

ED296814 1988-03-00 Migrant Students at the Secondary Level: Issues and Opportunities for Change. ERIC Digest.

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TEXT: In addition to culture and language differences, migrant students encounter special problems due to frequent moving, lack of continuity in schooling, and obligations to contribute to the family financially at an early age. Their dropout rate is alarming. Steps must be taken at the secondary school level to serve them more successfully.

WHY ARE THERE SO FEW MIGRANT SECONDARY STUDENTS?

Measuring exact dropout rates for migrant students is difficult, since their mobility

makes accurate counts almost impossible. However, several studies have revealed that most students leave school in the 9th or 10th grade.

Surveys of dropouts also show that certain factors are strongly correlated with students' quitting school: --failure in classes; dislike of school; extreme lack of credits (Morales, 1984); --little involvement in extracurricular activities; poor grades; extensive migration; dislike of school; perception of being poorer than other students (Medina, 1982); --limited fluency in English; history of transiency; lack of self-assurance, support and clarity about goals (Gilchrist, 1983); --perceived lack of family support and financial pressures (Nelken and Gallo, 1978); --overage; lack of interest in school; negative parental attitude (New York State Department of Education, 1965).

What surveys do not reveal are the conditions in the secondary school system which are adequate for resident students but become detrimental to the success of the mobile student.

WHAT ARE THE SPECIAL NEEDS OF MIGRANT SECONDARY STUDENTS?

The needs of migrant secondary school students are as varied as the students themselves. However, need must be determined in order to design programs.

AFFECTIVE NEEDS are perceived by migrant school staff to be at the root of many students' cognitive failures. Repeated experiences of frustration and failure, and lack of acceptance due to mobility, have produced low self-concept, feelings of isolation, and reduced motivation. Provision of a supportive, positive atmosphere can be highly productive and have great impact on acceptance, goal setting, and role model identification.

COGNITIVE NEEDS are specific, practical needs for academic success. They include the following: --Remedial assistance in math, reading, ESL, etc. --Study skills development --Time management --Academic and vocational guidance

TECHNICAL NEEDS reflect problems which students encounter with school systems and which affect them individually, but over which they have no control: --Inappropriate age/grade placement. (This is the highest predictor of dropout behavior, with a 99% dropout rate for students more than one year overage.) --Credit deficiencies due to frequent moves and no means for earning partial credits. --Inadequate knowledge of graduation requirements which vary from district to district.

Because addressing the needs of migrant students is a multi-level, multi-faceted undertaking, solutions of many kinds are required. Fortunately, effective solutions are already available.

WHAT DIRECT SERVICES CAN SECONDARY SCHOOLS OFFER TO ASSIST MIGRANT STUDENTS?

ACADEMIC ASSISTANCE

--COUNSELING. Effective migrant student counselors pay particular attention to credit completion, graduation requirements, status of competency exams, career and vocational education opportunities, and parental contact. --CREDIT ACCRUAL.

Programs such as California's Portable Assisted Study Sequence (PASS) enable students to make up or earn extra credits when they are away from school.

--TUTORING. Tutoring centers may be used for credit, credit make-up, ESL instruction, and after-hours study. Peer tutors who are also migrant students are especially effective. --EXTENDED DAY/WEEK/YEAR PROGRAMS. Migrant students have proven to be eager to take advantage of after-school, before-school, evening, Saturday, and summer programs. Migrant Work-Study and Job Training Partnership Act (JTPA) positions can provide after-hours career education and on-the-job training. --SPECIAL SUMMER PROGRAMS. Many summer programs provide extracurricular and leadership experiences, and motivate students to seek higher education. Adelante, Yo Puedo, the 4-H Mini-Corps Leadership program, and the New York State Summer Leadership Conference all provide unique college campus or outdoor experiences for migrant students.

CAREER AWARENESS

--WORK EXPERIENCE programs have proved to be one of the most powerful prescriptions available to migrant staff trying to cure the dropout syndrome. Such programs provide the least employable students with an opportunity to learn basic job skills and benefit from the positive effects of the program. These benefits include ESL practice in a real-life environment, an increased sense of belonging, financial assistance, academic credit, and possible future employment. --VOCATIONAL EDUCATION can give migrant students valuable opportunities to experience careers other than farmworking.

