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## ABSTRACT

Initiated in the mid-sixties under Title I of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, the Uniform Migrant Student Record Transfer System (UMSRTS) was designed to maintain ready accessibility via computer data base to the health and academic records of migrant children. The National Committee on the Education of Migrant Children (NCEMC) maintains that it is unwise to assume mere existence of UMSRTS either validates the system or assures its usefulness as an educational tool. The committee raises serious questions relative to: UMSRTS's detracting from development of other needed programs; its cost-effectiveness; the value of its information; evidence of its benefit, harm, or usefulness to both the child and the educational system; violation of the right to privacy; parental evaluation of data input. A recent study authorized by Congress has indicated that while the system has not worked well technically, a majority of the schools enrolled in the system have found it useful. However, a sizeable number of teachers in those same schools did not find it useful or were reluctant to rely on another's assessment of their students. The committee maintains serious reservations about the present and potential use of UMSRTS, urging extreme security relative to the right of privacy, staff development as a first priority, and further evaluation of UMSRTS. (JC)



# EDUCATION MIGRANT CHILDREN

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## THE UNIFORM MIGRANT STUDENT RECORD TRANSFER SYSTEM A POSITION PAPER

Approved by the Advisory Committee  
October 17, 1974

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH,  
EDUCATION & WELFARE  
NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF

EDUCATION

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The system of education which predominates throughout the public schools in the United States is one based on an orderly life pattern. A primary requirement in most schools is that a child enrolled in the system must have attended school for a minimum amount of time during the year, and have records attesting to that fact, in order to be passed along to a higher level and toward the ultimate completion of his formal education.

Also, traditionally, the classroom teacher has been the child's primary contact and the one who designed the child's program and determined his progress. However, in recent years a number of developments in our educational system have affected this traditional relationship of the teacher to the child. The rapidly vanishing self-contained classroom removes any single teacher from the role of determining a child's instructional program and evaluating his progress. The addition of counselors, psychologists, social workers and instructional specialists of all kinds has further diluted the teacher's role in relation to a particular child. The proliferation of packaged instructional materials, teaching machines, standardized tests, computer-based instruction, etc., has changed drastically the personalized relationship of the teacher and the pupil in the classroom.

Because of this teachers no longer are required to fully develop their own skills in such areas as diagnostic procedures, testing and evaluation. They can, to a great extent, rely on a cumulative record file put together by all those in the school who relate in any way to the student.

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It was in just such a school system that several hundred thousand migrant children were finally identified in the mid-sixties when funds under an amendment to Title I of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act became available for supplemental services for migrant children. It was recognized immediately that these children did not fit the pattern. Migrant children never attended the same school for anything like 180 days. Further, unlike most other children who change schools, migrant children brought no records and little information with them about previous schools attended.

A major complaint surfaced all across the country that education for migrants was not possible without records. In addition to test scores and curriculum information, records, it was said, would permit the schools to determine that a child had accumulated sufficient days of attendance to meet their requirements. Further, school and health officials suggested records would allow transferring children to enroll without receiving duplicate inoculations.

The answer to these complaints was the establishment of the Uniform Migrant Student Record Transfer System, a computerized national data base.

#### How the System is Designed to Work

This System was designed to maintain a current record in a data base on each and every migrant child and to rapidly transmit the information to each and every school the child attends.

When a child is identified by a particular school as being eligible for migrant funds a check is made to see if he is already listed in the data base. If not, he is assigned a number and whatever information is available at that time is transmitted for storage in the computer data base. In theory, each time the child moves, this information, plus that from schools in which he subsequently enrolls, follows him through a complex network of 137 teletype terminals and the United States mail. In addition to the child's name, birthdate and student number, the UMSRTS is designed to store and transmit information on the child's school history, his parental relationships, his special interests, special programs he has attended, his academic test scores, and his health history and health problems.

