually about to launch a program we are going to be pay…teachers to go back school to get their ESL or bilingual endorsement because the need for those teachers is huge. We are hoping that that incentivizes more educators to do that, especially with this population.

Language is also a barrier to communicate with some families. When a child and their family speaks a language that the school does not have the capacity to address, they must rely on phone-based interpretation services, which is often necessary, but very costly. A school social worker commented that phone translation services are, "very expensive, it's about 4 dollars a minute for somebody to be over the phone with you. Yeah. And that is plus the subscription fee."

4.1.3. Limited school-based mental health services

Preliminary findings from the study suggest that UIC and other similar immigrant student populations may struggle to secure adequate mental health services from within their school and in their community. Generally, UIC need trauma-informed services provided in a culturally competent manner and, often, in that child's primary language. Schools do have social workers or counselors, but their time is limited. As a CPS Education Support Staff states, "…each school has a trained counselor… It is better than nothing…but, if you figure that some schools serve 100 children and there is one counselor and if they do other stuff too… It is a challenge."

A CPS district administrator states that apart from a specialized program for ten Chicago high schools where violence impacts the most students, mental health services are "wildly inadequate" and that the school district cannot "actually provide the real services to students who are suffering from trauma in ways that we can on the scale that we need." He does, however, state that individual schools try to address the need.

We have some informed care, and have done some work with staff around trauma-informed care for both recent immigrants but also just undocumented students who may be feeling particular pressure because of the current political climate. So, there is some training, but it's not necessary, it's voluntary. Schools have to opt in for…training around trauma care. Schools have social workers. They can request bilingual support if there are students with whom they cannot communicate and students who are suffering the more severe trauma. (They) may go to an outplacement process where they are provided services paid by the district and outside of traditional school.

A high school social worker said, when referring to the UIC and refugee children in the school, "if we were to evaluate every student to see if they qualify for a kind therapy for trauma, I think every student would qualify. But there are some students that present with more severe symptoms: lack of sleep, inability to focus, acting out behaviors in the classroom." He describes further how the school implements some supports for students with more pronounced needs, such as individual therapy and group counseling for some, arrangements with teachers to allow youth to come to the counseling center to nap once they have completed their classwork, and referrals to mental health organizations for others. Unfortunately, community-based mental health services outside the school are not a viable option for many students. Respondents state that, generally, the community struggles to provide appropriate mental health services for children. Few mental health providers work with children and, for those that do, many do not accept a medical card to cover service costs. For UIC and other similar populations, the service gap is even greater because services should be provided in the young person's primary language. As the director of a UIC post-release service program states:

We have challenges even in the city because of the lack of providers. So, there could be waiting lists or you might need an appointment…You find a lot of providers that can't see people right away, so they will try to schedule some sort of intake for you and they will let you know that they

have a waiting list for another few weeks. We won't be able to have somebody see you until whenever… There is a combination of reasons for that. It's not just lack of providers, but…insurance companies in getting people who are qualified and also speak the language. Not finding bilingual staff even in Chicago or anywhere is pretty hard.

4.2. Balancing personal and family expectations with education

As described in the literature, many UIC face challenges with English language learning, school disruption, and experiences with trauma that influence how they perform and integrate into school. Preliminary data from this study suggest that some of these young people may face personal and familial pressures that influence their school performance and how and whether they attend school. As described below, some of these individual and family-based risk factors include competing work/school priorities and differing notions of formal education.

4.2.1. Work pressures threaten education opportunity

The combined challenges at school and opportunities to make money to care for one's self and/or family compels some students to prioritize work opportunities. As a CPS district administrator states, "… they just give up on this whole thing (education) and, whenever possible, what they want to do is work." The pressure to work, for many, is considerable. Not only are they compelled to work for their own personal need/gain, but some also feel indebted to family members who helped fund their travel to the United States. A former state government official and current service provider administrator provides insight into how UIC think about family indebtedness:

Here my parents did… whatever huge sacrifice to be able to pay this person to get me across. I am here now and instead of doing what I am responsible for, what is expected of me by my family, I am wasting my time in some school that is not even teaching what I need to know to be able to even work… So, all these wonderful career stuff that you want to show me, what does it matter to me when I could have been earning the five thousand or ten thousand dollars washing dishes or doing whatever to try and meet the expectation and obligation that I feel for the sacrifice my family made.

