Migrant Education in Florida

State and School Districts Showing Improvement in Education Programs for Migrant Children

June 2011

A Report of the Florida Advisory Committee to the United States Commission on Civil Rights

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Letter of Transmittal

Florida Advisory Committee to the
U.S. Commission on Civil Rights

Kimberly A. Tolhurst, Delegated the Authority of the Staff Director,

The Florida Advisory Committee to the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights submits this briefing report, *Migrant Education in Florida: State and School Districts Showing Improvement in Education Programs for Migrant Children*, as part of its responsibility to examine and report on civil rights issues in Florida under the jurisdiction of the Commission. This report is the unanimous statement of the members of the Florida Advisory Committee.

Children of migrant workers face additional educational challenges unique to their situations, such as disruption of education due to family mobility, poor record-keeping between schools, cultural and language barriers, and social isolation. These challenges are even more acute for schools and school districts serving large numbers of migrant children. In 2007, the Florida Advisory Committee conducted a fact-finding study of educational resources for migrant children, *Migrant Students: Resources for Migrant Children Similar to Other Children but Achievement Still Lags.* The study compared the level and type of educational resources provided to migrant children with resources provided to similarly situated non-migrant children.

The Florida Advisory Committee found that professional staffing levels and special schooling initiatives were higher at schools in the state with high numbers of migrant children. Other educational resources, such as computers and physical facilities, were found to be similar. Nevertheless, despite additional resources being provided to migrant children, this group of children still underachieved academically in comparison to their peers.

To learn if state and school districts had implemented new programs and strategies to better serve migrant children in the aftermath of the report's release, the Florida Advisory Committee held a follow-up briefing on the issue in January 2010. State officials, school district officials, as well as academics and community workers testified before the Florida Advisory Committee. This report is a summary statement of the Committee following that briefing.

The Florida Advisory Committee concludes that since the release of its 2007 report, it appears that both the state and school districts have implemented new initiatives to improve educational opportunities for migrant children in Florida. These new initiatives seem to be showing progress in closing the educational gap between migrant children and non-migrant children as well as raising the general academic achievement of migrant children.

Presently Congress provides additional funding to Florida for migrant children under the Migrant Education Program (MEP) as well as additional assistance for Migrant Head Start (MHS) programs. These dollars appear to be paying long-term dividends. Migrant children in Florida seem to be showing academic improvement. These types of investments will likely pay dividends to society in the future. We urge Congress to continue its funding of the MEP and MHS programs.

Respectfully,
Elena M. Flom, Ed.D. *Chair*
Florida Advisory Committee

2007 Report by the Florida Advisory Committee regarding Migrant Education in Florida

A migrant child is defined as a child of a parent who is, or whose parent is, a migratory agricultural worker, a migratory dairy worker, or migratory fisher, and who, in the preceding 36 months, in order to obtain, or accompany such parent or spouse, in order to obtain, temporary or seasonal employment in the agricultural or fishing work—(a) has moved from one school district to another; (b) in a State that is comprised of a single school district, has moved from one administrative area to another within such district; or (c) resides in a school district of more than 15,000 square miles, and migrates a distance of 20 miles or more to a temporary residence to engage in a fishing activity.[1]

Migrant children face educational challenges exclusive to their situations, such as disruption of education, poor record-keeping between schools, cultural and language barriers, and social isolation. These challenges are even more acute for schools and school districts that serve large numbers of migrant children.

Five school districts in Florida serve more than 2,500 students who are children of migrant workers

In 2007, the Florida Advisory Committee undertook a fact-finding study to compare the level of educational resources provided to migrant children compared with resources provided similarly situated non-migrant children.[2] The Committee's study concentrated on two counties in the state with large numbers of migrant children: Collier and Hillsborough.

The 2007 study by the Florida Advisory Committee contrasted resources and academic performance between those schools and schools in the district with no migrant children that were at the median point in the district as defined by socio-economic status.

The 2007 report of the Florida Advisory Committee found schools serving migrant children had higher levels of professional staffing and more special programs

The Florida Advisory Committee found that professional staffing levels and special schooling initiatives were higher at schools with high numbers of migrant children. Other educational resources, such as computers and physical facilities, were found to be similar between the two groups of schools. Nevertheless, despite additional resources being provided to migrant children in terms of staffing and special program initiatives, migrant children still underachieved academically in comparison to their peers.

The Florida Advisory Committee concluded that simply providing additional resources may not be the answer to helping this group of children succeed academically. The Florida Advisory Committee called upon the state and local school districts to re-examine their approaches to educating this special-needs group of children.

