

→ ESSA and Migrant Youth

By Ace Parsi and Maryann Losh

Edward R. Murrow's 1960 documentary, *Harvest of Shame*, pricked the national conscience on the issue of migrant workers. Five years later, migrant youth were included as part of the scope of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA). The 2015 reauthorization of that law, the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA), turns over more responsibility to states to help these students, who face common challenges of mobility, poverty, limited English proficiency, and limited parental involvement in their education.

Close to half a million youth are eligible for migrant student services. In Title I, part C, Education of Migratory Children, ESSA defines a migratory child as a “child or youth who made a qualifying move in the preceding 36 months as a migratory agricultural worker or a migratory fisher or with, or to join, a parent or spouse who is a migratory agricultural worker or a migratory fisher” (see box for more on federal provisions for migrant education). The majority of migrant workers work in agriculture, though they are also represented in logging, fishing, dairy, and food processing industries. Almost every state has migrant workers, but California, Texas, Washington, Florida, and Oregon together account for nearly half of the eligible migrant youth in the United States.¹

The challenges that migrant youth face translate to lower educational achievement and graduation rates. In an attempt to improve these outcomes, ESSA institutes key changes in the funding formula for migrant youth services, emphasizes new strategies, provides greater flexibility, and seeks assur-

ances of greater accountability. State boards of education (SBEs) can take the next steps, translating these opportunities into changes that help deliver greater educational equity and success for this often overlooked group.

STEP UP IDENTIFICATION AND RECRUITMENT

Migrant student demographics have changed over the past few decades for a number of structural reasons: Harvesting crops has become increasingly mechanized, immigration laws have become more restrictive, and migrant families are younger. States face challenges in identification and recruitment of migrant youth resulting from these and other demographic shifts: They come from an increasingly diverse array of countries, speak many different languages, and are more mobile, moving from state to state in less predictable ways than in the past. These challenges may be contributing to a decline in migrant youth identified for services.

Under No Child Left Behind (NCLB), ESSA's predecessor, states received a constant allocation, so that changes in migrant populations were not reflected in amounts received. States whose migrant population decreased continued to get funds, while states whose migrant populations increased were underfunded. ESSA has a 90 percent hold harmless provision in place for the next three years, during which states will continue to receive most of their current levels of funding from Title I, part C.

However, by 2020, ESSA will incorporate population changes in states' funding formula, basing funding on numbers of migrant students over the preceding three years. This change increases the urgency for states to redouble efforts to identify, recruit, and accurately account for their migrant populations.

SBEs can take several supportive actions. They can authorize new recruitment strategies such as online applications, professional development for staff, and support for outreach to and coordination with local and statewide agencies that interact with migrants, such as refugee resettlement programs. States can also work with the US Department of Education on more effectively accounting for migrant families whose work leads them to move within school districts rather than across districts and between states.

ENHANCE EDUCATOR CAPACITY

Once they are identified, migrant students must be served more effectively than they have been in the past if they are to succeed academically. Changes in migrant populations demand that state education agencies and local education agency staff gain new skills. For example, increasing proportions of eligible migrant workers are arriving in the United States from non-Spanish speaking countries such as Somalia.² Staff who were trained to recruit and serve Spanish-speaking migrants as a consequence must develop new skills to reach out to new populations, translate transcripts, and educate migrants from different cultures.

Additionally, states can use existing funds to deepen key student services: Extended learning time and online programs, coordination of health and mental health services, and postsecondary counseling are all acceptable uses of funds under Title I, part C. For migrants who have dropped out of school, as well as preschool-aged migratory children, there is also a new priority on coordinating service provision under Title I, part C with other resources such as those from the Workforce Investment and Opportunity Act.

PROMOTE SERVICE COORDINATION

Two key characteristics of migrant youth are mobility and diversity. Their mobility requires greater coordination among states

MIGRANT EDUCATION PROGRAM

In 1965, Congress realized that Title I, part A of ESEA did not provide the specific services migrant students needed. Thus ESEA was amended to include Title I, part C, Education of Migratory Children, which established supplemental services for these highly mobile students in recognition of the enormous challenges caused by repeated moves and intermittent schooling.