This respondent recognizes the feeling of indebtedness. Depending on how these young people think about this "sacrifice" and their familial role may influence personal "expectations" and "obligations" to the family. Furthermore, the respondent suggests that some UIC believe they are obligated to repay their family before they "waste" time on an educational program that may not help them with obtaining a job. For others, the sense of obligation and urgency is compounded by fear of violence directed towards their family due to a failure to pay the loans in a timely manner. A UIC detention center caseworker commented on one such case, "She (youth) was more like I need to get a job, I need to make money, I need to... cause with her situation she needed to pay back some loans and so she was more concerned about that and for the safety of her family because they took out those loans."

Other UIC feel beholden to family members who are struggling to survive in their country of origin. An administrator of a shelter for former UIC provides the following insight into how a UIC thinks about this pressure, "How can I go to bed at night having eaten dinner but not knowing if my mother has eaten that day?" This statement emphasizes the emotional and physiological toll their concern causes. In the following quote, the former shelter care teacher underscores this experience and then provides a related example:

So, I think like for a lot of the kids they were really stressed about their family and their family situation back home and they felt like the pressure was on them because, A, they were in debt from their journey and, B, they had family back home who was depending on them and expecting them to get a job and send money home. So, like

one kid, his dad died and his mom… he was like the oldest and his mom was alone and like, his family was really struggling financially so he came to work. He was essentially the breadwinner for his family so it was like torture for him to be stuck in our program and be told your education is really important.

In this example, the respondent describes how the young person assumes a critical familial role after his father's death. This role created additional responsibilities with greater expectations. Moreover, because he believed that he was the sole person capable of helping his mother, but was unable to help, he suffered. Again, although the program is intended to help the young person, it becomes a barrier to his working and fulfilling his familial obligation.

A respondent who manages a private faith-based shelter for former UIC who aged-out of ORR custody described how shelter staff sought to identify and implement informal measures to keep youth engaged in school while addressing their distress about sending home remittances during their drawn-out asylum case processing. She indicated that they try to find donations for the youth so they can send a small amount of money home: "X finds money somewhere and to give to them to send to their mom. Just for them to have peace of mind. Or, he finds little jobs, that is not a regular job, and they go and move furniture, or clean, and things. They get a few dollars and they send it home."

A city college academic counselor working with UICs described the internal conflict students can face between wanting to study and their sense of obligation to family members that have helped them. He presents this example of a college student who arrived as an unaccompanied child:

I had another student two weeks ago [say] 'I am going to have to drop my classes because of my family, somebody lost their job, and they helped me when I came to this country and I feel like I need to help them right now. So, now it's my priority to give them back what they gave me over college.' But on the other hand, those same family are telling him, "well you don't need to help us, just focus on college." But the guy was in that dilemma. So, we kind of agreed, "ok, don't drop all the classes just keep one, listen to those people that are telling you to stay." You see what I mean, each one is a different story but they are all struggling with that and they need to work the hours and eventually, that's going to be one of the reasons why they drop.

Cultural and familial experiences may influence how a young person thinks about their familial obligations and school. Consequently, requiring and/or expecting that a young person prioritizes his/her need for education may not match the expectations of service providers in the United States and, in this case, Chicago, Illinois. An administrator at a community-based service organization that provides services to UIC summarized it this way:

That's why I am saying, what is the educational goal? …In their country, they knew they could find a way to work and earn money. They did not have the luxury of higher education or even vocational training. That is not even an opportunity that for many of them would be a consideration in their country, right? so if could learn how to read and write, get some elementary that is fine. But the most important priority…. is survival, eating, having shelter. Those are their priorities. So, we are superimposing cultural priorities on them that are not their cultural priorities for survival in terms of how they grew up.