A school receiving a migrant child alerts the computer data base through the telecommunications network that the child has arrived. The information in the data base is returned to the school via mail on two separate forms: 1) a health form, for health personnel only, which includes health history and health problems; and 2) a classroom form with academic testing information and special interests. This form contains only the health information that it is believed a teacher needs to know. The intent of the system is to provide school personnel with information to enable them "to meet each child's needs." For the system to work, when a child leaves a school the information must be quickly updated and returned to the data base where it will be available for retrieval when the child enrolls in the next school.

### The Development and Operation of the System

The UMSRTS is administered by the United States Office of Education, with consent of the states and costs more than one million dollars each year. The funds are "set aside" from each state's budget from Title I (ESEA) migrant amendment funds so that all the states can participate in a single national information system. The Arkansas State Department of Education operates the system under contract with the USOE. The System links teletype terminals located throughout the 48 participating states to a data bank in Little Rock.

Throughout the history of the migrant record transfer system, there has been more agreement on the need to transfer information as a means of improving migrant education than there has been agreement on what information needed to be transferred.

Health information was the easiest area on which to secure agreement from the states. Academic data has proved the most difficult since no one seems to agree on what basic information a school needs to know about the child's academic experience. The first form which accompanied the nationwide computer network in 1971 was a combination of teacher opinion and test scores, plus health data. There was considerable dissatisfaction with this form. Within a year, the participating states had begun to revise the original form and to try to agree on just what information school personnel needed when a migrant child enrolled. The state directors of migrant education spent the next year wrestling with this question. They discussed norm-referenced versus criterion-referenced testing; how to convert one test score into an equivalent on another test; and how to convert test scores into pages in a textbook. Simultaneously, the system experts proceeded to revise the health information. The 1973 form has the Academy of American Pediatrics approval on the health data, with a few exceptions. Health problems are now coded to classroom implications and the health record is a separate form--"for health eyes only" (Appendix A)

On the 1973 form (Appendix B) the schools enter the scores of whatever standardized tests their school uses. For example, in New York State the Wide Range Achievement Test (WRAT) is administered. When the child returns to Florida, he is administered the Florida Criterion Reading or some other test, although he already has a Record Transfer Form with a WRAT score. These scores are meaningless unless they are understood and unless scores on one test can be converted to some meaningful equivalent on another. At present discussions continue about how to make a variety of test scores meaningful to all those schools receiving the same child.

At the same time that the data base and the forms were being redesigned, the Arkansas State Department of Education was moving ahead with the installation of a "dedicated" computer, i.e., a computer for the exclusive use of the Uniform Migrant Student Record Transfer System. Administrators, teachers and terminal operators have been

retrained in the use of the revised system in one-day training sessions conducted throughout the states by personnel from Little Rock.

\* \* \* \* \*

The National Committee on the Education of Migrant Children believes that it would be unwise and unrealistic to assume that the mere existence of the Migrant Student Record Transfer System either validates the System or assures its usefulness as an educational tool. The Committee believes that the time has come to try to put into a proper perspective the UMSRTS and especially its present and potential role in the education of migrant children. Educators, parents and concerned citizens alike ought to be asking some probing questions about this System--its purpose, its use and its potential.

The System, we believe, must be judged primarily on how its use affects migrant children. The Committee's basic concern is not with how much the System costs, or with how efficiently it works. We want to know what effect the System is having on the education and well-being of the children. Even the most effective data transmittal system cannot be tolerated if it has an adverse effect on children or if it carries within it the potential for harm.

Within this context the Committee raises a number of questions about the Uniform Migrant Student Record Transfer System.

*Is the attention given to the System detracting from the development of other needed programs?*

*Is the cost of such a system, when weighed against other needs, diverting funds from more urgent priorities?*

*Is the System transferring information effectively?*

*How does the information transmitted contribute to the education of migrant children?*

*On what evidence is the information so transmitted judged to be beneficial?*

*Is there any evidence that the information may be harmful?*

*Is the information transmitted deemed to be useful by school staff?*

Is the basic concept of the UMSRTS in contradiction to the current move away from the use of standardized test scores and other uniform record keeping in the educational mainstream?