To learn if the state and school districts had acted on the Committee's recommendations, the Florida Advisory Committee held a follow-up briefing on the issue in January 2010.[3] State officials, school district officials, as well as academics and community workers testified before the Committee. This report is the statement of the Florida Advisory Committee about progress in migrant education programs in Florida since the release of its 2007 report.

[1] 20 U.S.C. § 6399(2) and 34 C.F.R. §200.81(e).

[2] Florida Advisory Committee to the United States Commission on Civil Rights, *Migrant Students: Resources for Migrant Children Similar to Other Children but Achievement Still Lags (*October 2007) (Hereafter *Florida Migrant Report*). An executive summary of that report is included at the end of this report.

[3] The briefing was held on January 28, 2010, at the West Tampa Library, 2312 West Union Street, Tampa, Florida.

Migrant Workers—who they are and where they work

In part, the national concern for the education and welfare for migrant children stems from a relatively recent recognition concerning this group of children. As recently as 25 years ago, some 800,000 under-aged children worked with their families harvesting crops across America. As much as 30 percent of Northern California's garlic harvesters were under-aged children.[4]

Although conditions, particularly for children of migrant workers, have improved since the mid-1980s, the harvesting of most crops remains difficult work. Moreover, harvesting work has not become easier in modern times and is still dependent upon migrant farmworkers.

Officially, migrant farmworkers are persons who travel at least 75 miles during a 12-month period to obtain a farm job. The migrant labor force demonstrates various migration patterns. Some migrants do no farm work at their home base, but travel 75 miles or more to do farm work in a single location. Other workers travel to multiple farm locations for work and are called 'follow-the-crop migrants.' Follow-the-crop migrants might or may or may not do farm work at their home base.[5]

In general, a migrant worker will relocate his/her place of residence during the course of a growing season in order to follow the crops. A seasonal worker will remain in the same housing, though he/she may travel to different employers over a wide geographical area and work different crops during a season.

A common misconception about migrant farmworkers is that they are all Hispanic. This is true in Florida, where the majority of migrant farmworkers are originally from countries in South and Central America, with the majority of these from Mexico. A significant percentage, however, do not speak Spanish; rather, they speak one of several Indian dialects. There are also sizable subpopulations of other ethnicities as well. In some parts of Florida, upwards of 35 percent of migrant farmworkers are Haitians or from other Caribbean Islands, and many African Americans work the fields as well.

Florida, along with Texas and California, are regarded as the three 'sending states' for migrants because most migrants will claim one of these three states as their home. In many cases, migrants will travel alone to follow the crops, and their families will stay in the 'sending state,' or home state, establishing a year-round residence. This is common in families with school age children; though there are many families who migrate together.[6]

A common misconception about migrant workers is that they are all Hispanic. A significant percentage of migrant workers in Florida do not speak Spanish, rather they speak one of several Indian dialects

Migrant farmworkers in Florida can be found clustered into communities. Plant City west of Tampa in Hillsborough County is typical. Plant City is the nation's winter strawberry capital, and local farmers depend on immigrant workers to bring in the crop.

Shawn Crocker, executive director of the Florida Strawberry Growers Association, reported that "Ninety percent of the Florida strawberry crop is grown within 30 miles of Plant City. Regardless of the ups and downs in the agricultural market, the fact remains the Florida farmers depend on immigrant labor to get the product out of the field. In spite of some media prejudice that might influence popular opinion, local crops, and many of the crops harvested across the nation, could not be brought to the market without migrant farmworkers."[7]

[4] Cesar Chavez, address to the Commonwealth Club, San Francisco, CA, Nov. 9, 1984.
[5] U.S. Deptartment of Labor, "National Agricultural Workers Survey," at http://www.doleta.govagworker/report9 (last accessed Jan. 19, 2011).
[6] Ibid.
[7] George H. Newman, "Migrants Critical to Berry Industry," *Courier and Tribune*, Jan. 12, 2008.