The respondent in this quote distinguishes between the cultural expectations of working and earning money in the home country and obtaining a higher education in the United States. In their home country, family members may need the young person and all family members to focus on activities that address their immediate basic needs (food, shelter, safety). Higher education, although important, diverts young people from these urgent survival activities and, as the respondent suggests, a "luxury." After UIC migrate to the United States,

they receive the conflicting message that school and higher education is more important.

4.2.2. Competing notions of formal education in the United States

Study participants state that UIC and family members often have limited understanding about school and schooling in Chicago, often due to a lack of experience with formal education, and cultural differences. A school social worker discussed the challenges the school day and culture posed for some of the UIC and immigrant children in general.

It's a completely new world to walk the hallways and have this routine. Not only is it academics that are important to learn but more so the functional needs and how to navigate the entire building and know how to be on time to class with all the necessary materials and how to talk to teachers and how to ask for help and knowing when it's ok to work with a partner and when it's not ok and what does a test mean. The functional is almost harder than the academic learning.

That same social worker suggested that there are also cultural and familial responsibility-based barriers for student participation in important extracurricular activities that support learning, socialization, school engagement, and additional support.

That it's such a culture clash to come to the U.S. and learn that school is where life is for children and in order to be known as a reputable strong student you have to spend all your waking hours as a student in the building and to come from a culture where going home and being with family and supporting family is the number one priority. It's a really big learning curve….. It's a real problem because regardless of whether the student wants to participate after school or not, there are often other things occurring at home or in other areas of life. Most of them have to go work to earn some money and to stay for soccer practice is a privilege that many students just can't get. Whereas students coming from other countries recently to the U.S. either need to work, they need to go practice more English, they to take care of their siblings.

As she and other respondents suggest, the expectation for school may be different for both the child and their family, which creates added tensions for families that may already be struggling. Young people must balance the new school expectations with the demands of a family who may need their added income and/or support in the home. Consequently, UIC must negotiate these expectations while adjusting both developmentally and physically to their "new" life.

An academic counselor in a community college that serves Dual Enrollment high school seniors and UICs that have aged-out in ESL and GED classes, indicated that parents often are unfamiliar with after-school activities and worried about the safety of their children or questioned if their children were engaging in troubling behavior else-where while saying they were at school. Acting as a parent to demonstrate this dynamic, he said, "What are you doing at school so late. We don't trust you. You are probably doing something different. Pregnancies, being pregnant while they are here. Parents being afraid of the violence in this neighborhood, which is a big thing right now."

Different expectations in the home country and the challenge of educating young people who irregularly attended school, terminated their formal education early, and/or experienced extended school disruptions further complicates matters for these young people and schools. Participants indicated that infrequent and/or disrupted education caused difficulties reintegrating and engaging students, managing behavior, and advancing students' academic progress. Despite these difficulties, study participants noted that some students made impressive strides in U.S. classrooms. An ORR, post-release service coordinator, offers the following insight into this challenge.

If you grew up in the U.S., you are required to go school. You know, there is truancy officers. People that force, make sure parents… make sure they enroll the kids in school. If you are talking to a young man or woman in Guatemala, they might have stopped going to school in second

or third grade. It's going to be really hard to educate this child, but you would be surprised how much progress they can make once they are put in that structure at school.

Several of the study participants noted that uncertainty and education relevancy are core challenges to education planning and implementing necessary services for UIC. They indicated that the uncertainty of obtaining legal immigration relief that would allow UIC to remain in the U.S. makes it difficult to establish educational goals for youth and that they remain "in limbo" or "on borrowed time." A former state human service director for immigrant services and current administrator in a community-based organization that provides services to UIC made the following appeal:

What is the educational goal for these kids? You know, we got compulsory schooling, ok fine. But, what is the goal for these kids? Who are in that framework if they cannot work? Such a small percentage of them are going to get asylum. So, we are preparing those. I think we gotta' be clear. What's the educational goal? So, we are preparing those that may get asylum for you know better opportunity here in the U.S. What about the large percentage that is going to get deported? What is the educational goal for them? How are we dealing with the social-emotional of those kids not being able to repay the sacrifice of their families?