Does the System violate the child and his family's right to privacy? What safeguards are there that his rights will not be violated?

Is there any evidence that the material is being used in a manner harmful to the child?

What opportunity are parents given to inspect and approve data kept in the System?

In our efforts to seek answers to these questions, we have found little data to support either the effectiveness of the operation itself or the impact on the education of the migrant child. From the beginning there has been an implicit acceptance on the part of many administrators of migrant education programs that the transfer of information is synonymous with better education for migrant children. Yet, so far, there are no academic success stories. In fact, there is no real agreement as to what academic data can or should be transmitted. Two or three instances of success in locating children with health problems have been widely reported in the press and acclaimed by some migrant educators as proof positive of the effectiveness of the System. On the other hand there has been no comparable comment nor evaluation of the failures of the system.

The UMSRTS has occupied the spotlight of migrant education for a number of years. No other effort in migrant education has received so much attention from the education media nor occupied so centrally the concerns of the state and national migrant education leadership. Nor has any other program been invested with so much expectation that it would resolve the multitude of problems inherent in the education of migrant children. For years, the leadership's response to requests for action has often been "when we get the record transfer system operable we can or we will . . ."

Is this tendency to equate the availability of more information about the migrant child with improved education having a deleterious effect on migrant children's education? We think the evidence points in this direction. We believe there has been an excessive dependence by the USOE and the State Education Agencies on the eventual perfecting of the data base as a major tool in solving the problems of educating migrant children. This we believe has resulted in the failure of the leadership to conceive, fund and carry out crucial alternative approaches.

The NCEMC simply does not believe it is realistic to expect that the transfer of information, no matter how elaborate or complete, will

result in more children performing at their capability level, more children staying in school and more children's potential being discovered.

*Is the System as presently designed working? Is it doing what it was designed to do?*

Despite the latest innovations, basic problems remain. Although a child may be identified as a migrant child and have a number in the data base the record may be quite incomplete. There appears to be considerable resistance on the part of teachers toward familiarizing themselves with the forms and completing them for each child although the forms require the recording of a minimum of information. Perhaps the technology, the talk of matrices and other jargon of the data processing business may be intimidating. Too little time appears to be available for training. The emphasis of training sessions is on the mechanical aspects of reading and completing the form; not on how to utilize the information.

Human error and/or negligence has resulted in incomplete data and in considerable duplication of records. Years of debate about appropriate testing instruments and acceptable record design have not yet produced a record capable of transmitting data which would enable the teacher to plan for the child without further diagnostic procedures.

From the beginning the advantage of the Record System was to be the "instant" availability of information. A series of technical errors in location and selection of equipment, plus, again, the human failures in recording and transmitting data have made a delay of up to two weeks acceptable within the System.

Part of this delay is brought about because schools delay in transmitting information on enrollment or withdrawal. Some schools, lacking a proper recruitment and identification program, do not find or identify children promptly. Others are not aware that when a child is absent he may, in fact, have moved on. Thus several days may be lost before the school transmits withdrawal information. Since the child may have enrolled already in another school, information received by that school would not be complete or up-to-date.<sup>1</sup>

This two week delay period is a significant period in the often interrupted education of a migrant child. No child should have to wait until a computer print-out shows up before the educational process resumes. The migrant child must not be further victimized by either the failure of technology or by those who would use the lack of a record as an excuse for not educating the child.

1. Migrant Student Record Transfer System Performance Analysis in New York State, oral report, Mr. George Brycker, D. A. Lewis Associates, Clinton, Maryland, December 1973.

Only recently have two or three states begun to use demographic and other data available within the System to analyze movements of families. This would be a valid use of computer technology and would meet a primary need of schools in planning for incoming children, provided the data is reasonably accurate and complete.

It would therefore seem that the schools are making poor use of computer capabilities. The present System is not even fulfilling its own design. It is not delivering on time. It is delivering incomplete data. It is delivering inadequate data.