Migrant Children—where they are enrolled in school

Similar to migrant workers nationwide, migrant children are not evenly distributed across the country but are concentrated in a few states. According to the most recently published data from the U.S. Department of Education, there are only four states where the number of migrant children enrolled in school exceeds 10,000 students. Those states are California, Florida, Texas, and Oregon.[8]

California has the largest number of migrant children enrolled in school, with nearly 250,000 migrant children in public schools in the state. Texas has the second largest number of migrant students, 100,000.[9]

Table 1: States with largest migrant student populations

	Migrant student population (rounded to nearest hundred)
California	227,000
Texas	93,500
Florida	25,100
Oregon	21,050

Source: U.S. Department of Education

The two states with the next largest student populations of migrant children are Florida and Oregon. Florida has approximately 25,000 migrant children enrolled in its elementary and secondary public schools, while Oregon has about 21,000 migrant students.[10]

There are only four other states with 10,000 or more migrant children in their public school system. These are Arizona, Georgia, North Carolina, and Washington. Fifteen states report less than 1,000 migrant children attending school in their states.[11]

In Florida, the migrant student population is concentrated in a few of the state's 67 county school districts. Only five county school districts have more than 2,500 migrant students.[12] Those districts are (number of migrant students rounded to nearest hundred):

- Collier (4,900),
- Hillsborough (4,000),
- Miami-Dade (2,950),
- Palm Beach (5,500), and
- St. Lucie (4,200).

With the presence of such a large migrant population, Carol Gagliano told the Florida Advisory Committee that Florida undertook to institute a comprehensive needs assessment (CNA) to better serve these children. That study and the results of that process were released following the 2007 report by the Florida Advisory Committee. [13]

As Gagliano told the Florida Advisory Committee, the first major finding of the CNA was that significant academic gaps existed between migrant and non-migrant students. Another major finding was the need for an increased number of highly qualified educational professionals to serve these children. The CNA also found that migrant pre-school children were less prepared for school than their non-migrant peers. The last finding of the CNA was that educators needed to learn specific ways to gather and analyze data in order to improve educational opportunities for this unique group of children. As a result, the state has developed a service delivery plan designed to markedly improve educational opportunities for migrant children throughout the state.[14]

[8] U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, Common Core of Data, 2005 School Year.
[9] Ibid.
[10] Ibid.
[11] Ibid.

[12] *Florida Migrant Report*, p.6. Note: As reported in the 2007 study, the number of migrant children actually enrolled as students can be substantially lower than the number actually residing in a particular county. As then coordinator of Migrant Education in Collier County, Ed Wiggens, told the Florida Advisory Committee, the number of migrant children in Collier County approaches 9,000, though only about 4,900 may be listed as enrolled in school. See *Florida Migrant Report*, p. 6. note 16.
[13] Carol Gagliano, Director, Florida Migrant Education Program, *Florida Migrant Student Briefing*, p. 9.
[14] Ibid., pp. 10-12 and 14.

Federal Support for Migrant Education Programs

The No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB) focused national attention on the importance of ensuring each child's access to equal educational opportunity.[15] The law seeks to improve the performance of schools and the academic achievement of all students without regard to economic or other disadvantage. The heightened challenge of meeting the act's new accountability requirements underscores the necessity of ensuring that all schools have the support they need to provide all children with a quality public education.

Under Title I of NCLB, grants are provided to school districts serving large numbers of children from low-income families. Migrant children, however, face challenges in addition to low family income exclusive to their situations. These include disruptions in their education stemming from frequent moves, cultural and language barriers, and social isolation.

Florida receives $21 million in annual federal support for its Migrant Education Program

Because of these special needs, federal funding under Part C of Title I specifically supports educational programs for migrant children. Funds under Part C are designed to ensure that migrant children receive all appropriate educational services—including supportive services that address their special needs to ensure that these children have the same opportunities to meet the same challenging state academic content and student academic achievement standards that all children are expected to meet.[16]

The Department of Education conducted a study to compare the student characteristics at schools receiving Title I funding with migrant children with Title I schools with no migrant students. The study found that 25 percent of all Title I schools served some migrant children. In addition, the study found that Title I schools with migrant children had higher student poverty levels. The study also found that the academic achievement of Title I schools with higher numbers of migrant children was lower than that of Title I schools with no migrant children.[17]

65 of Florida's 67 counties have coordinators to administer migrant education programs

Part C funds are distributed by the federal government to the states through the Migrant Education Program (MEP) within the Department of Education. In Florida, the state receives more than $21 million annually to support migrant education. Funding under the MEP provides support for migrant education coordinators, and 65 of the state's 67 county school districts have coordinators to provide technical assistance to local school districts with regard to the implementation of programs and services for migrant children.[18]

At the local level this includes the recruitment of migrant children and youth for MEP services, identification of migrant children and youth for MEP eligibility, assistance with school placement and identification of retention training programs, and family support services. In addition, the MEP supports comprehensive educational programs specifically designed to help reduce educational disruptions and other education related problems that result from frequent moves. As such, it works to ensure that migrant students who move between states are not put at a disadvantage because of disparities in curriculum or graduation requirements.