Participants also observed that traditional school curriculum, especially for adolescent UICs, lacks relevance for some youth that for various reasons were disengaged from school in their home countries. Study participants frequently noted that many of these young people came to the United States to work, so school may seem irrelevant and be a source of frustration. A former teacher in an ORR funded shelter, putting herself in the position of her students, suggests that some young people are frustrated with school demands and related requirements. Not only must they follow their teachers' demands and learn the new educational material, but also, they must attend school, instead of work. This situation causes some young people to become frustrated and respond with "disrespectful" behaviors that can impact how teachers engage with the student. She described her classroom situation in the ORR facility in the following way:

So, a lot of the kids who dropped out, they were working and/or they lived in neighborhoods where gangs are prevalent and a lot of the boys had been involved in gangs or affiliated with them in some way. So, like even just like assuming the role of student and now I have to listen to you and I have to learn from you is like very hard for them. So, there it's just a lot of kids being like, "I don't want to do this," being disrespectful, just not seeing the value of it. Feeling like it wasn't useful or didn't relate to their life… I think just getting the kids to buy in and being motivated that was one of the biggest challenges.

Participants also observed that traditional school curriculum lacks relevance for some UIC that do not consider post-secondary education as an option. A participant noted the recently enacted Chicago Public School high school graduation requirement of a documented post-high school plan that includes college, employment, gap-year program, military service, or apprenticeship program is unrealistic for many youth because their future in the U.S. is undetermined. Others suggested integrating vocational training, apprenticeship, or internship programs into the high school curriculum to make education more relevant for some UIC. A human service agency administrator summarized the ethical and pedagogical implications in the following way: "This child is not the typical adolescent that the school is usually aimed at. Then, how do we engage these kids to try and help them get the maximum benefit out of education…I don't know how we can introduce them to education that's compulsory and keep them there and not address them in a very real, actionable way."

4.3. Barriers to school enrollment and education assessment

A review of the preliminary data suggests that some UIC may struggle to enroll in school and get adequately assessed to secure necessary education and support services. These challenges are magnified if the child and their caregiver are English language learners and/or have limited literacy skills. Furthermore, participants suggest that UIC, particularly older UIC, living in the Chicago Public School (CPS) area may face additional challenges enrolling in some public schools.

Some of the enrollment challenges are associated with the complexity of the CPS district enrollment process. Generally, for all children living in the CPS district, the varied application and enrollment procedures for each of the different school types – neighborhood, public community, charter, magnet, and selective enrollment – is potentially complicated with an application process that requires a separate bid for each school. Except for young people's local neighborhood school, which must enroll any youth in its attendance area, all other public school types have additional requirements that impedes young people's immediate enrollment in their school of choice including additional academic criteria for non-neighborhood public schools, a limited enrollment period for public charter schools, limited lottery entry period for magnet schools, and testing requirements of selective enrollment high schools.

Interviewees suggest that some UIC, especially older UIC, face additional challenges enrolling in school. A CPS district administrator who works with schools and English language learners throughout the district suggests that although it is not common, some schools "may not be as welcoming to having these students." In addition to needing language and educational services, many of these young people need other supportive services to help with their learning. He provides the example of a student who attempted to enroll in a local neighborhood public school but the "principal didn't want to take him… You get a lot of EL's there (at the school) so he knew he was going to have to find someone to provide services for this student and that just creates more work for them." This administrator acknowledges that although most schools try to enroll every eligible student, the district needs to "constantly remind school leaders and everyone else that they're required to take them" and that they must enroll any young person who lives in their district and wants to attend their school regardless if they "have all of the paperwork."

Enrolling in a school can be a challenging experience, especially if the child and their primary caregiver lack basic literacy and English language skills, are unfamiliar with the district and different enrollment/application procedures, and/or struggle to advocate for themselves. Some children receive the support of an advocate who can help them navigate through the process. The advocate can be a person in the child's informal network or a service provider working with the child or family. Post-release service providers who are already working with the young person can provide this assistance. The manager of an ORR-funded post-release program notes the important role these workers can play and expectation that they help UIC get into school because of their general knowledge of the law and advocacy training:

> The challenge there is for some of the older kids. It's hard to get some school to accept those children and we have to remind them… that the law says they are eligible and they can enroll there. Immigration status is irrelevant, and then we have to help them get enrolled in the school. So, we have to advocate on their behalf to get them in there and recognize that we want kids to have access to education and also for the schools to recognize that we totally get it.