Unlike any other ESEA program, Title I, part C was state operated: The state education agency bore responsibility for the State Migrant Education Program (MEP). Congress recognized that these students required a unique service delivery system, one that included a data system that promoted rapid exchange of education data so that migrant students could be placed in classes appropriately and so that health information could be shared, thus avoiding repeated inoculations.

In addition, Title I, part C included opportunities for states to partner to create supports such as PASS coursework, which provides a way for students to catch up only on content they missed so that whole courses do not have to be repeated; materials and resources for out-of-school youth, who do not attend school for economic reasons; technology supports for staff and students; and preschool strategies, to name a few focus areas for state consortia. States must develop plans that describe the needs of migrant students and services provided. These features were retained in ESSA.

and localities in transferring records and credits. Their diverse needs demand greater connection with health services and career readiness supports. States should seize the passage of ESSA as an opportunity to increase interstate coordination of migrant services, including better sharing of data and consistent eligibility criteria to ensure there are fewer gaps in services across district and state borders. States should also be providing resources, professional development, and technical assistance to better coordinate the work of educators, wraparound support providers, summer learning providers, employers such as agribusiness, and postsecondary institutions to meet the needs of this diverse population.

While SBEs pass regulations and guidance in several related areas, they can also use their powers of convening and advocacy in areas where they lack authority, such as funding or cross-sector coordination. Through these actions, boards can contribute to a more coherent system that can help migrant students prepare for college, careers, and civic life.

INCREASE ACCOUNTABILITY

From an educational equity standpoint, it is important for state policymakers to hold themselves, their schools, and educators

more accountable for results and success of migrant students. For example, many migrant students represent an important subset of a group that received a greater share of attention in ESSA, English language learners (ELLs). While the proportion of migrant students compared with ELLs is smaller, the share of migrants classified as ELLs is increasing. Accountability for ELLs was moved from Title III to Title I in ESSA, which also includes a mandate for greater consistency in how students enter and exit services designed to increase their English language proficiency (ELP).

As SBEs discuss and inventory strategies to improve ELP outcomes, one strand of that conversation should focus on the particular needs of migrant students. The charge for states in this conversation is to ensure that Title I, part C is not simply an isolated funding stream but one whose purposes are integrated and reinforced by a broader standards-based leadership strategy that moves the state's education system toward greater equity and excellence.

CONCLUSION

ESSA turns the page on the nation's education system, from a federally directed approach to one focused on state authority and flexibility. It does not, however, change

the focus of the law on equity. Migrant students represent a group that has often been left behind, yet their work and the work of their families remain essential to everyone else's daily life. By deploying statewide comprehensive needs assessments of migrant youth, developing new service delivery strategies, and providing training to educators and other staff on how to meet the needs of migrant youth, state boards of education can ensure that the services provided these youth are more relevant and effective.

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RESOURCES

US Department of Education Office of Migrant Education, <http://www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/oese/ome/resources.html>.

National Association of State Directors of Migrant Education, <http://www.nasdme.org/map.cfm>.

Interstate Migrant Education Council, 2015 National Symposium Proceedings report, http://imec-migrated.org/documents/IMECProceedingsReport_000.docx.

Color In Colorado, <http://www.colorincolorado.org/article/migrant-students-what-we-need-know-help-them-succeed>.

NASBE, "NASBE Standards-Based Leadership Framework: A Policy Update Series," <http://www.nasbe.org/policy-update/nasbe-standards-based-leadership-framework-a-policy-update-series/>.

NOTES

1. Ariel G. Ruiz Soto et al., "State and Districts with the Highest Number and Share of English Language Learners," Fact Sheet no. 5 (Washington, DC: Migration Policy Institute, 2015).

2. Ariel G. Ruiz Soto et al., "Top Languages Spoken by English Language Learners Nationally and by State," Fact Sheet no. 4 (Washington, DC: Migration Policy Institute, 2015).