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[15] Pub. L. No. 107-110, 115 Stat. 1425 (2001). NCLB amended the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965.

[16] 20 U.S.C. § 6391(2011).

[17] U.S. Department of Education, *A Snapshot of Title I Schools Serving Migrant Students, 2000-01* (2002).

[18] *Florida Migrant Report*, p. 2.

Migrant Student Achievement Improving, but Still Lags Behind Other Children

In its 2007 report, the Florida Advisory Committee reported that at the schools examined in Collier County most migrant children were not proficient in reading and their average score on the 4th grade Florida achievement reading assessment was 274. In contrast, the average reading score for all children in the Collier County school district was 317.[19]

Similarly, in Hillsborough County, a large majority of migrant students were not at a proficient level in reading and the average score for migrant children at examined schools on the 4th grade Florida achievement reading assessment at examined schools was 277. In contrast, the average reading score for all children in the Hillsborough County school district was 316.[20]

Table 2: Florida Reading Proficiency, Non-Migrant and Migrant Children, SY06 – 08

	SY2006	SY2007	SY2008
Non-Migrant	54%	57%	59%
Migrant	31%	34%	35%

Source: Florida Department of Education.

In recent years, migrant children appear to have shown improvement in academic achievement. Whereas in the 2006 school year only 31 percent of migrant children were reading at a proficient level, the percentage of migrant children reading at a proficient level increased in the 2007 school year to 34 percent. The percent of migrant children reading at a proficient level increased again in the 2008 school year to 35 percent.[21]

Migrant children in the state seem to have similarly shown improvement in mathematics proficiency. In the 2006 school year, only 43 percent of migrant children were performing at a proficient level in mathematics. The percentage of migrant children performing at a proficient level in mathematics increased in the 2007 school year to 44 percent, and increased again in the 2008 school year to a level where nearly half of all migrant children performed proficiently in mathematics.

Table 3: Florida Mathematics Proficiency, Non-Migrant and Migrant Children, SY06 –08

	SY2006	SY2007	SY2008
Non-Migrant	60%	62%	65%
Migrant	43%	44%	49%

Source: Florida Department of Education.

Despite recent academic gains for migrant children, an achievement gap between migrant children and other children seems to persist. The reason for this is that reading and mathematics performance for non-migrant children have also improved in recent years, and as a result the achievement gap between migrant and non-migrant children has not been reduced.

As shown in Table 2, the reading proficiency gap between migrant and non-migrant children in 2006 was 23 percentage points. Two years later in 2008 the gap was virtually the same.

The gap between migrant and non-migrant students in mathematics proficiency, however, has not changed much in recent years. As shown in Table 3, the mathematics proficiency gap between migrant and non-migrant children in 2006 was 17 percentage points. Two years later in 2008, the gap was essentially unchanged at 16 percentage points.

It should be noted, however, that the number of migrant children who were tested between 2006 and 2008 declined substantially. In 2006, more than 18,233 migrant children took the state's reading and mathematics proficiency tests. In 2007, only 16,487 migrant students were tested. In 2008, just 12,184 migrant students took the achievement tests—a decline of 30 percent in the numbers of children tested.[22]

[19] *Florida Migrant Report*, p. 15.
[20] Ibid.
[21] Migrant Education Program, Florida Department of Education, Florida Migrant Education Program Service Delivery Plan," (September 2008).
[22] Ibid.

Initiatives for Improving Migrant Children Education in Collier County

The Collier County School District was one of two counties examined by the Florida Advisory Committee in its 2007 study. The county has a population of around 250,000 persons, and the county school district has an enrollment of about 42,000 students. The county has the largest concentration of migrant eligible students east of the Mississippi River.

About 5,000 migrant children attend school in the Collier County School District—about 11 percent of total enrollment. However, there may be as many as 9,000 migrant children residing in the district. Brigita Gahr explained, "In Collier County, because of the concentration of agricultural workers in the area, migrant education services go up to the age of 22 or high school graduation. There are a large number of out-of-school, here-to-work, youth and many qualify for migrant education services and the county tries to meet their specific needs."[23]

Collier County has the largest concentration of migrant eligible students east of the Mississippi River

The county's migrant population generally lives in the interior, away from the coast. The largest town of migrant workers is Immokalee. As reported by the Florida Advisory Committee in its 2007 study, migrant children in the county fare poorly compared to non-migrant children in the district. This is despite higher teacher and professional staff levels at schools with high numbers of migrant children.[24]

As expected, English is a second language for the vast majority of migrant students. In the 2008-09 school year, 68 percent of all migrant children in the district were categorized in the English Language Learner (ELL) status. In addition, another 11 percent of migrant students in the district were in their 2-year ELL follow-up period.[25]

Table 4: Average Reduction in Achievement Gap between Migrant and Non-Migrant Students between 2004 and 2008.