Instead of immediately enrolling these young people in appropriate educational services, some schools redirect older UIC to alternative programs that do not provide the necessary education services. Respondents suggest that this is more likely to occur in schools and districts where the appropriate education services are not available. Again, as an attorney who provides pro bono legal services to UIC states, these young people often need an advocate or legal assistance to get them into school.

> We have seen sometimes, especially with kids that are a little bit older and that are further outside (Chicago), schools are putting up a lot of barriers…. I have talked to multiple clients that they are 17 who have been told (that they) can't just be enrolled in a public school they refer them to out there, we don't have language services, so you should go to this adult ESL class… I had a kid last year who needed special education services, and this was in Chicago somewhere on the south side, and they just kept telling mom… she would come to enroll him a few times, and they kept telling her someone will call you back. We don't have the services right now. So, I wrote them a nasty email from an attorney and they got him enrolled immediately.

After enrolling, schools must provide equal access to necessary supports and services to all children, regardless of the child's national origin or immigration status. Assessing children so that they are placed in the appropriate class and receive the necessary services requires that school staff have the necessary information. Study participants noted that school staff periodically faced challenges obtaining this information and could not obtain students' school records from the country of origin, had limited communication with ORR facility teachers/caseworkers or post-release workers, and/or had difficulty distinguishing between a student's English language limitations and learning/cognitive disabilities.

Several respondents indicated that they have difficulty accessing school records from young people's home country. A CPS district administrator notes that education records are secured for only a minority of the students, "probably like less than half…in which case we play that game of guessing, ok where do we think students would be as best suited." A school social worker who works with UIC and refugee children elaborates how this impacts a child's placement:

> So that's (obtaining records) has been a major difficulty. You know the students that come to us at age 17, and they don't have any sort of educational records it's very difficult for them to finish HS and get a diploma because there is no indication of how many credits they have in a certain area. CPS requires certain credits to graduate and…if they come with educational records sometimes they are translated wrong, or inaccurate, or there is not really an equivalent to the course that they took that matches with CPS, or can consider in a certain area. Educational records is definitely a challenge.

Several education professionals interviewed expressed a concern that school staff are not accurately assessing some youth and incorrectly attributing limited language fluency with learning disabilities or cognitive impairments, which impacts class placement and the services and supports students receive. As an education administrator states, "There is the English learner, there is the special ed(ucation) student, there is the one that needs a little support and so if an English learner needs… support in math or language arts. Sometimes the school doesn't see that he can get multi-tier support."

Although respondents identified limitations in accurately assessing UIC and other similar children, they also noted that despite the numerous challenges, school staff make considerable efforts to accurately identify their needs and provide them with necessary services. A school social worker in an elementary school with a large immigrant population describes the attention her school ascribes to identifying English language learners that need special services. She states, "We are working very hard to not over-identify or under-identify or create any sort of achievement gap between students of color and white counterparts. But (this) means there is pros and cons to that because, that means that sometimes staff are overly cautious in identifying immigrant children as needing support services due to learning disabilities." As a result, students who may need special education and/or other services may not get them. Alternatively, students who do receive specialized services, whether they are appropriate, may feel stigmatized. A CPS

school administrator highlights this concern in an experience he has with some English language learners who believe that their limited English fluency influences his perception of how schools staff think about his intelligence, "We have students who told me that because I didn't speak the language they felt I was retarded or I had some sort of learning disability."

5. Discussion

The current study considers the educational experience of UIC in the Chicago metropolitan area from the perspective of service providers who work with or on behalf of these young people. This paper presents preliminary findings from this study and highlights potential challenges in serving this vulnerable population of young people who often require additional supports and services to address their unique educational needs.