Conversations between teachers of migrant children and NCEMC staff have indicated that a sizeable number of these teachers question the usefulness of the data because of its incompleteness and erratic delivery. Other teachers quite candidly indicate they do not use the data because they prefer to do their own evaluation. Some indicate that they did not consider the information to be necessary or in many cases reliable. In a 1973 study, ordered by the Congress, 44% of the teachers queried said they did not use the information on the UMSRTS.<sup>1</sup> Concerned teachers also complain that they are continually left out of the decision-making process regarding useful content of the record. Decisions are, in general practice, made in closed sessions of state directors of migrant education and with little or no consultation with the persons on their staffs who have the competence in the areas of child development, curriculum planning and assessment required in these decisions.

On the other hand, this study showed more than 90% of the schools receiving PL 89-750 funds (Title I, ESEA, migrant amendment) were using the System. Ninety percent of the project directors and 56% of the teachers indicated that they used information from the System primarily for academic information, special notations about the child and health information.<sup>2</sup>

About 80% of project directors and principals in the study sample indicated the UMSRTS was helpful to their staff. However, in the home base states 62% of both directors and teachers reported it to be useful or very useful while 38% felt it was slightly useful, or not useful. In the receiving states 85% of the directors and 63% of the teachers rated the UMSRTS as useful or very useful. The remainder rated it slightly useful or not useful. However, the study did not use any criteria for judging usefulness for these ratings. The responses reflect the personal judgment of each person interviewed.<sup>3</sup>

This same study indicates that the most frequent recommendations received from local school personnel regarding the UMSRTS were for (1) more extensive information; (2) more accurate information; (3) a different record format; (4) quicker processing; and (5) more simplified procedures.<sup>4</sup>

1. Evaluation of the Impact of ESEA Title I Programs for Migrant Agricultural Workers, Vol. I, p. 23. Exotech Systems, Inc., Falls Church, Va., carried out under contract with the U.S. Dept. of Health, Education and Welfare, 1974.
2. Ibid., p. 23; 3. Ibid., p. 24. 4. Ibid., p. 24.



Clearly, this study indicates that, despite widespread participation in the System by local project schools, classroom teachers, in large numbers, are not finding the System useful. The fact that the form as presently used carries little academic data, at best, raises serious questions about the criteria used by directors and teachers to judge the System useful.

In recent years the mainstream of education has moved more and more away from the use of the standardized test, uniform curriculum and grade placement to an individualized approach. The mobile child would seemingly stand to benefit from such a trend. Yet the leaders in migrant education have concentrated on developing a uniform record system. The need for such a system is predicated on a theory that receiving schools must have previous records in order to place and assess children's abilities. Energy, time, and funds have been invested in, as yet, unproductive efforts to develop a nationally understood device for reporting test results. *Is it not possible that the basic concept of the UMSRTS is in contradiction to the best current educational practices?*

The 1970 White House Conference affirmed the right of all children to have their school records protected from misuse or from use by sources outside the school without the knowledge and authorization of the pupil and parent. Recent investigations have revealed widespread abuse of privacy in the use of school records which are kept routinely in the local school. There is good reason to ask if the existence of the UMSRTS is a cause for real concern about the protection of migrant children from a potential invasion of their privacy. The storage of family, health and educational information in a data bank which is then transmitted from school to school through an interstate network does, we believe, expose the migrant child and his family to a far greater risk than the average child whose records are kept in one school. We believe there is little doubt that this information eventually becomes accessible to thousands of persons all across the country--teletype operators, principals, teachers, counselors, paraprofessional aides, or anyone else who has access to local school files.

There are even greater dangers of misinterpretation of data in this System than in the record keeping of a local school. A teacher in Michigan, for example, who sees data compiled by persons in Alabama and New Mexico, cannot discuss the information nor ascertain the conditions under which the data was collected. There is no effective way to correct what may be an error or an unqualified professional judgment. Migrant children should not be dealt a further injustice by having adverse or incorrect information following them from state to state.