	4th	6th	8th
FCAT Reading	24	17	12
FCAT Mathematics	12	15	0

Source: Collier County School District.

Gahr told the Florida Advisory Committee how the school district has implemented the state's migrant education initiative. "The needs assessment process in the (Collier) district for migrant students includes a *Migrant Use of Funds Proposal*. Schools are required to look at achievement data, analyze it, and correlate anything that they propose with Education's seven areas of concern. The Proposal must focus on strategies, staffing, costs; and results are to be evaluated at the end of the year."[26]

Brigita Gahr noted recent successes. "If you look at the 5-year period between 2004 and 2008, we are reducing the achievement gap between migrant and non-migrant students. Between 2004 and 2008, the average reduction in the achievement gap between migrant students and non-migrant student in reading proficiency was between 24 percent at the 4th grade level and 12 percent at the 8th grade level."[27] (See Table 4.) During the same 5-year period, there have also been reductions in the achievement gap in mathematics proficiency between migrant children and non-migrant children.

[23] Brigita Gahr, Coordinator Migrant Education Program, Collier County, testimony before the Florida Advisory Committee, U.S. Commission on Civil Rights, briefing, Jan. 28, 2010, transcript, p. 43 (hereafter *Florida Migrant Student Briefing*). As reported in its 2007 study, the actual number of migrant children actually enrolled as students may be substantially lower than the number of migrant children actually residing in a particular county. See footnote 12.

[24] *Florida Migrant Report*, p. 16.

[25] Collier County School District, Migrant Education Program.

[26] Brigita Gahr, *Florida Migrant Student Briefing*., p. 46.

[27] Ibid., p. 44.

Initiatives for Improving Migrant Children Education in Hillsborough County

The Hillsborough County School District was the second county school district examined by the Florida Advisory Committee in its 2007 study. Hillsborough County is located along the Gulf Coast in west central Florida, and includes the city of Tampa. More than one million persons reside in the county, and the school district is one of the largest in the state with an enrollment of more than 200,000 students.

About 4,000 migrant children attend school in the district—about 2 percent of total enrollment. Similar to Collier County, most of the county's migrant population lives in the interior part of the county away from the coast.

During the 2008-09 school year, there were 3,126 migrant students in the Hillsborough County School District and 185 other migrant students served through the continuation of educational services. The 3,126 migrant students included 2,439 students attending school and 687 non-attenders, who were served by the Migrant Education Program outside of school.

As reported by the Florida Advisory Committee in its 2007 study, migrant children in the county fare poorly compared to non-migrant children in the district. Migrant children perform poorly academically, despite higher teacher and professional staff levels at schools with high numbers of migrant children.[28]

Migrant children in the Hillsborough district are no longer concentrated in a few schools as they have been in the past. As the district opened more new schools and with expanded choice programs the student population has become more disbursed. As an example, Wimauma Elementary today has a migrant student population of only 17 percent--compared to 41 percent just a few years ago.

Similar to migrant students in Collier County, for the vast majority of migrant students English is a second language. In the 2008-09 school year, 68 percent of all migrant children in the district were considered English Language Learners (ELL). In addition, another 11 percent of migrant students in the district were in their 2-year ELL follow-up period.[29]

Carmen Sorondo said that the district, following the lead of the state, has implemented a needs assessment protocol for all migrant children in the district. "The needs assessment process in the Hillsborough district for migrant students includes an annual needs assessment for every migrant child, the implementation of initiatives to meet those needs, and then a review of how students performed on the four major indicators: reading proficiency, mathematics proficiency, school readiness, and graduation. The assessment also includes information from surveys conducted with parents."[30]

According to Sorondo, the initiatives are showing results. In the 2008 school year, migrant student proficiency in reading increased 51 percent, and increased by 68 percent the following year. For mathematics proficiency, migrant students showed gains of 69 percent and 66 percent in the 2008 and 2009 school years respectively. Similar improvements were reported for middle and secondary students.[31]

However, as Sorondo pointed out, despite recent improvements in migrant student achievement, educational continuity for migrant children remains a very complex issue because so many of these children may migrate among school districts. As a result, the complexities involved in educating this moving population and meeting their special needs makes reducing the achievement gap a long term process.[32]

[28] *Florida Migrant Report*, p. 16.