As the research suggests and this study supports, many UIC are English language learners with limited or disrupted formal education experiences, as well as a history of traumatic experiences in their home country and on the migration to the U.S. Moreover, UIC are transitioning into a new culture with potentially different expectations for education from them and family members. Some UIC may expect to work or feel that they need to work if they feel obligated to or responsible for family members who are struggling for necessary resources. This may make some UIC at risk of dropping out and create additional challenges for schools and educators in engaging youth who prioritize work and question the relevance of an advanced education.

Schools frequently need to provide additional educational and supportive services so that these young people can benefit from all the local districts' educational opportunities. Unfortunately, although some schools have adequate resources to address some of these needs, others struggle, especially in the area of providing culturally sensitive bilingual and mental health services. As presented above, schools may vary in how they respond to the needs depending on a variety of factors including the school's student population, its experience serving immigrant/refugee populations, the school type, and its location. The district, charter school networks, and individual schools often seek to address these school-specific gaps with external resources. Many schools engage with local community providers that are experienced in working with this and other similar populations of young people. They work with community providers to not only provide services but, also, to train school staff in working with these and other immigrant populations. Unfortunately, community providers are also struggling with the community's general need for culturally sensitive, bilingual and mental health services.

Finally, school staff struggle with properly assessing children for their education placement and educational service needs. In addition to the challenge of differentiating between language and educational/cognitive needs, school staff often do not have the child's educational records from either their home country or their ORR placement before being placed with an adult sponsor in the community.

More research needs to be done to examine their academic progress and experience with the education systems both when they are in ORR's immediate care and after they are placed into local communities. It is unclear whether the educational services provided while in ORR care adequately prepares UIC to transition into community schools and whether post release services adequately support this transition. As findings from this study suggests, educational service goals for UIC may not be aligned with the personal goals of UIC who desire to work to address personal and familial obligations. Research needs to examine how this impacts school integration and performance, social-emotional well-being, and preparation for aging out of ORR's care at the age of 18 or being deported to their home country. It cannot be ignored that the vast majority of UIC are 15 years and older and many are 17 and on the cusp of becoming ineligible for ORR-funded and other services(U.S. Office of Refugee Resettlement, 2018a). This includes housing,

education, and post-release services that play critical roles in stabilizing and preparing them for the future.

ORR-funded post release services (PRS) provide some UIC who live with adult sponsors with child-focused services for no more than 90 days that promote their safety and well-being. While services vary depending on the young person, PRS providers can offer educational services that include assistance with school enrollment, educational monitoring, and assistance with alternative education planning (U.S. Office of Refugee Resettlement, 2017a). This may be a promising strategy for some young people who struggle with enrollment and/or receiving the necessary educational support services to aid their school transition. Additional research, however, needs to be completed to determine how these services support school transition. Moreover, PRS is available only to a small segment of youth who have been released from ORR custody and have additional needs and/or situations, such as those who were victims of trafficking.

Developing a targeted approach to addressing the educational needs of UIC who entered undetected and never entered ORR's care is a challenge because they are not easily identified within school populations. Federal guidelines currently bans schools from asking about a child's citizenship or legal status to enroll in schools (U.S. Department of Justice et al., 2014) and other district/city policies, such as Chicago's Welcoming City Ordinance, makes it extremely difficult for schools to identify these young people, track their educational progress, and provide targeted services. As a result, schools and districts should take an expansive approach to addressing the needs of these and other, similar, undocumented populations of young people. Unfortunately, as findings from this study suggest, school districts, such as Chicago, are under resourced and ill-equipped to meet this vast need without considerable funding. Even with adequate funding, local districts may struggle with hiring qualified personnel who have both the language and culture competency because they are not available to the extent necessary. As a result, local school districts should devote resources to expanding staff capacity in providing trauma-informed and culturally competent care, as well as increase awareness about this and other similar populations. Universities and colleges must also prioritize the recruitment and training of bilingual and multilingual students in professions that work with and support these young people including teachers, social workers, counselors, and other support staff.

