

EVIDENCE SUMMARY**July 2023**

What works to help students in immigrant and refugee families complete secondary education?

There is some moderate evidence that trusted adult support increases academic achievement.

- Three articles highlight the importance of support from a trusted adult on academic achievement. Two suggestive studies focus on parental support, while another impact evaluation focuses on trusted adults. Students who had the support of their parents or trusted adults were more academically successful than peers without those support systems.

Suggestive studies demonstrate that contextually appropriate after-school and extracurricular activities yield positive outcomes for youth.

- Some studies indicate that after-school and extracurricular activities increase academic achievement among certain populations, such as first-generation immigrants. However, another article concludes that Latin American and other immigrant children do not receive academic benefit from extracurricular activities. This may be due to the fact that many after-school programs and extracurricular activities do not address the specific contextual needs of immigrant populations.

More rigorous research is needed on interventions for high school students.

- Most of the identified studies looked at the academic achievements of younger children, and all but one of the studies were suggestive. This indicates that more research is needed on the high school population and that such research should be more rigorous.

Purpose of this summary

Evidence summaries provide a brief review of the best possible evidence related to a specific research question. They are designed to assist practitioners in their decision-making about possible interventions. This evidence summary describes the status of current available evidence on students in immigrant and refugee families completing secondary education.

What is meant by “secondary education”?

Secondary education refers to middle school and high school education in the United States.

What does the evidence show?

There is some moderate evidence that trusted adult support increases academic achievement.

- Solomon (2021) conducted a randomized controlled trial of a program for at-risk youth in Washington, DC, and Maryland. Study participants were youth between 16 and 22 years old who were recruited or referred to the program and screened to find the highest-risk youth, including immigrants. The study evenly divided a total of 476 youth into a treatment group and a control group. The treatment group program sought to improve educational attainment **by fostering long-term connections between the youth and a trusted adult figure**, known as a “promotor.” The “promotores” worked with their assigned youth for a minimum of two years and a maximum of eight, conducting regular check-ins by phone, text, or social media in addition to having in-person meetings. The check-ins were not prescribed and allowed flexibility for the promotores to meet the specific needs of the youth. These trained adults continually assessed the youths’ needs and referred them to services ranging from education to employment to health. A significant difference in the uptake of education services was found between the treatment and control groups. **Five years after the implementation of the program, treatment group participants were more likely to have earned a high school diploma or GED than control group members.**
- Araque et al. (2016) studied a program designed to **increase the engagement of Latino/a parents in their children’s schooling** in Orange County, California. They began by interviewing parents to identify barriers to their understanding of and participation in the education system. Based on this input, they developed a **10-hour training program in four languages called 10 Education Commandments for Parents**. The goal of this program was to help parents understand the educational system and facilitate building self-efficacy in becoming agents in their children’s education. The training program was implemented to 68 parents at one elementary school and one middle school; child care and refreshments were provided. The researchers surveyed parents before and after the program, while also monitoring the academic achievement of their students over the school year. While student GPA at the elementary school did not increase significantly more than a comparable school that did not receive the intervention, **the middle schoolers did show a significantly larger GPA increase than their comparison school group counterparts. Additionally, parents felt more confident about navigating the school system and understanding school feedback after completing the training program.**

Suggestive studies demonstrate that contextually appropriate after-school and extracurricular activities yield positive outcomes for youth.

- Hawley McWhirter et al. (2019) evaluated a **program to lower dropout rates** and promote college and career readiness among Latino/a immigrant high school students. **Participants met with facilitators and tutors twice a week after school for bilingual (English/Spanish) academic support and community-building activities.** The sample consisted of 19 self-selected high school students in Oregon. At the beginning and end of the school year, researchers assessed the students' perceptions of their abilities and achievements. **Post-test scores of self-efficacy for academic achievement and assertiveness were significantly higher than pre-test scores.** Self-efficacy scores for self-regulated learning and future expectations did not improve significantly. Two years after the initiation of the program, **all participants either had graduated or were on track to graduate on time.** Facilitators, teachers, and parents reported that participants seemed more hopeful about their ability to shape their communities and futures.
- A study by Camacho and Fuligni (2015) examined the **relationship between participation in extracurricular activities and grade point average (GPA)** among a mixed-demographic group of Los Angeles high school students. The group of 468 11th graders from three different high schools included primarily students of Latino/a, Asian, and European backgrounds, about a quarter of whom were first-generation Americans. Participants completed a survey with questions about immigrant generation, gender, ethnicity, parent education levels, and participation in extracurricular activities. **Findings show a significant positive relationship between participation in extracurricular activities and GPA.** Breadth of participation (defined as the number of different types of activities) and participation specifically in academic activities were likewise positively associated with GPA. Most importantly, **first-generation immigrant students benefited most from extracurricular activities in comparison to third-generation immigrant students.**

Research suggests that federally funded foster care for unaccompanied refugee minors is associated with increased high school graduation rates.

