

Reaction to: “Title I’s Migrant Education Program: The Challenges of Addressing Migrant Students’ Educational Needs in the 21st Century”

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In this piece, José Madrid discusses the Migrant Education Program (MEP), a program that stems as far back as the presidency of Lyndon B. Johnson and his Great Society initiative. This program was created to effect meaningful change in the educational development of students whose parents engaged in migratory work. The MEP provides funds to state education agencies (SEAs) to distribute to specific areas to increase the chances of successful development of these young individuals. Specifically, the practice areas focused on are School Readiness, English Language Arts, Math, Parental Inclusiveness, Health Education, High School Completion and Out-of-School Youth, while also addressing transportation needs, vocational studies, career readiness and counseling. I agree with Madrid’s advocacy for the continuation of the program and that some aspects could benefit from modification to ensure sustained success. Unfortunately, Madrid introduces a variety of reasons that the program may fail. In pointing out these stumbling blocks, his attempt to elevate one proposed solution over another as more attainable is not very convincing.

One of Madrid’s major criticisms of the MEP is the lack of student privacy that exists because of the current federal records system. This system collects the state records of all SEAs that participate in the MEP in order to compile education and health data of students who travel from state to state and thus have data in multiple information systems. The intention is to accurately enroll and place students and keep track of their completed credits. Madrid argues that increases in this technology could end up in the “wrong hands,” and be used by other government agencies to jeopardize the status of migrant workers since some are illegal or undocumented aliens. While a palpable criticism, I am suspicious of the author’s intention in lodging this complaint against the federal records system given other points in this piece.

Multiple times throughout the paper, Madrid refers to the MEP as a “model program” that should serve as an example for other comprehensive education policies for a subgroup of students. He also states that the MEP is unique in that it may be one of the only federal grant programs that requires a student records system. I believe these two statements are contradictory because in order for something to serve as a model, that would insinuate you have qualities and characteristics that are different and more effective than other programs in order to influence others to mimic your approach. Hence, it would make sense why the MEP has this information exchange program. Additionally, because of the distinctively mobile nature of migrant workers and their families, access to records that exist separately across multiple

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areas, but housed together under one roof, per se, is a necessary tool to have at one's disposal. Madrid also advocates that migrant children are "national children" because no one state may take responsibility for them. This commentary only bolsters the need for a federal records system that transcends states' boundaries.

In response to Madrid's concern regarding the notion that access to this information could put families at risk for deportation from this country, I do not doubt that this could exist as a possibility, given recent events that we have witnessed regarding individuals attempting to enter and remain within the United States. Despite this possibility, Madrid does not actually offer any factual evidence of the prevalence of individuals in departments other than the Department of Education making the effort to actually seek out those whose families are undocumented workers within this country. Like I said, I do not doubt that the possibility could exist, but I would be more inclined to focus efforts in that direction with more concrete evidence.

For all these reasons, I believe it only makes sense to have a federal records system that assists in the smooth facilitation of information pertaining to students who do live this migratory style of life. It would be wise to keep the privacy concern within our thoughts and even begin to conduct preliminary research and craft legislation that provides safeguards for the disclosure of information without it being utilized against the declarant in a negative manner.

I suggest that the expansion of categories that qualify as eligible for receiving the federal funds of the MEP could benefit from the highest level of input and improvement at this time. Since there has been an expansion of categories to the fishing and dairy industries in the past, along with the broadening of the definition of what qualifies as agricultural and food processing work, improvement here seems most attainable. However, this would only serve as a portion of the solution because adding more categories would decrease the amount of funding allocated for each student's needs. Change here could serve as a domino effect: Broader categories would allow more people to achieve the status of a "qualified prior move," which in turn would increase eligibility for benefits to more individuals. This increase in benefits may help to introduce the information exchange system of migrant students and families into a broader array of discussions and debates, and the more the matter is discussed, the more viable it may be to secure protections over information disclosed by individuals who are part of the program.

In sum, a focused and more likely win for the Migrant Education Program could help thrust this little-known yet prevalent situation into the spotlight and bring about even more meaningful change in the lives of migrant workers, their families, and more specifically, their children.