

## **Classroom to become center for refugees**

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### **Body**

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At least 12 nations are heavily represented in the Hillsborough school system.

Times Staff Writer

UN empty **classroom** in a Town 'N Country area elementary school is about to **become** a resource **center** for **refugee** students in Hillsborough County.

The aim of the Immigrant Acculturation **Center**, which opens today at Dickenson Elementary, is to boost the academic achievement of the district's **refugee** population, said project manager MaryLou Whaley.

The **center** will be financed through a \$258,000 federal grant, and could help as many as 1,000 K-12 **refugee** students, Whaley said. The students are immigrants who come to the United States fleeing persecution, civil war and governmental turmoil.

By law, the district is not allowed to ask students about their citizenship status. But their native language, coupled with how long they have been in the United States, helps officials get a general idea, Whaley said.

School officials have identified at least 12 nations that are heavily represented in Hillsborough schools' student population.

"A lot of times they come here with the knowledge that they cannot return to their country without being killed or persecuted," Whaley said. "They come not knowing the language, with little or no support system, trying to support a family of four, five or six on minimum wage."

While nonprofit organizations offer financial and social support for immigrant and **refugee** families, education for their children often falls by the wayside.

The **center** wants to satisfy that need.

The district will begin identifying **refugee** students by the **center's** partnership with local agencies such as Career Recruitment and Instruction in Basic English, Catholic Charities, Diocese of St. Petersburg Inc., Florida Department of Children and Families, the Gulf Coast Jewish Family Services Inc. and the Hillsborough County Sheriff's Office.

Hillsborough is one of eight districts in Florida being awarded a grant to increase the academic achievement of **refugee** students.

School officials are scheduled to open the **center**, at 4720 Kelly Road, with a ribbon-cutting today.

## Classroom to become center for refugees

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## FAST FACTS

## Countries of origin

Here are some of the countries heavily represented in Hillsborough County's refugee student population:

- Colombia
- Cuba
- Ethiopia
- Eritrea
- Haiti
- Liberia
- Russia
- Spain
- Somalia
- Sudan
- Togo
- Vietnam

## Graphic

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Correction:

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