This study is limited in various ways. Notably, Chicago's Welcoming City Ordinance forbids schools and city departments from asking or collecting information about students' legal immigration status, and community providers' similar policies complicate the identification of UIC within the population and providing a precise view of UIC, apart from similar immigrant youth in the population. As a result, education and other community service providers may be limited in their ability to inform this and other similar studies; especially if a meaningful segment of the UIC population is hidden among a larger population of young people who are new to the US, undocumented, and fearful of deportation. Additionally, Chicago Public School's organizational structure that includes both traditional and independent public charter schools creates additional challenges because of potential policy and programmatic variability between the district and each of the 128 public charter schools on how they engage with and address the needs of UIC.

6. Conclusion

UIC face numerous challenges once they come to the United States. Adjusting to their new environment requires that they learn about the differences in the culture and begin preparing for a life that may not be in the country where they currently live. Public schools provide children with not only an academic education to advance in society, but also a space to learn about the culture and society.

Schools and the public education system are an opportunity to help transition and prepare this vulnerable population for the future,

whether it is in the United States or in their home country. CPS and its schools must consider the expectations of these young peoples (as they should with all students) and also their needs and obligations to family members who may be struggling to survive. It should consider alternative strategies for preparing these and other young people whose basic needs may conflict with broader societal expectations for post-secondary education.

Finally, public schools, arguably, are the most important system for UIC and other new immigrant populations because they have a right to attend and receive an equitable education with access to specialized services so that they can benefit from every opportunity CPS and its schools offers. Incumbent in these rights is the district's responsibility or duty to provide the services and supports. The challenge for CPS and other schools and districts throughout the country is determining how to equitably provide services that are often difficult to obtain.

Declaration of interest

Acknowledgements

Appendix A. Interview guide

General service provider questions

1. What services does your organization provide for unaccompanied immigrant minors?
2. How does this population access/learn about your services?
3. Which type of service needs does this population present?
4. What are the gaps, challenges, barriers in serving this population?
5. Are there any requirements to access services within your organization for UICs?
6. How do you engage the UIC family/sponsor household? What are the needs that you have seen for these households?
7. What other organizations do you work with to address the needs of UICs?
8. What type of follow-up service, if any, is provided by your organization to this population after you make a referral? After you close a case?
9. Do you provide services to UIC's after they turn 18?
10. Do you have specific support/programs for LGBTQ UICs? Pregnant or parenting UICs?
11. What type of training is provided employees in your organization regarding UICs?

Additional questions for education service providers

12. Are there specific programs in place in schools that may receive larger numbers of UICs?
13. How has your school/school system adjusted to this population and their needs?
14. How are you addressing the needs of those that might have a lapse of formal education? Those with special needs?

Additional interview questions for legal service providers

15. What legal services do UIC's and their sponsors require once they enter care?

16. What legal services do UIC's and their sponsors need after they are released from care?
17. What challenges do you or your organization face providing legal services to UIC's and their sponsors?
18. How does your organization respond to these challenges?
19. What, if any, organizations are able to respond to these challenges?
20. How capable are these organizations in responding to these challenges?
21. Are there any subpopulations within the UIC population that are particularly challenged to receive legal services?
22. How does your organization respond to these challenges?
23. What, if any, organizations are able to respond to these challenges?
24. How capable are these organizations in responding to these challenges?

ORR facilities interview guide

1. What are the most common education, human service, health, and behavioral and/or mental health needs of UIC's while in your care? Post –release?
2. How is your organization addressing these needs (what services/supports)?
3. What organizations in the community addresses this need/ who in the community do UICs and their family/sponsor go to for help?
4. What are some of the challenges that families/sponsors face when receiving a UIC from an ORR center?
5. What percentage of your clients are receiving legal assistance in addition to social services?
6. What, if any, family reunification difficulties do UICs placed with family members experience?
7. What percentage of the youth and their sponsors screened by your staff/ORR staff are determined to be at risk or have special needs? What are some of the common risks and needs?
8. What percentage of sponsors require home studies due concerns?
9. What percentage of youth are determined to need additional post-release case management services to address mental health or medical issues?
10. What percentage of the children under ORR custody in your facility are released into the foster care system?

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