[29] Hillsborough County School District, Migrant Education Program.
[30] Carmen Sorondo, Coordinator Migrant Education Program, Hillsborough County, *Florida Migrant Student Briefing*, p. 54.
[31] Ibid., p. 41.
[32] Ibid., pp. 56-7.

Challenges Facing Educators and the Education of Migrant Children

As Carol Gagliano told the Florida Advisory Committee, unique challenges confront the education of migrant children. "We have to challenge ourselves to be creative and do things differently than the traditional school setting for this group of children that does not fit the regular student profile."[33]

School liaison with parents and growers is essential to better serve migrant children

It was suggested to the Florida Advisory Committee that cooperation with growers is an essential component to a quality education for migrant children. As one migrant caseworker explained, "We are talking about a migrant population. So all the computers and staff may be in place, but if the student is not in the school these resources are not very helpful. There is no such thing as a typical migrant. It largely depends upon the crops. The family that picks tomatoes will move 10 times more than the family that is doing citrus or strawberries."[34]

The Florida Advisory Committee heard that such cooperation has increased in Florida in recent years. For example, in the Plant City community strawberry growers donated funds to build a charter school to serve the children of their employees. The Fruit and Vegetable Association of Florida encourages its members to work with school districts and provides college scholarships to migrant children.

Social services for migrant families need attention

Often, teachers and school personnel are forced to deal with social issues of migrant children. The Florida Advisory Committee learned about the importance of school-to-home liaisons, one area that needed improvement by the school districts. The Committee was told that home visits from school personnel are often the first encounter families have with any social agency, and that families often need relationship building before they will access available social services.

> **"We still have migrant families in Florida that are living two and three families to one single white trailer."**
> **--***Migrant Caseworker*

As one migrant caseworker explained to the Florida Advisory Committee, "A lot of school time is dedicated to dealing with the social problems of migrant children. Whether it is housing, medical services, or food, these issues have to be addressed before educational programs can be effective. The services might be there, but it does not mean that families are going to venture out and get those services even though they qualify for them."[35]

Special education programs for migrant children can make a difference

The Florida Advisory Committee heard that schools should consider unique programs to serve migrant children. For example, in the past migrant children had a longer school day. The longer school day allowed migrant children to complete their schooling in a shorter period of time, which in turn allowed the children to move to a new location with their families before the regular school year had ended.

As heard at the briefing, immigration issues may also adversely affect education for migrant children. For children of undocumented parents, there is little incentive to gain an education as there are barriers to higher education and children of undocumented parents cannot qualify for financial aid. This situation particularly affects secondary school students, and leads to a high number of these students dropping out of school.

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[33] Carol Gagliano, *Florida Migrant Student Briefing*, p.11.
[34] Lourdes Villanueva, Director, Redlands Christian Migrant Program, *Florida Migrant Student Briefing*, p.88.
[35] Ibid., p. 93.

GAO Reports on Services for Migrant Children —Federal Agencies Need to Improve their Exchange of Information

In its report to Congress on services for migrant children, the Government Accountability Office (GAO) stated: "Children in migrant agricultural worker families often face significant developmental and educational obstacles, including poverty, limited English proficiency, social isolation, and health risks associated with intermittent medical care and pesticide exposure. For migrant children, these obstacles are compounded by mobility as families move from site to site in search of work."[36]

The GAO also reported that migration patterns of migrant workers had changed dramatically. Since the 1980s, more families of migrant workers no longer follow crops but instead travel from their home base directly to one destination, where they work for a season and then return home. These changes reflect the increased mechanization of agricultural work; growth of large-scale agribusiness, including poultry and hog farming; and the rotation of workers from harvest work to other types of agricultural work.[37]

However, a significant portion of migrant worker families continue to follow unpredictable routes as they move between crop and other agricultural work. This can result in educational challenges for the children. For example, during one particular school year surveyed by the GAO, children attending school in one district in Texas had traveled from their home base and attended schools in at least 40 other states, and then returned home.[38]

Along with the MEP, the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services administration is responsible for the Migrant Head Start Program (MHS).[39] In contrast to MEP, MHS's primary goal is to promote school readiness. To achieve this goal, MHS provides funds to grantees separate from regular Head Start programs to establish infant and preschool centers that provide comprehensive and uniform services for eligible migrant infants and preschool children of crop workers only.[40]

"Migrant Head Start program's capacity to Serve all eligible children is limited."
--GAO

The program plan for MHS specifies three performance goals: enhancement of children's growth and development, strengthening families, and providing children with educational services. However, as a result of narrower eligibility requirements, fewer infants and preschool migrant children are eligible for MHS than for MEP, as a result MHS's capacity to serve all eligible children is limited.[41]

Almost a decade ago the GAO reported that very little is known about program outcomes for migrant services under the MEP and MHS program.[42] Information presented to the Florida Advisory Committee suggests that the situation has changed. Outcomes for the MEP in Florida are now quantified and a system appears to be in place to track results.