- Crea and colleagues (2017) analyzed the **factors that contribute to high school graduation rates among unaccompanied refugee minors (URMs)** in the United States. Using data from the ORR-funded Lutheran Immigration and Refugee Services (LIRS), these researchers analyzed quantitative data from 193 youth that exited the LIRS URM program in 2015. Of these youth, some were placed in foster care, while others lived in group homes. The data showed that the longer the youth remained in URM foster care, the more education they received. **Every month in URM foster care was associated with a three percent increase in the likelihood of graduating high school.** Gender and age of admission into the LIRS program were not statistically correlated with high school graduation rates.

What are the implications for practice and research?

“Staying in care [of the Unaccompanied Refugee Minors Program] seems to serve a protective role in promoting education, likely through the structure and services in place that allow youth the freedom to focus on studies.”

(Crea et al. (2018))

Programs should consider the support that students need outside of school and train key adult figures in their lives, including parents and other trusted adults, to provide that support.

- Solomon (2021) focused on the broader category of “trusted adult” to ensure youth had a successful academic experience. This promotor (mentor) acted as a hub of resources that connected the youth to support services and communicated with their loved ones. It is important for caseworkers to identify trusted adults in their clients’ lives. These trusted adults are often parents or other adult family members. If needed, clients can be enrolled in an after-school mentoring program to connect with a “trusted adult.”
- Oftentimes, parents being the “trusted adult” for academic purposes presents a barrier due to their lack of understanding of the U.S. educational system. Araque et al. (2016) addressed this by analyzing a program that trains parents to understand the U.S. educational system so they can best serve as advocates for their children.

Programs should consider providing contextually appropriate after-school and extracurricular activities that engage trusted adults.

- The type of after-school program may influence whether participation affects youths’ academic success. Participation in structured, purposeful after-school activities seems to demonstrate the best outcomes. Contextually appropriate after-school programs with mentorship-type components could yield positive results. More information on youth mentoring can be found in the below Switchboard resources:
 - [Guide: Refugee Youth Mentoring – Essential Elements for Effective Programs](#)
 - [Webinar: Promoting Supportive Mentoring Relationships with Newcomer Youth](#)
 - [Blog: Advice for Mentors Who Work with Newcomer Youth](#)

More rigorous research is needed on interventions for high school students of diverse backgrounds.

- Most of the identified studies looked at the academic achievements of younger children, with the oldest children in this evidence summary being in 11th grade. Additionally, all but one of the studies were suggestive. These study features indicate that more research is needed on the high school population, specifically in terms of graduation, and that research in this area should become more rigorous. While the identified studies focus on younger children, it is possible that these early interventions may set students up for success in high school. Furthermore, most of the studies focus on Latino/a students without much consideration of students from other racial, ethnic, and linguistic backgrounds. More research is needed on students of diverse populations, including immigrant and refugee communities.

How did we identify evidence for this summary?

Included Studies

The Switchboard evidence database includes the following types of studies, categorized by the strength of

their evidence:

Strong Evidence

Meta-analyses: systematic analyses of sets of existing evaluations of similar programs

Systematic reviews: syntheses of the best available evidence on specific research questions that use narrative synthesis focused on evaluations of the impacts of at least one specific policy, program, or intervention.

Moderate Evidence

Published individual **impact evaluations** using randomized controlled trials (RCTs/C-RCTs), natural experiments, quasi-experimental techniques such as difference-in-difference (DID), instrumental variables (IV), regression discontinuity design (RDD), and propensity score matching (PSM) or other forms of synthetic matching, as well as fixed effects techniques with interaction terms.

