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# Schools aren't ready for Viet kids' invasion

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Several hundred Vietnamese refugee children have registered in San Francisco public schools but few preparations have been made for their arrival.

The school district has only sketchy information about the children, only one Vietnamese teacher, and no extra money to meet their needs.

As of Friday, the total number enrolled was 351, of whom 336 speak no English and 15 speak some.

In other school districts across the nation, the situation is the same.

Thousands of Indochinese refugee children will enter American classrooms this fall unable to speak English and bewildered by American culture.

Many officials say they are ill-prepared to teach them.

In San Francisco, the Vietnamese children live throughout The City, although the heaviest concentrations are downtown, the Sunset District and the Mission District. The students will be scattered fairly evenly through the 12 grades.

The heaviest pressure for dealing with the refugee children falls on the school district's bilingual office, which is responsible for giving non-English-speaking children some kind of English instruction.

Because there is only one Vietnamese-speaking teacher in the district, the office will rely on a technique known as "English as a second language" (ESL).

That means the children will be enrolled in regular classes for

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the entire day except 40 minutes, when they will be given intensive English instruction.

"We'll have to try to provide them with ESL and some Vietnamese aides if we can get them," says Raymond Del Portillo, director of bilingual education.

He said each school where the children are assigned either has an ESL program or will be provided with one.

But as of Friday, Del Portillo was virtually in the dark about the entire situation.

He said he knew of only 200 Vietnamese refugees who had registered in the district.

The attendance office, which handles the enrollment figures, listed 351 refugees.

About 40 of the students will spend their first year of schooling at the Chinese Education Center at 945 Washington St.

In a special survival program, the children will learn basic English, community orientation and American culture without losing their native language or culture.

Then they will be sent to a regular school.

Michael Kittredge, principal of the center, reports that the majority of students screened so far speak "extremely limited" English.

And because of the large number of Vietnamese, the center's enrollment is higher than usual. "Unless we can get some assistance, these children can't be served by us," Kittredge says.

Ideally, Del Portillo says, the Vietnamese would best be served in a facility like the Chinese Education Center.

"But all our centers are neighborhood-placed and there's no pattern emerging as to where the refugees live," he said. "All we can do is beef up the schools with more aides."

So far, however, there is no money to hire any extra staff.

State schools chief Wilson Riles estimated in May that the cost of educating 3,000 refugee children between the ages of 5 and 17 would be \$6.9 million.

He laid the onus for providing that money on the federal government, but so far no funds have appeared.

"The scope of the problem hasn't been particularly well thought through at the federal level," says Albert Silverstein, the school district's director of planning and funding. He is currently looking for sources of money to help educate the Vietnamese.

Meanwhile, Del Portillo says, he hopes a few workshops for teachers can be set up and he intends to order "A Handbook for Teachers of Vietnamese Students" to familiarize teachers with the refugees' problems.