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[36] GAO, *Migrant Children-Education and HHS Need to Improve the Exchange of Participant Information*, GAO/HEHS-00-4 (October 1999) (hereafter *GAO Migrant Education*).
[37] Ibid., pp. 6-7.
[38] Ibid.

[39] 42 U.S.C. §9832(17) defines the term "migrant or seasonal Head Start program as: (a) with respect to services for migrant farmworkders, a Head Start program that serves families who are engaged in agricultural labor and who have changed their residence from one geographic location to another in the preceding 2-year period; and (b) with respect to services for seasonal farmworkers, a Head Start program that serves families who are engaged primarily in seasonal agricultural labor and who have changed their residence to another geographic location in the preceding 2-year period.
[40] Eligibility requirements for MHS include: 0-5 years of age, changed residence from one geographic area to another in preceding 2-year period, at least 51 percent of family income derives from crop work activities, income is at or below poverty level, participant is a child of seasonal agricultural workers. *Migrant Child Report*, p. 10.
[41] Ibid., p. 8.
[42] *GAO Migrant Education*, p. 1.

Committee Conclusions

The issues that affect the education and welfare of migrant children have only relatively come under the national spotlight. In 2007 the Florida Advisory Committee undertook a seminal fact-finding study to compare the educational resources provided to migrant children with the resources provided to other similarly situated non-migrant children.

The Florida Advisory Committee learned that special support services and funding for additional professional staff were being provided to schools with high numbers of migrant children. That additional support aside, the Committee found a significant and persistent achievement gap existed between migrant students and non-migrant students. The Florida Advisory Committee called upon state officials and local school district officials *"to consider other and different institutional and structural changes apart from what has been offered in the past in order to truly provide migrant children true equal educational opportunity."*[43]

In 2010, the Florida Advisory Committee held a follow-up briefing to learn what actions the state and local school districts had taken regarding the Committee's recommendation. We are pleased to report that the Florida Department of Education through its Migrant Education Program and the two school districts examined by the Florida Committee, appear to have taken constructive steps to improve educational opportunities for migrant children.

Since our report on migrant education was published in 2007, MEP officials at the state level and MEP coordinators at the school district level have re-examined their education strategies for migrant children. As a result, there appears to have been a real and substantive change in the structure and delivery of educational programs to migrant children.

As part of this reinvigorating effort, state officials have established four identifiable goals for migrant students: school readiness, proficiency in reading, proficiency in mathematics, and graduation from high school. Each goal has its own set of specific goal-oriented initiatives. To meet the state's goal to improve reading and mathematics proficiency of migrant students, there is a needs assessment that is conducted for every migrant child. The assessment reviews how the student is performing, and establishes a specific education program tailored for the individual child. The effort seems to be showing results proficiency.

In studying migrant education, the Florida Advisory Committee also learned that in order for migrant children to achieve academic success it is essential to have a full integration of social services with educational programs as children from migrant families often live in difficult circumstances. For example, schools must be working with social service providers to ensure families of migrant children have basic nutritional needs met and adequate housing. Schools with migrant children, therefore, should have a formal coordination network of social services outside the school.

Moreover, schools should not limit their coordination only with public service agencies. There is a significant role for non-profit organizations and religious organizations to provide essential social services to the migrant community. In addition, there should be an active school liaison with the growers who employ migrant workers.

Presently Congress provides $21 million dollars to Florida under Part C, Title I, of the NCLB and additional assistance for migrant children Head Start programs.[44] These dollars have the potential to pay long-term potential dividends. Migrant children in Florida seem to be showing academic improvement, and this investment will pay dividends to society in the future. We urge Congress to continue its funding of the MEP and MHS programs.

[43] Recommendation of the Florida Advisory Committee, *Florida Migrant Report*, p. 32

[44] 29 U.S.C. § 6391, et seq.

Florida Department of Education
Office of Title I Programs and Academic Intervention Services
The Title I, Part C-Migrant Education Program (MEP)[45]

The Title I, Part C-Migrant Education Program (MEP) funds additional educational programs for migrant children (ages 3-21). Migrant students have the same risk factors as other students. These students also face further challenges because of their frequent moves.