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1. Report to the President, White House Conference on Children, U. S. Government Printing Office, Washington, D. C. 1971, p. 368.

Further, there is no assurance that the System has adequate safeguards. State Directors of migrant education did agree in May, 1974, to name a committee of state directors to develop procedures to prevent the abuse of the data bank. Such a step must be taken, but it should be done in cooperation with parents and citizens. It must not be the sole responsibility of those who need and use the data.

There are presently no procedures for informing parents that records are stored and transmitted. It is unlikely that parents will ever have the opportunity to see the records kept on their children. Thus the children may have no one to check on the accuracy or validity of the records.

We can easily fall prey to the argument that the "extraordinary circumstances of migrancy" justify extraordinary measures--even those not normally acceptable. Under the guise of such circumstances are we allowing a precedent to be set which will eventually see all children's school records freely stored and transmitted in this fashion? The conceptualizer of this System, Gene Hackett, thinks so. In November 1970, he was quoted in an article in *American Education* as saying, "What we are involved in has implications for all educators, all children. If this works, no one will ever again say 'you can't do it' when educators propose a technically complicated project. With our mobile society it is possible that a record-keeping system may be necessary for all American school children. The precedent has been set."

In reviewing the history of migrant record transfer systems, dating back to the pre-ESEA hand-carried form to the sophisticated computer system of 1974, it would appear that the flaws in the system are inherent in the facts of migrancy.

Migrant children do not conform to the orderly pattern of a continuous 180-day school year. Their mobility, the most essential factor of migrancy, places them outside an orderly system. Their educational lives are disorderly by the orderly school systems standard, and no amount of orderly systems, designed by orderly PERT diagrams, will make them orderly. No matter how much time is spent trying to make double Spanish names fit the allotted square for a single last name, no matter how hard we try to order their family lives to fit the family data matrix, the children who travel the United States with their migratory parents will disrupt the orderly 180 days of formal schooling. What the education of migrant children calls for is not the imposition of orderly systems on their disorderly lives, but the skills to deal with the disorder they bring.

The rural teachers to whom the migrant child comes need the skills to quickly assess his reading and math levels and place him in a program that will provide a few months of learning and a sense of accomplishment. When a child is in a school for a few short months,

no precious time should be wasted waiting for the delivery of information. The system has been justified on the grounds that the records make the teacher aware of the child. If recognition of the child is a major problem in the education of migrant children, rural teachers must be trained to be aware of and sensitive to the migrant child the day he "drops in," not when a computer *printout* shows up. Rural teachers need the skills to talk to a child and learn something about him as an individual; something of his special interests and his special accomplishments. They need the skills to observe a child and recognize his academic problems, and the skills to provide compensatory education. And they need the skills to help the lonely outsider feel a sense of belonging in a new environment.

Making the lives of children the data base for an impersonal record system will neither enhance nor enrich their lives. Nor will it educate migrant children. That is the task of the classroom teacher.

Providing the teachers with the skills "to meet every child's needs" must therefore become the number one priority of migrant education.

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#### SUMMARY

At the present time there is much we do not know about the Uniform Migrant Student Record Transfer System. We do know, however, that the System has not worked well in the technical sense, that many of the records have neither been transferred as intended nor have they contained the information they were designed to convey. At the same time, from the recent study, authorized by Congress, we know that many schools are enrolled in the System and that a majority say that they find it useful for determining eligibility or placement. Yet, a sizeable number of teachers in those same schools do not find it useful or are reluctant to rely on an unknown person's assessment of their students.

It is also evident that the states have a serious commitment to the UMSRTS. Discussions and negotiations on the System have been given first priority by state directors of migrant education. The System has been seen as providing answers to major problems facing migrant educators: so much so, that it has diverted efforts away from such essential programs as recruitment and staff development.

There remain some serious unanswered questions. These have to do in particular with the measurement of benefit to the migrant child. The present transmittal form provides minimal academic data and even this is questionable as to its valid use in assessing and placing children. Steps should be taken to collect data on the basis of sound criteria to determine the validity and appropriateness of the academic data.