ALTERNATIVE SUPPORT PROGRAMS

--COOPERATIVE PROJECTS are successful in several parts of the country. 4-H, the Cooperative Extension Service's youth program, assists communities in organizing clubs that cover topics ranging from nutrition and crafts to leadership and community service. La Familia is a total educational program serving the entire migrant family in cooperation with public schools, adult education, and community colleges. Girl and Boy Scouts, YMCA and YWCA, public libraries, health organizations, and private businesses have also worked cooperatively with Migrant Education. --HIGH SCHOOL EQUIVALENCY PROGRAMS (HEPs) are designed to serve high school dropouts. Participants earn high school equivalency diplomas through individualized, self-paced study programs, and receive career and cultural education. Over half of the HEP students are from very low-income migrant families with a prevalence of predictors of educational failure. Yet the program has met with a great deal of success and

enthusiasm from students and educators alike. Between 1980 and 1984, 85% of HEP participants passed their general exams (Riley and others, 1985).

POST-SECONDARY PROGRAMS

Even "successful" migrant children are high-risk students, at both high school and college levels. For this reason, several follow-up programs have been designed to provide continued support.

The COLLEGE ASSISTANCE MIGRANT PROGRAM (CAMP) is a Title IV program that provides tutoring, orientations, and counseling to migrant students planning to enter the university. CAMP success rates are also impressive.

COLLEGE BOUND is a summer program for high school seniors that helps them make the transition from high school to college. Students study, work, and receive assistance and counseling at a college campus. Over 90% of College Bound students enroll in college the following semester.

MINI-CORPS is a Migrant education teacher training program which is designed to provide experience and support for teachers-in-training. Classroom assistance is given to migrant children by a former migrant student who is an identifiable role model.

WHAT CHANGES CAN WE MAKE IN SCHOOL SYSTEMS TO HELP MEET MIGRANT STUDENT NEEDS?

System level changes involve long-term alterations in the way the educational system serves migrant children. Migrant programs that work within the system to encourage and train innovative educators can help schools to facilitate, rather than deter, the success of migrant students.

CHANGE AT THE SCHOOL AND DISTRICT LEVELS

--RESPONSIVE SCHOOL POLICIES have included: -Credit exchange programs to accommodate frequent moves; -Close monitoring of course credits to prevent deficiencies; -Credit completion programs, partial credit options, and supplementary study programs to allow for late fall arrivals and early spring departures; -In-school alternatives to suspension to avoid unnecessary absences. --STAFF DEVELOPMENT provides teachers with opportunities to take college courses in relevant areas such as remedial reading, ESL, Spanish language, and cultural differences. --ROLE MODELS in schools have a powerful effect on the success of migrant students. Migrant program workers can encourage the hiring of migrant and bilingual staff. --PARENT INVOLVEMENT is a strong indicator in student success. To involve migrant parents, schools must provide notices to parents in the parents' language; bilingual staff to answer questions; and effective means for communication between parents, students, teachers, administrators. --ADVOCACY for student needs is probably the most

demanding activity for migrant staff at the high school level. Migrant staff assert the need for appropriate class schedules, test and credit make-up, and special tutoring. They also make student needs known to administrators.

CHANGES AT THE REGIONAL AND STATE LEVELS

--STAFF DEVELOPMENT. Large districts, regions, counties, and states have the ability to build broad staff development programs. Statewide programs are common. They keep migrant staff well-trained in methods of teaching migrant students. Talent exchange policies are effective ways to pass along specialized knowledge. --MODEL PROGRAMS. State and regional resource centers such as the Educational Resources Information Center (ERIC) help to identify and distribute information on model programs and special projects in migrant education. These centers may also contain libraries with a variety of migrant-related material. --ADVOCACY. The efforts of state and regional programs can influence changes in migrant education legislation, legal decisions protecting migrant children's rights, and the interstate adoption of programs such as PASS.

CHANGES AT THE INTERSTATE AND NATIONAL LEVELS

Many organizations and programs have been created to provide technical assistance for migrant education:

--Migrant Student Record Transfer System (MSRTS) transfers information for migrant students moving between schools; --Migrant Education Recruitment and Education Taskforce (MERIT) provides advance information to programs in receiving states about the movement of migrant families. --Secondary Credit Exchange (SCE) seeks to improve student credit accrual through communication between the home-base and receiving schools. --National Association of State Directors of Migrant Education (NASDME) investigates current research on migrant education that may prove useful nationwide. --Migrant Educators' National Training Outreach (MENTOR) provides correspondence courses on educating migrant students. (Names of other organizations can be obtained from the ERIC Clearinghouse on Rural Education and Small Schools.)

In addition to these programs, information dissemination is an important service at the national level. Several projects produce national newsletters. The ERIC/CRESS data base provides special bulletins on migrant education, as does the Migrant Education Resource List and Information Network (MERIT).

SUMMARY

Effective components of a secondary program include: --Establishment of a comprehensive secondary counseling plan, including academic, career, and individual counseling. --Comprehensive career experience and work-study programs. --Parent education programs. --Improved identification and recruitment of interstate students and

dropouts. --District policies that recognize migrant students' special needs. --Increased options for credit accrual.

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