Migrant students usually account for only a small percentage of the total student population. Many school districts find it difficult to provide the level of services needed to ensure the best educational experience possible for migrant students.

The Title I, Part C (MEP) attempts to ensure that migrant students do not face additional educational challenges because of the differences in academic standards throughout the country. The program also promotes the coordination of educational and support services including the timely transfer of academic records.

Title I, Part C funds may be used for the following:

- Identification of migrant children and youth for MEP eligibility
- Recruitment of migrant children and youth for MEP services
- School placement assistance
- Identification and Recruitment (ID & R) Training
- Interstate and intrastate coordination
- Advocacy
- Family Support
- Determining the eligibility of migratory children and youth for MEP services

Statutory Authority

- Title I, Part C, Local Education Agency Project Applications
- Title I, Part C, Local Education Agency Monitoring
- Title I, Part C: Data Reporting
- Title I, Part C, Technical Assistance

New & Hot Topics

- Migrant Student Information Exchange System (MSIX)
- 2009 National Migrant Education Conference

Publications & Data

- Florida Migrant Education Comprehensive Needs Assessment Final Report (PDF, 216KB)
- Migrant Data Elements
- Florida Migrant Education Services Delivery Plan (PDF, 346KB)
- Priority for Services TAP (PDF, 142KB)

Additional Resources

- Eastern Stream Center on Resources and Training (ESCORT)
- Florida Migrant Interstate Program (FMIP)
- Florida Migrant Parent Advisory Council (FMPAC)
- Florida Portable Assisted Study Sequence (PASS/Mini-PASS)
- Migrant Education Resource Center (MERC)
- National Association of State Directors of Migrant Education (NASDME)

[45] See Florida Department of Education, Migrant Education Programs, at http://www.fldoe.org/bsa/title1/doemep.asp.

Executive Summary of the Florida Advisory Committee 2007 Migrant Education Report

Resources for Migrant Children Similar to Other Children, but Achievement Still Lags (October 2007)

This is the first study of which the Florida Committee is aware that specifically compares the equity of education resources provided to migrant children and similarly situated peers. This study is designed to compare educational resources provided to schools with large numbers of migrant children with typical schools in the same school district. Using a within school district school-to-school matching comparison design, this study compares the educational resources provided to migrant children to similarly situated non-migrant children for the following resources: (1) teacher-student ratios, (2) staff-student ratios, (3) computer technology, and (4) library resources.

The design of the study examines differences in educational resources between schools with high numbers of migrant students to matching schools in the same district with no migrant students on a tiered one-to-one comparison school basis. As time and staffing constraints precluded an examination of all school districts in the state by the Committee, the study concentrates on two school districts with significant numbers of migrant students, Collier County and Hillsborough County.

In the Collier County School District there are 28 elementary schools with a total enrollment of approximately 40,000 students. There are about 5,000 migrant students in the school district, and migrant students are about 12 percent of the district's total enrollment.

The Hillsborough County School District has a total enrollment of approximately 160,000 students and operates 126 elementary schools. There are almost 4,000 migrant students in the district, and they comprise more than 2 percent of total enrollment. Though the percentage of migrant students is small in the district, the numbers of such students are relatively large and migrant students are concentrated in a few specific geographic areas of the district such as Plant City.

In conducting the study, for both the Collier and Hillsborough County School Districts three elementary schools were selected and identified as “migrant schools.” In Collier County; two of the selected “migrant schools” had more than 50 percent migrant students, while the migrant student population at the third school was 40 percent. In Hillsborough County, of the three selected “migrant” schools each had a migrant student population of about one-third. To select matching schools, three elementary schools in each district were selected whose student population came from homes that reflected the median household income of the district.

Comparing the two groups of schools in a matched design, the academic performance of migrant children was found to be lower in comparison to that of non-migrant children in the same school district. That notwithstanding, it was found that additional special support services and additional funding were being provided to the “migrant schools”. Instructional staff and professional support staff levels were also higher at the “migrant schools”. As to other educational resources, within the same school district no differences were found with respect to per-child library books or computer resources between the “migrant schools” and the comparison matching schools.

The study also found that every school in the study with large numbers of migrant children was engaged in a number of special schooling initiatives specifically targeted for migrant children. In addition, building principals of the “migrant schools” reported that resources were adequate to serve the needs of the migrant student population.

Noting that additional resources were provided to schools with large numbers of migrant students yet academic performance still lagged, the Florida Committee urged the state and school districts to re-examine its education strategies for migrant children.

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