As yet we cannot begin to deal with the whole question of invasion of privacy which is such a nationwide concern. Further investigation of nationwide use or potential use of the data bank is needed in order to determine whether the UMSRTS poses a serious threat to the privacy of migrant families. In the meantime, the best security possible must be imposed upon the UMSRTS.

It may yet be that the most effective use of the data bank will be for survey purposes and the projecting of pupil movements. While we maintain serious reservations about the present and potential use of the UMSRTS as an educational tool we recognize that the kind of data needed to take a definitive position is not now available. We urge that such data be collected.

In the meantime migrant educators must turn their attention to other educational tools. Staff development which has been sadly neglected must be given first priority. Only when we have well-trained staff will we meet the educational needs of the migrant child.



# UNIFORM MIGRANT STUDENT TRANSFER FORM

01 LAST NAME	02 FIRST NAME	03 WT	04 SEX	05 BIRTHDATE MO DA YR	06 V	07 AGE	08 CITY OF BIRTH	09 COUNTY, COUNTRY OF BIRTH	10 ST	11 HOME BASE CITY	12 ST	13 STUDENT NO	14 MIFE
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MIGRANT STATUS 13		EXTRA BIRTHDATE 14		15									
<b>S SCHOOL HISTORY DATA</b>													
SCHOOL NAME		ST	DATE FRB		DATE WITH		7 DAYS	8 DAYS	9				
SCHOOL ADDRESS			MO	DA	YR	MO	DA	YR					
SCHOOL CITY													
ST ZIP SCHOOL ID													
MEDICAL RECORD ADDRESSEE													

<input type="checkbox"/> LEGAL				<b>PARENT DATA</b>				<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> CURRENT			
01 LAST NAME		02 FIRST NAME		03 LAST NAME		04 FIRST NAME		05 LAST NAME		06 FIRST NAME	
AA				AA				AA			
AB				AB				AB			
<input type="checkbox"/> CR CURRENT RESIDENCE											
STREET ADDRESS											
CITY											
ST											
ZIP											

<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> SPECIAL PROGRAMS				<input type="checkbox"/> MOST RECENT MIGRANT PROJECT SCHOOL				<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> SPECIAL INTERESTS			
NAME		CODE	HRS	WKS	CUMUL	NAME		DATE		ADJ	COORD

## SCHOOL HEALTH DATA

CATEGORY OF HEALTH SERVICE	MINIMUM HEALTH SERVICES MATRIX											
	01	02	03	04	05	06	07	08	09	10	11	12

AA INITIAL HISTORY												
AB PHYSICAL EXAM												
AC HT & WT (ANNUALLY) H.C. (BIRTH ONLY)												
AD BLOOD PRESS												
AE HB HCT												
AF URINALYSIS (ONLY WHEN INDICATED MEDICALLY)												
AG TBC (ANNUALLY IF NEGATIVE)												
AH IMMUNIZATION DPT - DT AFTER 5												
AI TRIV. POLIO (ORAL)												
AJ MEASLES												
AK RUBELLA												
AL MUMPS												
AM DENTAL												
AN VISION												
AO AUDIOMETRIC SCREENING												
AP SPEECH												
AQ COLOR BLINDNESS												
AR BLOOD LEAD												
AS PESTICIDE BLOOD LEVEL												
NOTE: THE FOLLOWING ARE NOT RECOMMENDED AS ROUTINE BY THE AAP STANDARDS OF CHILD HEALTH CARE, OR THE IMMUNIZATION SCHEDULE OF USPHS.												
AT FLUORIDE SCREENING												
AU TYPHOID PARATYPHOID												
AV SMALLPOX												
AW POLIO (INOCULATION)												
AX INFLUENZA												
AY SCA (0401)												

## TD TEST DATA

NAME	CODE	FORM	LV	SCORE	ST	DATE	ADJ	COORD

Appendix B

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