

School Doors Not Opening For Refugee Children

Camp Pendleton

The school bell is not sounding for about 3500 Indochina war refugee children still living in tents here.

Although Southern California schools are filled with youngsters starting another year of classes, the refugee children aren't being enrolled while they remain at their temporary Marine Corps base home.

And with 11,700 refugees still at the camp and leaving at a trickle of 240 a day, officials fear it might be months before some youngsters start their first day of class.

Officials say this delay is heart-rending to refugee parents.

"They are keenly aware of the value of an education and the importance of a good start for the first year in a new school," a Pendleton spokesman said of the parents.

The refugee adults in many cases are well-educated. Officials say about 45 per cent of heads of families have high school diplomas, and many have attended universities.

Another 12 per cent of the adults have university degrees and more than two per cent have completed some post-graduate work.

The only formal education the young refugees get now are classes in what officially is called "survival English." It amounts to giving the new Americans enough words and phrases to cope with the basics of American life.

Camp Pendleton's tent city tentatively is scheduled to close at the end of October, and officials fear not all the families will be able to leave before then.

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