Suggestive Evidence

Published studies using methods including non-systematic literature review, uncontrolled before and after tests, post-test only, interrupted time series (ITS), cross-sectional regressions, longitudinal panels, cohort and case-controls, and purely qualitative techniques.

Excluded Studies

The Switchboard evidence database excludes case studies, unpublished suggestive research, opinion papers, descriptive studies, and unpublished literature reviews.

Search Protocol

Studies included in the database focused on high-income or upper middle-income countries, including but not limited to the United States. Studies included must have been published since 2012. To identify evidence, we searched the following websites and databases using the following population, methodology, and target outcome terms:

Websites and Databases	Population Terms	Methodology Terms	Target Outcome Terms
Social Science Premium	refugee	evaluation	"secondary education"
APA PsychNet	OR	OR	OR
ERIC	immigrant	impact	"graduation"
Education Source	OR	OR	OR
Gale Academic OneFile	"unaccompanied minor"	program	"high school"
Academic Search Complete	OR	OR	OR
Gale General OneFile	asylee	intervention	"high school completion"
Academic Search Premier	OR	OR	OR
Education Full Text HB Wilson	OR	policy	"high school graduation"
Education Database	"temporary protected status"	OR	OR
	OR	project	"secondary education completion"
	"victims of traffick*"	OR	OR
	OR	train*	"secondary education graduation"
	"traffick* victims"	OR	OR
	OR	therapy	OR
	T-Visa	OR	"school completion"
	OR	treatment	OR
	U-Visa	OR	"academic performance"
	OR	counseling	OR
	Cuban	OR	workshop
	OR	OR	OR
	Haitian	workshop	"academic/high school achievement/attainment"
	OR	OR	OR
	Amerasian	review	"academic success"
		OR	OR
		meta-analysis	OR
		OR	"academic trajectory"
		synthesis	OR
			"academic trajectories"
			OR
			"on track, off track"
			OR
			"persistence to graduation"
			OR
			"dropout prevention"
			OR
			"pathways to high school completion/graduation"

For databases or websites that permitted only basic searches, free-text terms and limited term combinations were selected out of the lists above, and all resultant studies were reviewed for relevance. Conversely, for databases or websites with advanced search capability, we made use of relevant available filters. All search terms were searched in the title and abstract fields only in order to exclude studies that made only passing mention of the topic under consideration.

After initial screening, Switchboard evidence mapping is prioritized as follows: First priority is given to meta-analyses and systematic reviews, followed by individual impact evaluations when no meta-analyses or systematic reviews are available. Evaluations that are rated as impact evidence are considered before those rated as suggestive, with the latter only being included for outcomes where no evidence is available from the former.

Studies Included

Database and website searching identified 1,894 studies. Of these, 1,835 were determined to be irrelevant to this search. Fifty-nine full-text articles were assessed for eligibility. Fifty-four full-text articles were excluded due to not meeting one or more of the inclusion criteria pertaining to resettlement country, year of publication, population, methodology, or target problem. Five studies were eligible for inclusion. They are listed below, with hyperlinks to the abstracts or full text (when available).

Meta-Analyses and Systematic Reviews

None

Impact Evaluations

Solomon, S. (2021). *Long-term impacts of Promotor engagement: A five-year follow-up study of the Latin American Youth Center's Promotor Pathway program*. Solomon Evaluation, LLC. [Full text](#).

Suggestive Studies

Araque, J. C., Wietstock, C., Cova, H. M., & Zepeda, S. (2017). Impact of Latino parent engagement on student academic achievement: A pilot study. *School Community Journal*, 27(2), 229–250. [Full text](#).

Camacho, D., & Fuligni, A. (2014). Extracurricular participation among adolescents from immigrant families. *Journal of Youth & Adolescence*, 44(6), 1251–1262. [Full text](#).

Crea, T. M., Hasson, R. G., III, Evans, K., Berger Cardoso, J., & Underwood, D. (2018). Moving forward: Educational outcomes for Unaccompanied Refugee Minors (URM) exiting foster care in the United States. *Journal of Refugee Studies*, 31(2), 240–256. [Full Text](#).

Hawley McWhirter, E., Rojas-Araúz, B. O., Ortega, R., Combs, D., Cendejas, C., & McWhirter, B. T. (2019). ALAS: An intervention to promote career development among Latina/o immigrant high school students. *Journal of Career Development*, 46(6), 608–622. [Abstract](#).